

Young entrepreneurs succeed in keeping South Africans connected during loadshedding

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Since 2008, the concept of loadshedding has been a reality that citizens have had to contend with as part of normal, day-to-day life. Despite numerous interventions to stabilise the country's electricity supply, little relief has been felt in the homes and workplaces of South Africans who remain in the dark and disconnected with no access to affordable, alternative solutions. For three young entrepreneurs, Brian Gadisi, Alan Gie and Themba Hadebe, the [loadshedding crises](#) presented an opportunity for innovation that is making a tangible difference in the lives of thousands of South Africans across the country by keeping the Wi-Fi on even when the power is off.



When the trio met back in 2020 while studying toward a postgraduate diploma in Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town, they could not have fathomed that just two years later they would be in a fully-fledged business with their product stocked in major retailers across South Africa.

What started out as a university project and a challenge to beat a running record for the most money made from a business on the programme, quickly turned out to be the catalyst for the invention of an ingenious product, the [WiBox](#), a mini-UPS designed to power your router and fibre during a power outage, and the establishment of Arion Power as a formidable start-up business in the South African market.

While loadshedding may have affected their work and study schedules, it was the boredom of not being able to binge Netflix series, use smartphones or laptops, and not having any internet access during power cuts, that frustrated the students enough to consider the possibility of alternative solutions. "There were no affordable products in the market when we started. You can't afford one of those big inverters as a student, so we started thinking about what it is we actually needed, and the answer is simply a running Wi-Fi connection in order to access your phone or laptop. That was the concept behind the WiBox," shares 24-year-old co-founder, Alan Gie.

Without any technical study backgrounds, one could describe the story of Arion Power as a perfect storm scenario. A

classic tale of the right people being in the right place at the right time. “Our entrepreneurial journey started with us immediately solving a problem. The whirlwind of loadshedding starting during lockdown with people all working from home led to us having a big pool of clients from the get-go. It was a case of opportunity meets perfect timing for us,” comments co-founder Themba Hadebe, also 24-years old.

“We realised there is a far bigger problem that people are experiencing in our country with regards to business continuity and simply just trying to stay connected,” explains the third member of the group, 24-year-old Brian Gadisi. The unanimous decision to continue the business moved the group to formalise themselves, dividing responsibilities by strengths among the team which has proven an effective model for them even up until today. Navigating through the ever-changing priorities of a business, however, can be challenging for even the most seasoned entrepreneur.

“We moved straight from university into running a business which was quite daunting, so receiving business support from the likes of the Innovator Trust incubation programme and having our incubator partners to help us in putting in systems and structures in place has been incredibly valuable especially because we’re moving from being a reactive to a more proactive business,” says Alan.

The small-business team will form part of the Innovator Trust’s [Enterprise Development](#) programme, which targets IT-based SMMEs providing business skills training, mentorship, and resources over a 2-year incubation period.

With the success of the WiBox, the team have already begun plans to launch a number of other products to aid in providing affordable access to alternative power solutions. “We’ve realised that the business goes far beyond just the product we started with, so we are actively working to develop new solutions for different applications. We ultimately want to solve the bigger problem at hand which is access to sustainable power,” shares Brian.

Are you a South African based small business owner? Tell us what impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on your business and what your experience is like now, as we begin to emerge from a world post-lockdown. [Click here to fill out our SMME Insider Survey.](#)

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