

# Accidental ice cream empire

**ROSKA:** WHAT STARTED AS A HOBBY MAY BECOME A GLOBAL, PREMIUM DESSERT BRAND

» They are working alongside employees in this business fuelled by passion.

Hein Kaiser

**H**appenstance and sweat – and a lot of the latter. Former corporate-suit-turned-entrepreneur Kamal Manilal cofounded Roska Artisanal Ice Cream with his wife, Roshni, just over two years ago.

It was no overnight success and is still a work in progress but after starting up at home with a single ice-cream maker and an idea, the pair now has premises near Gold Reef City, seven full-time staff, and loads of ice cream. And it is just the beginning, with plans to build the company into a global, premium dessert brand.

Corporate life was not panning out the way that Manilal had envisioned and career turbulence became a burdensome bugbear. Initially he was looking for something to take his mind off the hassle of daily toil. And one morning, after browsing through Facebook memories, he came upon an old post and a picture of an ice-cream maker someone had gifted him a decade ago.

It was a moment of inspira-



**AMBITIONS.** The Manilals aim to take the product to overseas markets. Picture: Hein Kaiser

tion and after dusting off the machine, he began experimenting. It was a passion project at first, but co-workers, family and friends soon started ordering large volumes of ice cream after tasting batches he shared in the beginning.

Said Manilal: "I almost threw in the towel a couple of months into the venture."

But he was racking up growing numbers of orders from colleagues, friends and family. He

said: "I'd been churning ice cream for a full week, and I was exhausted, my lower back was killing me. I was on my feet the entire weekend and it was a Sunday night, and I was outside washing dishes for hours on end. And I just thought to myself, I can't do this. It was hard. I was exhausted and I just felt I needed help."

His wife, Roshni, stepped up to the plate. That moment became the genesis of the Roska brand. A debut staffer was employed

and trained, while branding expert Roshni developed a logo and packaging. The brand became a portmanteau of the couple's first names.

Manilal developed the recipes and flavours himself, experimenting relentlessly. The outcome, an eggless creamy and premium product in delicious flavours. He said: "As each day went by, I started coming up with various recipes. It took a lot of time and a lot of research. Eventually

we had a catalogue of 17 flavours."

He said part of his mission was to bring back the classic authenticity of ice cream he remembered from his childhood. To this end his research also included anecdotal input from retailers and restaurateurs to better understand taste-demand.

"A lot of the variants we developed were inspired by this input."

Manilal said that working with his wife is invaluable. The honesty of a relationship is brought into the workplace, he said, and there is no pussyfooting around issues.

"We tell it like it is to one another. It's honest, it's engaging and far more productive than the wide berths reality is sometimes afforded in the corporate world."

In addition to its debut menu of flavours, Roska now produces smaller ice-cream cups and ice creams on sticks, named Belgian Chocolate Ice Cream Bars.

The large, now industrial looking ice-cream tanks and machines at the couple's new southern Johannesburg factory churn all-day long to fill the line of freezers that hold stock for delivery to restaurants, bespoke ice cream stores and a growing number of supermarkets.

The couple are still on the floor, making the product alongside employees. It's a hands-on business, fuelled by passion. "We'd like to play with the big players in the market," Manilal said of Roska's future. "We would also like to take our product overseas too. We've got big aspirations." – [news@citizen.co.za](mailto:news@citizen.co.za)

## GAMING INDUSTRY

# Drop seeds, not bombs in African-made content

Jack Dutton

Two manga-like avatars lock swords against a comic strip backdrop as Alexander Poone explains the different worlds of *The Traveller* – a video game based on a graphic novel.

The 27 year old from Johannesburg is showcasing his creation at the annual Africa Games Week in Cape Town. The organisers of the continent's largest gathering of game developers aim to help the gaming industry meet demand for African-made content and boost local talent.

Most of the games on the market are from America, Europe and Japan, but African content was negligible, said Poone.

There's "a lot of content that is new and not been fully explored yet", said the founder of Dream Shards.

The hybrid event ran through Friday, attracting about 2 500 developers, coders, designers, investors, and publishers, with 600 of the attending in-person. Event

co-founder Nick Hall said a lot of publishers wanted African-made content.

"There's a huge opportunity. Now is the best time really to be making games or trying to get into the games industry because we're hoping in the next few years we're going to see a massive spike in growth," he said.

Burdened with poverty and infrastructure problems such as reliable telecoms and electricity supply, Africa traditionally lagged far behind other continents in gaming. But recent years have seen an extraordinary boom – gamers in sub-Saharan Africa increased to 186 million last year, from 77 million in 2015, according to a study by game analytics company Newzoo.

Of those 186 million, 63 million pay for games as the continent embraces digital currencies. A total of 95% of the market is on mobiles, reflecting the continent's improved internet access and affordable smartphones.

Africa, along with China and India, is expected to surpass a bil-



**PLAY ONLINE.** A participant at Africa Games Week, which brings game developers, companies and consumers together. Picture: AFP

lion gamers and the continent is home to industry's "last untapped consumer audience", Hall said.

He predicted that Africa could reach one billion users in the next five years. To cash in on Africa's

gaming boom, large developers need to work with local content creators, such as streamers or YouTubers, Hall said.

South Africa is by far the continent's largest gaming market

with 40% of its population playing, followed by Ghana and Nigeria. And a lot more are upcoming. In the Central African Republic, Teddy Kossoko founded Masseka Game Studio, which creates games telling stories of African cultures and history.

Others developers are making games for social causes.

Jay Shapiro of Usiku Games, a Kenya-based gaming company, created *Seedballs*, which helps replenish Kenya's lost forests. Kenya hopes by the end of this year to have increased its forest cover from 7% to 10%.

Shapiro said the game was helping achieve that. "We created a mobile game where when you fly a plane and, instead of the usual dropping bombs and trying to destroy things, you're dropping seeds and trying to plant trees."

At the end of the game, players are asked if they would like to turn the virtual trees they have planted into real trees. "It's the only example we've seen of using gaming to plant real trees," Shapiro said. – *AFP*