

National Pitch & Polish entrepreneurial competition finals



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Crytone Revanewako, Pitch & Polish 2012 Winner with Dave Wright of Engen

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Out of the 174 online entries received for the competition, 25 entrepreneurs pitched in Round 1 with 15 going through to Round 2. A total of seven contestants pitched at the semi-final, including the winner from the Wild Card element, held live on-air with media partner, SAfm.

Sponsor and one of the three judges, Dave Wright, Director: Corporate Planning from Engen Petroleum Ltd, expressed his belief in the programme by saying, "We are proud and privileged to be part of Pitch & Polish. SMMEs are the secret for success for job creation which is addressed through this competition. We are delighted to be part of it."

Khabo Raphoto, HR Director at Babcock International Group: Africa and Allon Raiz, CEO of Raizcorp, were part of the esteemed panel of experts who, along with the audience of 160 guests, listened to the contestants final three minute, now polished, pitch.

The finalists were:

- * Alan Butler of Green Thumb Home Growers Co-operative whose business idea is an answer to the need for housing, food security, and employment. Butler stated, "Basically, my product is a single garage-sized growing room, supported by 11 individual companies that form a co-operative." Alan, from Retreat in the Cape, won the Wild Card competition on SAfm.
- * Bhongolwethu Sonti, from Port Elizabeth's business idea is to transform the inner-township and city

dumping sites into community hydroponic farms. His objective is to create financial growth within these communities, providing them with a source of food, and commodities to trade with other markets, making it self-sustainable, transfer skills and create jobs.

* Criytone Revanewako, from eMalahleni, approaches environmental issues from a recycling perspective, using slag generated by the ferrochrome smelting industry to produce economically useful products cheaply and sustainably, such as paving and building bricks, road construction material, roofing and flooring tiles, pre-mixed and ready mixed concrete.

The rise of social entrepreneurs and greentrepreneurs, such as these finalists, represents the growing awareness amongst South Africans of the importance of sustainability in all aspects of life, and therefore a bright spot in the country's economic outlook. Social entrepreneurship expert Bill Drayton, quoted in the Social Entrepreneurship Teaching Resources Handbook, characterises a social entrepreneur as, "someone who cannot come to rest, in a very deep sense, until he or she has changed the pattern of social concern across all society... they simply will not stop because they cannot be happy until their vision becomes the new pattern. They will persist for decades." This trend is evident too in South Africa, based on 41% of 2012 contestants being social entrepreneurs compared to 29% in 2011.

Given the high potential for the needed positive social and environmental change that these entrepreneurs represent, the Pitch & Polish programme developed and run by South African small business incubator, Raizcorp is an example of how corporate South Africa can generate education and business development opportunities for smaller businesses, while ensuring that sustainable social development goals are also met.

Bronwyn Echardt, Pitch & Polish Project Manager at Raizcorp, attributes much of its success to the combined education and entertainment format. "Research by Laurie Scholtz on the impact of social entrepreneurs' education and business skills training, published in 2011, showed that there are only three types of informal business skills training that have a significant impact on the success of organisations, namely: business experience, networks, and workshops and conferences." Pitch & Polish, as a national competition and workshop platform combines all three.

In addition to the intensive training that the competition entrants received at the free workshop events around the country, sponsored by Engen Petroleum Ltd, 1 651 combined audience members received a full day's expert training on the fundamentals of entrepreneurship.

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