

FNB's IT incubators hatch innovators

By  Nicci Botha

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FNB has put together a number of think tanks to support budding entrepreneurs and merge IT and business to foment its fintech initiatives.

“Technology is about taking an existing process, making it work more smoothly and removing the friction for the customer,” says Marcel Klaassen, head of growth and acquisitions: FNB.

“It’s not necessary to completely destroy old systems to improve them, adds Peter Alkema, CIO: FNB Business. “We also want IT people to think like business leaders.”

“We’ve created some incubators where business and IT meet, which have produced great software, not just for external applications, but also for our internal operations. This integration and collaboration of fintech ensures that we remain authentic and continue innovating.”



FNB CodeFest Source: *Peter Alkema*

CodeFest

One of these is the bank’s CodeFest. At last year’s event over 250 developers built 42 apps in a six-day sprint. The top 10 apps were presented to a dragon’s den of FNB and RMB execs, and a kids’ banking app was declared the overall winner.

This year’s non-stop programming marathon planned for October will run for 48 hours with a bigger emphasis on rewarding technical craftsmanship.

WeThinkCode

In addition, FNB is a founding co-sponsor of WeThinkCode, the first peer-to-peer tertiary IT education academy in Africa that mentors and develops students who have an affinity for IT, but lack the financial resources to pay for traditional tertiary education.

The two winners of a bootcamp hackathon, who will be enrolled in the rigorous two-year programme, recently visited Cape Town where they toured some of the top start-up IT firms and incubators. “Who knows the next Mark Zuckerberg could

come from one of the country's poorest townships," Alkema says.

Innovation strategy

FNB Business cultivates an ecosystem with a range of value-adding services that supports entrepreneurs to develop themselves, remove angst and tap into networks and funding opportunities.

Accelerating business innovation at FNB is part of its overall strategy. "We are focused on creating meaningful innovative products and services for all our customers. This can be seen through the funding and support of a number of programmes, like CodeFest, WeThinkCode, Alpha Code, Foundry and the annual devOps IT conference," Alkema says.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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