

Creating the largest digital transport marketplace in Africa

 By Cari Van Wyk

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Earlier this year I did [an interview](#) with starter-upper, founder and managing director of BidShip, the Uber of Logistics. Last time I asked him to tell us about his company, this time, as we are celebrating the success of South Africa's youth, I asked him to tell us more about himself and share his journey to success with us and other South African youth in the industry.



Ron Henning

■ *Tell us a bit about yourself. Who and what are you?*

The best way to describe myself is probably as a young and energetic person constantly on the move. I moved to Cape Town in 2011 after winning the South African Freight Forwarder of the year award. At the time, I was employed by UTi (now DSV). My duties spanned from logistics operations to Ocean Freight manager where I managed a division of over 100 people. UTi was the cornerstone of my career development to date. Working at UTi helped me to excel in life and not only in my career but also on a personal level. I think it was here where my creative and entrepreneurial spirit was born.

■ *Tell us more about what you do? What does your workweek look like?*

The idea of an online transport marketplace started in 2013 already after working in the Logistics industry and identifying inefficiencies within the transport industry and how this is still being entertained. Not much has changed the past two decades and with technology literally dissolving the boundaries of business potential I decided to start the first business to business online transport market place. In 2015 I founded BidShip which is an online transport marketplace where customers who have goods to ship meet with transporters that have space available on their trucks.

My work week is pretty hectic as running any new business is really demanding and there is no such thing as fixed working hours. When you start to build and grow a business you don't have the luxury to rest on your laurels as the business won't grow itself. On top of this, I am also a husband and father and with that not being enough I am also a final year MBA student at Stellenbosch University which is really demanding. The nice thing about managing my own time is that I am pretty flexible. Being busy or worrying where I am going to get the time to get everything done is a good problem to have.

■ *Why did you choose a career in the logistics and transport industry?*

I think that logistics chose me. After I left school, I had the option of becoming a game ranger or taking an eight to five job. I have a great love for the outdoors so the outdoor based job was the natural choice or preference but after much convincing I found myself taking a job at UTi in East London. I started in 2002 and from there I suppose it just came to me naturally.

I was hardworking and very inquisitive and wanted to learn as much as I can about logistics in the shortest possible time. I spent about two years in every operational department in the UTi International Division which aided me in having a holistic overview of the logistics industry which also enhanced my systems thinking capabilities. This was really great for my all round understanding of logistics as I gained in-depth knowledge of air, road, ocean and customs operations.

■ ***What are some of the challenges young people/entrepreneurs face in the logistics industry? What were the biggest challenges you faced?***

I suppose that the challenges faced by entrepreneurs are probably the same irrespective of industry. The real challenge is to survive long enough to see your vision turn into reality. Industry specific challenges are mainly related to the novel concept of BidShip and getting traditional users of transport services to use an online transport marketplace. I am cognisant that it would take a fair amount of education to change the view of the traditional participants, but I remain positive that once we have the “sneezer’s” and early adopters on board, BidShip would become the transport option of choice.

Secondly, I believe that we often think that if we come up with new and improved ways to do things the market and customers will automatically have a need to purchase our products or services. This could not be further from the truth and every entrepreneur should know that your product will never just be bought – you have to sell it. To make something novel or new is the easy part but to sell it is where the challenge lies. This is especially true for internet based offerings and services.

■ ***What has your journey been like since the last time we spoke? Any new highlights to share?***

It has been interesting... We have slightly changed our business model to deal more with the larger type commercial clients where we offer them transporter and carrier management services. For the clients that are hesitant to change to the online marketplace, we also offer a traditional transport brokerage service. The uptake on this has been really good, our size and agility allow us to perform each transaction with perfection.

Some of the other highlights have been that we are forming strategic alliances and partnerships with some large players in the market. These partnerships are aimed at BidShip having access to an established transport client base and then, together with our partner, offering these customers a transport management service.

■ ***Where do you see yourself in 10 years?***

On my own island... no, I see my future and BidShip’s as one. The ideal future is to create or at least lead the creation of the largest digital transport marketplace in Africa. Like I stated in my first interview I don’t see BidShip as a disruptive technology company but as a company that wants to change the transport industry.

■ ***What has been your greatest achievement so far?***

I think my one single biggest achievement would have to be my family (beautiful wife and two great children) who means the world to me and remained my greatest reward through tough and turbulent times. The responsibility of family is often forgotten or negated when one starts a business and try to study at the same time. I have had many great moments but those that stand out for me are around the Freight Forwarder of the Year Award I won in 2009 after which I went on to represent South Africa at the International Freight Forwarder of the Year Award in 2010. Secondly, is my MBA journey as this has been instrumental in my development and gave me the courage to take the leap to become an entrepreneur.

■ ***What motivates you?***

I have always been lucky as I am a self-motivated person and don’t need much external input to keep me motivated. I suppose that underlying my self-motivation is the drive to leave a legacy for my family whilst at the same time making a difference (rather than just making money). What I realized is that in life it is easy to be an individual success but the essence lies in changing the lives of others.

▣ **Words you live by?**

“Creativity loves constraint,” meaning that you can achieve great things when you are constrained. And then the words of one of the Capitec founders: “we will either be a small failure or a huge success.”

▣ **Words of advice for SA's youth?**

Simply put, the future of South Africa is in the hands of its young entrepreneurs. Take the risk and start your own business and create an opportunity to make a difference. Although it is smart and safest to create a business while you are formally employed, the reality is that your priorities will never be vested in your business as you are in a comfort zone. Get out of the comfort zone and into the zone where the magic happens.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

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