

Special tech startup secrets: social media and gamification FTW!

 By Leigh Andrews

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Looking for an example of something game changing for the realm of e-commerce in Africa? Look no further than the [i-Pay Payment Solution](#), an innovative tech business. CEO Thomas Pays talks us through the importance of self-belief and slight insanity when launching any business...

While the focus for digital over the past decade has mainly been on search engines such as Google, MSN and Yahoo or Bing, Pays says we need to shift focus. With social media platforms becoming so much more popular and part of our daily life, you can often capitalise on the best segmented audience for your business to create quality leads and sources of revenue through these platforms.



Thomas Pays

What makes him an authority? Well, he's not your typical businessman. In addition to being CEO of the i-Pay Payment Solution, he went where few South Africans have gone before by launching the Gambling-Advertising agency as well as dabbling in the online auction space with Smokoo and keen to help young South Africans bring their entrepreneurial visions to life. Now, he's CEO of [Just Perfect Digital](#) and i-Pay, his cutting-edge instant payment processing platform. Having come to SA from France with just R500 in his pocket, he's made a success from [his belief that](#): "Africa remains an untouched land of opportunity for e-commerce".

Pays shares some key learnings and how you can take advantage...

■ 1. Let's start with looking into why you decided to relocate to SA from France?

Pays: I had any guy's dream job before I left France: selling luxurious Italian supercars for Ferrari. However, my South African wife, mother of my first-born child, didn't find the culture and environment suitable for her to settle there, and she had told me so much about South Africa and asked to move back and be with her family. As a husband and father I knew it was important for us to find comfort, to build a home and a life together in a place where we could both thrive. And so, after a short holiday in South Africa, a month to be precise, we agreed that South Africa was 'home.'

■ 2. You're the right person to answer this, then: How does the SA market differ to that of Europe?

Pays: It's a lot less challenging when you refer to the competition, many established local businesses do not have the experience or expertise you gain when you live and work in Europe. One of the greatest assets in Europe is the culture of service - the client is king, which is something many South Africans still need to acknowledge. South Africa needs to implement tactical processes to ensure client satisfaction.

■ 3. Let's dive a little deeper into that then, and what goes into starting up a digital agency.

Pays: You definitely have to be a little bit insane when making the decision to start up a digital agency, as you are literally telling yourself: 'I am going to be responsible in competing against hundreds of competitors on behalf of our clients and over so many industries.' All this while keeping in mind that you are competing with agencies that have been up and running for 8 to 12 years and have already built credibility, authority and a team of experts.

■ 4. Quite daunting indeed. How did you use this insight in launching your i-Pay platform?

Pays: Again, you definitely need to be slightly insane to think you can compete with the likes of the banks or existing companies like PayPal. I heard this a lot from a few of my fellow entrepreneurial friends, however I saw an opportunity in the market that was so niche and yet so broad in terms of acquisition: I realised there was not one single payment method in the world that would allow for payments via SMS and integration into any website, point of sale or accounting software, to allow clients to pay their bill conveniently from the comfort of their mobile device, tablet or computer.

The fact that I don't comprehend limits and always want to push the boundaries when someone tells me 'it cannot be done' or 'it is impossible', makes me want to prove to them that when you are not settling for anything else, success will be achieved.



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■ 5. Talk us through the numbers, as well as your failures and successes with your previous digital businesses.

Pays: The experience and knowledge we gained within the gambling industry with [Gambling-advertising](#) and [Smokoo](#) allowed us to learn about digital marketing and the best ways to capitalise on any digital presence. We were present in over 120 countries and were marketing for our clients in over 18 languages. As we were working against agencies based in the US and Europe, we learned not to use our wallet to compete with these agencies that could spend in dollars and pounds. Instead, we used our minds and innovative means to attract clients in the most creative ways. For example, when marketing budget is an issue or you need to hit the market with a bang, social media is the way to go. With over 15 million South Africans logging into Facebook daily, it makes sense to use it as a source for acquisition or building brand awareness in no time. We decided to create bespoke competitions and gaming applications that are designed to engage and reward existing customers while gaining new consumers. It is literally a 'win-win' situation.

Gamification then allows a brand or business to interact in a fun way with its clients and at the same time gives clients the platform to advertise for the brand through friends that they refer. It is one of the secret tools that propelled some of the biggest ecommerce stores in South Africa to become overnight successes like [Superbalist](#) or even [Daddy's Deals](#).

■ 6. Tell us about the importance of digital savvy in creating businesses today?

Pays: You can have the greatest ideas and the best products, but if you do not know how to market them and get ROI, you will never be able to build sustainability and growth within your business. Growing any business online allows you to track all your marketing and customer experience. If you constantly optimise then you always end up improving your business. Once you have the right combination of sustainability and ROI you can finally focus on your growth, which is what has always been the key to success. It is the time, commitment and dedication we provide to all our clients.

■ 7. Lastly, please expand on how you help young South Africans bring their entrepreneurial visions to life.

Pays: I spend a lot of time meeting with young and senior entrepreneurs alike who have never understood the broader picture of taking calculated risks, and that you sometimes need to fail a few times and learn from it to make a success.

Many entrepreneurs just need guidance. Without the basic groundwork of building a solid foundation for their business, they often do not have sufficient confidence in themselves or their products/services. I simply explain to them that it won't be easy but I will provide them with a clear path that can help them gain success if they follow it, and make sure they meet their targets.

As simple as that. [Click here](#) for more from Pays on the evolution of e-commerce in South Africa.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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