

EskomSePush: Developing a load shedding success story

By [Andy Walker](#)

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Load shedding apps first came to the fore in 2014, back when it was common practice for our glorious electricity provider to switch off our lights at the most inconvenient times. Some five years later, South Africa's once again facing long nights lit only by ever-shortening candles.



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But while this fate can't be avoided by the average South African, we can all be prepared for when it does. That's where apps, and their ability to quickly serve information, come to the fore.



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We've seen a fair few of these come and go, but one has stuck around since 2014.

Perhaps its the name, which the developers note was inspired by "colleagues and clients accents' and pronunciation of push". Or perhaps — personally speaking — it's because it's a genuinely excellent app.

[EskomSePush](#) on Monday shot to the top of Google Play's local app download chart as [load shedding hit Stage 4](#), beating the likes of WhatsApp and Facebook Lite in the process.

The real numbers

But how does that translate in real numbers?

“From 2500 to 300,000 active users a day, and from three to 1400 emails a day,” says Herman Maritz, co-developer of EskomSePush.

Berlin-based Maritz is joined by Capetonian Dan Wells. The two-man team became good friends working on apps for banks, specialising in user experience, APIs, mobile development and DevOps, before joining forces to build EskomSePush.

“Back in 2014 we wanted to know when load shedding was happening so that we could plan around it over our December holidays,” Maritz tells us in an email.

The idea was to create a simple push notification service, which dredged muddy schedules from municipalities across the country and served clear location-relevant information when load shedding was impending.

Notification service PushBullet was their primary inspiration.

“When we launched the first version of the app in 2015, we had over 100,000 active users in six weeks — and peaked at around 250,000 active users before load shedding was suspended later that year,” he adds.

This was the app’s first big usage spike. But for a developer, building an app that either has a huge number of users or barely any at all might be a daunting prospect, but Maritz and Wells see this as a challenge. And a service. Wells notes:

“*When load shedding started again late last year, I sincerely got a fright when the EskomSePush app informed me that load shedding had started, I thought it must be a bug in the code.*”

“It’s a real big rush knowing that hundreds of thousands of users are using our app and find it helpful. I’m just as glad as any other South African when there is no load shedding,” he adds.



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Passion project

At present, both Maritz and Wells develop EskomSePush as a side project in their own time. Both have day jobs in the commerce industry. The app is undoubtedly a passion project, but even passion projects need funding.

“We recently added some ads into the app, just to bring in a little cash to keep our lights on... Dan put in his own money to keep it running over the last couple years,” Maritz notes.

“I HATE ADS,” he tells us, caps and all, noting that an alternative monetisation strategy is currently in the works.

While those cogs turn in the background, the duo are foremost working on the app’s stability as user numbers increase,

including investment in load balancing and beefier servers.

They expect user numbers to crack 500 000 this week.

But Maritz suggests that additional features — “that will make people come back to EskomSePush even when there is no load shedding” — are incoming.

While EskomSePush isn't the only load shedding app — Load Shedding Notifier, for instance, is South Africa's third most popular app this week — the duo have some advice for developers of all apps, not just those that bring bad news.

“We've learnt a massive amount by running the app, not just technically,” Wells reveals.

“Make sure you have a thick skin and the ability to read between the noise for the most important things. Build relationships with your first followers – they will be the people who help the most.”

As for Maritz, he left us with this: “It's a fun ride with a lot of heavenly highs and depressing lows. Make sure you do it for the right reasons or you won't enjoy the rollercoaster.”

ABOUT ANDY WALKER

Camper by day, run-and-gunner by night, Andy is editor at Merneburn and prefers his toast like his coffee -- dark and crunchy. Specialising in spotting the next big Instagram cat star, Andy also dabbles in smartphone and game reviews over on Gearburn.

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