

# Finding the silver lining in WorksheetCloud

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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As the national lockdown saw the closure of schools and regular teaching methods, and the rise of homeschooling and virtual classrooms, companies in the edtech space have found it's their time to shine.



Learning Lab Apps co-founders: Adrian and Dereck Marnewick

One such company is Learning Lab Apps, a Cape Town-based online education provider founded in 2014 and the creators of the online educational app, WorksheetCloud. Here we chat to co-founders Dereck and Adrian Marnewick about rolling with the punches and learning to adapt offerings in times of need...

## **Tell us about Learning Lab Apps and how it all started?**

We're a bootstrapped, family-owned business that has been in the edtech industry before the term "edtech" existed.

Our co-founder, Dereck Marnewick (father), was Head of Physics at Fairmont High School for 15 years, before resigning in 1995 and ploughing his entire pension into his new startup idea called EvaluNet, that developed LAN-based educational software for the home and school market.

In 2014, Adrian (son) told his father Dereck that he was tired of working for him, and instead wanted to work with him. The two agreed to form a new business called Learning Lab Apps.

Learning Lab Apps acquired the exclusive rights to take over and further develop EvaluNet's home range of products that focus on parents and learners.

### ▣ ***How does the WorksheetCloud platform work?***

We create happiness in families - this is what we ultimately do.

The way we do that is through the online educational app we develop called WorksheetCloud that helps remove the stress all families experience with studying for exams and tests. We all remember stressing ourselves and our parents before tests and exams, and this is what our company aims to reduce or eliminate.

WorksheetCloud is dubbed as "the easiest way to study for your school exams". WorksheetCloud provides learners with online, interactive worksheets and practice exams that are designed to help your child smash their school exams. The content is based on the South African CAPS and IEB curriculum and covers Mathematics, English, Afrikaans, Natural Science, History and Geography depending on the grade. We have content available from Grades 1 to 9.

Parents no longer need to spend hours searching for relevant study content. WorksheetCloud's content includes detailed answers with model explanations, hints and tips. All our content is designed to help your child improve their school results quick and effectively.

Parents can see the full product tour at [www.worksheetcloud.com](http://www.worksheetcloud.com).

### ▣ ***How did the Covid-19 lockdown affect/alter your game-plan?***

Our company's first core value is "Care about everyone".

It was obvious and understandable that parents were freaking out about this lockdown. Learners are worried about the impact it will have on their futures. Not to mention it is not clear if school will even resume after the lockdown.

In order to live out our core values, it was clear that we had to do something that was going to benefit the country and that would be freely accessible to as many learners and parents as possible. Adrian recalls having a discussion with Dereck who said: "Even if we lose money, which will very likely happen, I want us to help people."

We put our heads together and came up with the idea of offering free, live-streamed online lessons and called it WorksheetCloud Live Lessons. That turned out to be a disaster, even though we managed to live-stream lessons to 40,000 learners on the first two days, which is a record in South Africa. With seven teachers, all sitting at home with differing internet speeds, it quickly became clear that live lessons were going to end up frustrating too many users because some of the teachers' internet connections would bomb out mid-lesson.

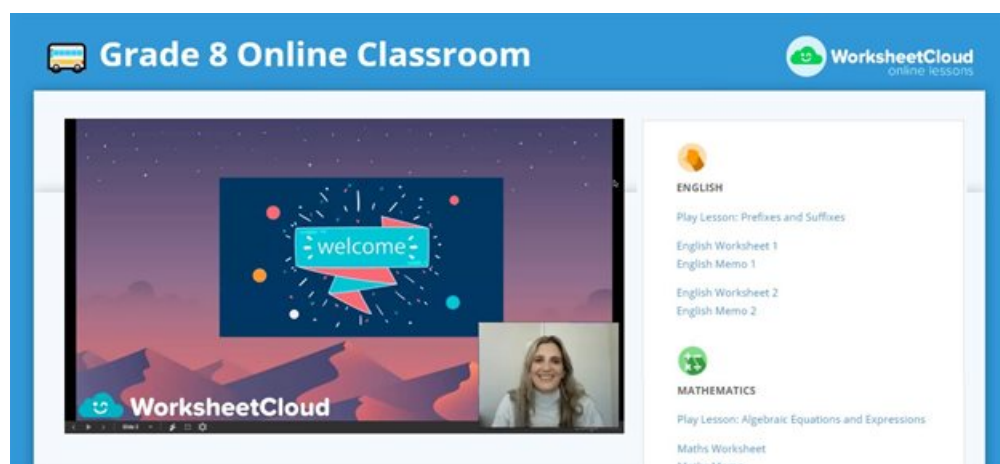
We then pivoted and I rebuilt the entire site and system within 18 hours to cater for on-demand, recorded lessons and just replaced "Live" with "Online" in our name, WorksheetCloud Online Lessons.

Our online lessons have reached 900,000 views within the first 17 days of launching (updated to 1-million as of Thursday, 23 April 2020). Parents can access this free content at [www.worksheetcloud.com/live](http://www.worksheetcloud.com/live).

Since we launched WorksheetCloud Online Lessons, I've been working 12 to 14 hour days, as has most of our team. But that's okay because our team believes strongly in rolling with the punches.

WorksheetCloud Online Lessons is in the process of being integrated into the WorksheetCloud app and will become part of

our standard product offering.



■ ***Do you believe the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a fundamental shift in the education industry that will outlast the lockdown, or do you see teaching returning to its BC (before coronavirus) norm once all is over and done?***

I strongly believe it has had a fundamental shift for the education industry. It has forced almost every parent and teacher to take notice of companies like Learning Lab Apps and products like WorksheetCloud.

Yesterday, we hosted a free webinar for South African teachers to show them how to adapt their teaching methods and provide content online. We were expecting a few hundred teachers to attend this webinar. We had 3,900 teachers attend. While I do believe things will return to normal, I also believe that the online teaching tools that teachers, learners and even parents have been exposed to will see an increase in demand for edtech.

■ ***Unlike so many other industries where people have had to make radical shifts in their working lives, you seem to be in a fortunate position where the impact on your staff has been minimal. What adjustments, if any, have you had to make, any changes to HR policies regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?***

When we started Learning Lab Apps in 2014, we were an entirely remote company for two years. One of the early adopters. It nearly killed the company for various reasons, which I'll still write a book about one day. Remote work needs to be managed extremely carefully and your team needs to have not only the maturity to work remotely, but also the ability to go without seeing co-workers for long periods of time. The introverts handle this fairly well. The extroverts, not so much. For the past four years, the majority of our team has been working from an office, but we still allow remote work whenever an employee chooses to do so. In terms of Covid-19, we were able to go from the majority of the team working in-office to the entire team working remotely within 7 hours thanks to the remote work policy we instituted in 2014.

■ ***What has been the reaction from users during this time?***

We've had over 5,000 parents email us (within 12 days) to tell us how much we've saved them during this time and given them some comfort about their children's futures. We keep getting messages from parents literally every few minutes.

**Here is one of my favourites:**

*Hi Adrian*

*I've been subscribed to receive emails from you for a while now, and although I appreciate your content, I never signed my daughter up for lessons as I was worried about the volumes it would add to her normal school load, which is already overwhelming.*

*Fast forward a few months, we are faced with this unprecedented pandemic that no one saw coming. And who comes to the rescue?? WorksheetCloud!! Conventional schools are struggling to quickly adapt to the crisis, leaving disheartened parents to scramble for alternative teaching methods to circumvent the situation.*

*I would like to commend you for rising to the occasion, and offering free lessons. The link to your website has been shared widely on school groups, with many parents appreciating the value that is being offered.*

*As for the parents that were sitting on the fence like myself, I am most certainly signing up now, and will do so for all 3 of my children.*

*So in short this is a thank you note from a happy parent.*

*Regards*

*Cheryl*

### 🔴 **What's at the top of your wish list for WorksheetCloud?**

"Googling" has replaced the term "internet search".

We want "WorksheetCloud" to become synonymous with "studying". Your mom won't ask if you've studied for your exam. All she'll ask is if you've used WorksheetCloud today.

This is what we're working towards.

### 🔴 **Where do you see the platform in five years?**

Later this year we'll be launching the biggest upgrade to WorksheetCloud in three years. We're launching Study Notes into the platform, which are basically "cheat sheets" that give learners everything they need to study in a bite-sized format.

We believe firmly in the MVP (minimum viable product) process, which means we develop small ideas, build them as quickly as possible, put them out to our customers and get feedback that we use to make improvements.

This means it's very difficult to tell exactly what WorksheetCloud will look like in five years, because our product development is powered by our users.

However, my vision is to have 1-million paying users within the next five years. It's very ambitious, but we didn't get as far as we are now by being afraid to take risks.

## ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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