

Mielie Mailer aims to change e-commerce delivery in SA



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Mielie Mailer is a lifestyle-driven enterprise that seeks to help humans make better choices for themselves and for the planet. Their first solution comes in the form of a 100% compostable delivery sleeve which offsets the carbon footprint of any e-commerce delivery in South Africa. Pretty awesome, right?

We chat to Trent Pike, founder of Mielie Mailer, to find out more about the environmentally conscious enterprise...

■ ***Can you tell us a bit about Mielie Mailer?***

It might not be the answer you were expecting, but we see Mielie Mailer as a platform which will turn our crazy ideas into world-changing companies and inspire others to do the same.

Our first solution: a 100% compostable plastic-alternative to traditional delivery sleeves fly-bags. It's a simple concept sure, but one that could remove up to 50 million single-use plastic bags every year from circulation.



L to R Renato Marchesini, Trent Pike and Erik Bourlov.

The company was founded by myself, Renato Marchesini and Erik Bourlov.

■ ***When, how and why did you get started?***

The consequences of climate change are becoming clearer each day - out of control wildfires in Australia and California, rising sea-levels which are drowning entire nations in the Pacific and intense weather events in Bangladesh. Climate change is set to disproportionality affect the poor - climate apartheid is what some experts are calling it.

When we heard that, as South Africans, we knew we had a responsibility to bear. We have all benefited from the unchecked economic growth of the past - but it has come at a high cost for future generations (including our own).

Mielie Mailer was born out of this line of thinking. How do we create a business which makes a positive impact in South Africa? So after a few late nights of research, we identified three key areas which made economic sense to address and created Mielie Mailer:

- The backlash against plastic has been swift and brutal. Single-use plastic is no longer tolerable.
- South African's are waking up to the fact that climate change is very real and it's going to change the fabric of our society.
- e-commerce is the fastest-growing retail sector in South Africa, with forecasts ranging from 20-50% year-on-year growth.

Ideation to launch took less than 90-days - driven by a sense of urgency that we are running out of time.

■ ***What is the core function of Mielie Mailer?***

First, and most importantly, the core function of Mielie Mailer is to help humans (and businesses) make better choices for themselves and the planet. In this way, we want to be enablers. There can't be change if people don't have anything to change to.

“ *Powerful change only comes about with collaboration.* ”

Secondly, our mailers act as any shipping mailer does - as a delivery vessel to ship e-commerce orders from point A to point B. It replaces traditional plastic fly-bags and even cardboard boxes.



■ ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

Many e-commerce stores and large companies in South Africa seem to have their head in the sand when it comes to the shift in consumer sentiment towards sustainability and conscious consumption. The stats are out there, consumer reports by Deloitte and other large corporations are stating that companies must adapt or die. Yet, some South African companies just want to do business-as-usual. It's been a frustrating obstacle when dealing with more corporate clients.

Other than that, we've been incredibly blessed - most businesses have welcomed our product with open arms and consumers in South Africa are fully behind us.

■ ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

We see many young entrepreneurs in South Africa chasing investment. We think it's the biggest mistake you can make as a business owner. Focus on building your product and the investment will come. And we say that from experience. So far, we've been approached by three investors.

We remain 100% self-funded. :)

■ ***What has been your proudest achievement thus far?***

I think it was the day Superbalist spent 45 minutes on our website and then reached out to us for a meeting.

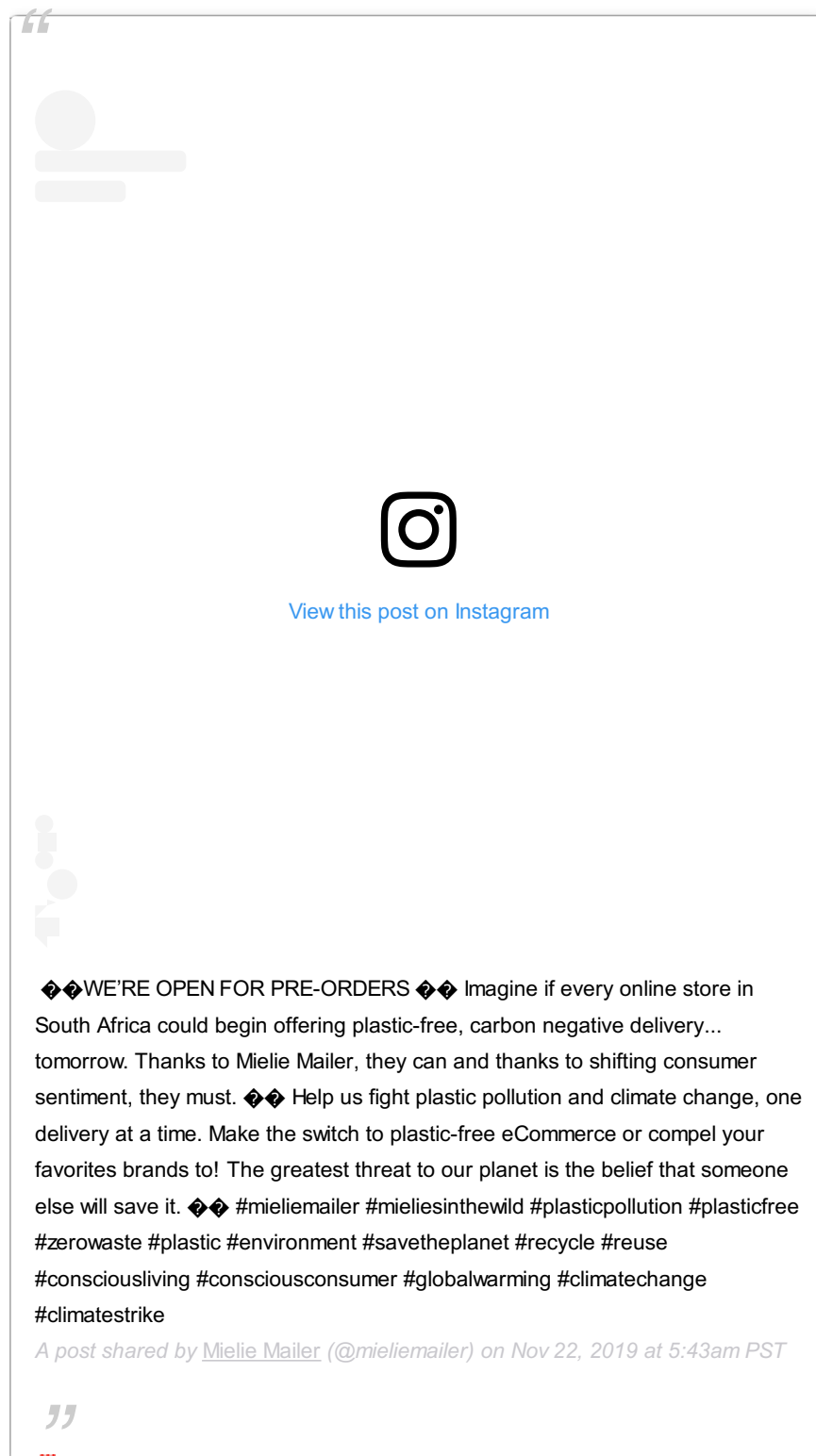
■ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

Sustainable, transparent, socially conscious and even political.

Ask any entrepreneur how they started and they will likely say one of two things: 1. They saw a gap in the market 2. They were passionate about a cause/industry/idea

In 2019 and beyond, frequently those gaps are going to present themselves in the green sector and those passions are going to be in line with public opinion about sustainability, climate change and single-use plastics.

Transparent because consumers have gotten incredibly smart and tech-savvy. If a company is dishonest to its customers, somebody is going to find out and then the whole world will, thanks to social media.



📌 **What do you think is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?**

We've never been part of one, so we can't really comment. From an outsiders perspective though - we think any type of support and direction for young companies and entrepreneurs can only be a good thing.

■ **What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?**

Entrepreneurship is key to South Africa's future. Luckily we have a culture of innovation in this country.

What we would love to see is a culture of transparency and accountability emerge in tandem to innovation. Starting a business is often seen as a money-motivated pursuit. We think that line of thinking needs to change. People, planet, profit - in that order. That's how South Africa's entrepreneurial landscape should define and reward success.



■ **What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?**

I've attempted to sell everything from frozen prawns (when I was 11 and before I went vegan) to wireless earbuds. Within the space of my short-ish life (I'm 26-years-old), I've had one relatively large success (Mielie Mailer doesn't count yet) and about 100 failures... that's a 1% success rate.

I think you know what I'm getting to here, and it's the cliché you hear in every self-help book, every TED talk about entrepreneurship and every business podcast... don't give up.

“ On that note - learn from your mistakes. They are far bigger lessons than your successes. ”

■ **Tell us about your biggest struggles as an entrepreneur, as well as some major highlights.**

Learning how to manage stress and anxiety. Starting a business is a daunting task and anxiety reigns supreme.

Creating a work-life balance and setting boundaries has been extremely difficult to do, but it's particularly important as you begin a business. Your health, both mental and physical should not be expensed for any business venture.

instaLens has been my major highlight as an entrepreneur (so far). It was a business I started with my partner at the time, Georgie and it took off like a rocket. It was a life-changing experience for me and almost everything I learnt during that

period still guides me in life and in business.

■ **Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?**

Being an entrepreneur is one of the most rewarding pursuits you can possibly undertake. It's one of the few career paths where you actually get to spend your life giving back to society and people.

I've watched my brother, Matt, who runs an incredibly successful business (Swimmattix Swim School) enact positive change on a daily basis and it's been inspiring to see.

“ *Entrepreneurship is ultimately a path of creation and philanthropy.*

As an entrepreneur, you get to; Change industry. Create employment. Enact positive social change ”

Entrepreneurs build our world. They are the stewards of our future. That is why I would encourage anyone and everyone to become an entrepreneur.

■ **Where would you like to see Mielie Mailer in the next five years?**

The team at Mielie Mailer are BIG dreamers. We see Mielie Mailer becoming a global brand, a South African icon for the rest of the world to see and be inspired by. We've set a very ambitious goal of replacing 100-million single-use plastic products with our alternatives over the next five years.

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