

# Zeelo launches in South Africa

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Zeelo, the shared transportation service, has launched in South Africa - it's first overseas market after the UK.



James Champion and Andrew Robarts, general managers of Zeelo SA

Zeelo offers safe, convenient and affordable shared transport solutions for commuters and fans, and boasts clients such as Jaguar Land Rover, The Sharks, South African Cricket and Big Concerts.

The platform integrates with more than 20,000 vehicles to provide commuting, event and private charter services. In South Africa, Zeelo has partnered with a number of local operators who supply the vehicles used to transport Zeelo passengers safely to their destination.

We chat to James Champion and Andrew Robarts, general managers of Zeelo SA, to find out about their journey, which includes having transported over 18,000 passengers in South Africa...

## **Can you tell us a bit about Zeelo?**

Zeelo is a personalised shared mobility service, connecting underserved areas with shared transport options so people can make the most of their travelling time. Zeelo builds routes using a unique AI-powered algorithm, RINA (Route Integration Navigation Algorithm) and a customer-centric approach to deliver a service that beats the convenience of driving a car.

Our services include: ZeeloCOMMUTE, a transport solution for employees to and from work; ZeeloEVENTS, which offers transport solutions to and from major events and ZeeloPRIVATE, a transport solution for private groups.

The Zeelo service is operational in the UK and now in South Africa, and since Zeelo opened in the UK in 2017, the service has transported over 150,000 travellers achieving a Trustpilot rating of 9/10.

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

Zeelo started life in South Africa back in 2014 as 'The Rugga Bus', a service transporting the Cell C Sharks fans to and from Jonsson Kings Park on match days. We founded 'The Rugga Bus' as a way to provide fans with a means of getting to and from games without needing to worry about the issues usually associated with large events, such as traffic, lack of parking and the risk of drinking and driving.

A few years later, news of the idea spread to London, where Zeelo co-founders, Sam Ryan and Barney Williams, became interested in the idea. Zeelo was founded in the UK in 2017 by Barney Williams, Sam Ryan and Dani Ruiz after selling their first business JumpIn – a taxi booking and sharing app – to Addison Lee in 2014. The teams struck a deal and 'The Rugga Bus' was officially transformed into Zeelo SA.

### ■ ***What is the core function of Zeelo?***

The core function of Zeelo is to move people out of cars and into shared transport. We look at reducing the number of cars on the road, the number of parking space used in city centres, the amount of stress associated with being stuck behind the wheel in traffic and to reduce carbon emissions in the process. This also helps to give people their time back, hours once spent driving a car can now be used constructively while sitting back and relaxing in a luxury shuttle or bus. At its core, Zeelo is a tech company that is looking to change the way people travel.

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

**Robarts:** Our biggest challenge initially was the fact that we both had full-time jobs and had to manage the business on the side. This wasn't too much of a challenge when the business was 'The Rugga Bus' as it was a part-time business. However, when we were incorporated by Zeelo and became Zeelo SA, we both were juggling full-time jobs while trying to expand the Zeelo business in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban. James was the first to go full-time with Zeelo and spent the first five months building the business on his own with some fairly ambitious targets to hit. This involved a lot of late nights and lack of sleep.

Another obstacle was the integration of the tech product in South Africa, as this would be the first market Zeelo was to be operational in, outside of the UK. We were unsure if the South Africa market would respond well to the Zeelo product offering and a great deal of educating needed to be done, to get the product off the ground in SA. After a lot of hard work to get the system up and running in SA, followed by a short trial period testing how the market responded to the tech, we found that there was a massive need for the product in the country and that users were responding well to it.

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

**Robarts:** Don't wait around for the perfect timing to get started with your ideas. Take the leap and get started right away, your ideas will evolve and your business will grow faster as you try different things and learn from your mistakes. During this process, don't be afraid of failure, or better still, don't be afraid of asking for help, as you could learn from other people's experience which will prevent you from making the same mistakes that they did.

### ■ ***What has been your proudest achievements thus far?***

**Robarts:** Transporting around 4,500 fans to the Ed Sheeran concert at the FNB Stadium, it was a fantastic event and probably our proudest single achievement so far. Along with that, getting our first corporate commuting route up and running in Johannesburg, growing a user base of over 4,700 South African users in our first year, who between them have purchased over 18,000 seats thus far. And most recently, growing our business from a team of two, based in Durban, to a team of five spanning across Kwa-Zulu Natal, Gauteng and the Western Cape.

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

**Robarts:** The future of entrepreneurship looks to be an exciting one! With all the modern tech advancements, I believe entrepreneurship is more accessible to people in most cases, as one can startup a business with just an idea and a laptop.

The globe is becoming more closely connected by the day, meaning that people can tap into goods and services across borders very easily and usually at a lower cost than we would have seen 15-20 years ago.

Online companies, tools and applications mean that entrepreneurs don't necessarily need all the relevant qualifications to get the job done, they can tap into this support to enhance their business repertoire. But an increase in entrepreneurs also leads to an increase in competition and we are already seeing a lot of startups fighting hard for space within certain industries.

This means the future of entrepreneurship is also a difficult one, as the number of startups establishing themselves worldwide is only going to increase over time.

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

**Champion:** South Africa has a wealth of entrepreneurs chomping at the bit to get their startup off the ground, but so many of them never follow through and actually get started due to a lack of knowing "what to do next". More government and community based start up workshops could be the answer here in giving these entrepreneurs the confidence to go ahead and get started.

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

**Champion:** There are many traits an entrepreneur needs to succeed, but here are what I think are the three most important.

1. **Strong work ethic** - you simply have to understand that becoming a successful entrepreneur is not easy- if it was, everyone would be one. Accept that you will have to work harder than you ever have once you embark on your entrepreneurial journey.
2. **Ability to learn from failures** - this rings true with me at Zeelo. We have made many mistakes in our short journey thus far, but the key has been learning from these mistakes and growing from them.
3. **Determination** - never give up. Speak to any number of successful entrepreneurs and they will tell you that their success did not come without any hardships along the journey. A successful entrepreneur needs to be determined and willing to keep going no matter what.

▣ ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as entrepreneurs, as well as some major highlights***

**Champion:** I would say our biggest struggle has been working as a team of only two for the last eight months, requiring a lot of hard work and extra hours to be put in. That being said, as I alluded to in the previous question, you need to have a strong work ethic to become a successful entrepreneur.

A major highlight has been negotiating and successfully formulating the deal that resulted in Zeelo UK partnering with us to incorporate Zeelo South Africa

### ▣ **Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?**

**Champion:** The feeling of seeing the business that you created and that you have worked so hard on, begin to change people's lives is exhilarating! I would encourage someone to become an entrepreneur to experience this feeling alone!

### ▣ **What is the importance of entrepreneurship?**

**Robarts:** Entrepreneurship is important for a number of reasons, especially in the South African context. Primarily, entrepreneurship stimulates economic growth within a country by the generation of new business. It also has an impact on the creation of new jobs, which is important in South Africa, where the unemployment rate has been floating around 28% for some time. I particularly like the fact that entrepreneurship prevents stagnation in an economy, as the new businesses which enter the market keep well-established businesses, and government, on their toes as they look to fill any gaps in the market.

### ▣ **Where would you like to see Zeelo in the next 5 years?**

**Champion:** I would like Zeelo to really be making a substantial difference by getting people out of cars and into shared transport, whether it be for work, or events. I would like to see Zeelo as a household name in five years time. When asked how they got to work, or how they got to an event, I would like to hear people say “I Zeelo’d” or “I got a Zeelo”.

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