

Siya Sigcau

Organic Matters

Turning Waste Into Opportunity

Siya Sigcau specialised in labour law at university. He worked at a labour broker supplying workers to a waste management company, called Don't Waste, which had just started up and was busy growing. "They came to me one day and said I was always working with them, I might as well join them and create an HR department for them," Siya shares.

He joined the company as an HR director. "Because I understood that I couldn't separate HR and operations, I got entrenched in the operations of the business too," he says. "That's when the waste management bug bit."

Siya was later promoted to general manager of operations for the group. "Back then, it wasn't fashionable to be in waste management. Companies doing recycling was unheard of," he explains.

He stayed with the company for 15 years, until he spotted a gap in the industry in 2018 and decided to start his own company.

It's Not Just Rubbish

Siya had zero funding, however, and partnered with Mandy Collins to start Organic Matters, a waste management and recycling company, with a twist! "I realised there were very few waste management companies that specialised in waste water and even fewer that were black-owned," he explains.

Five years ago, when you cleaned your grease traps, it was called hazardous waste because of the chemicals they use to clean the kitchen. "I analysed this waste and discovered that the chemicals were actually a small quantity of what was in the traps and that most of it was organic waste," Siya says.

The company engaged the government and a farmer in their research and got them involved. "The farmer allowed us to test the wastewater on his compost for hydration and it worked!" Siya explains that this held an ever-larger value proposition for the country, which is currently experiencing



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water scarcity. “We diverted the water from landfills into composting.”

Picking Up The Right Partners

Organic Matters got funding to buy two trucks, which they paid back in full during the Covid-19 pandemic. “We lost about 80 percent of business during the lockdowns because many of our clients were restaurants and shopping centres, but we luckily still had the hospitals and big companies like Coca-Cola that were still operating as essential services,” he says.

One of the clients he’s gained over the years is City Lodge. “From 1 July, we’ll be doing the waste management for every City Lodge Hotel across the country,” Siya adds.

The company has also partnered with BiobiN, which offers a capture, containment and in-vessel composting system that drains waste water. “We became the distributor for BiobiN across South Africa as well.”

The business has since grown from only five employees in 2018 to 120 employees in 2024.

When The Waste Hit the Fan

Organic Matters’s biggest challenge has been a competitor pursuing legal action against them for encroaching on their intellectual property. “A year into operating, in December 2019, they brought lawyers and a sheriff down to our offices with an order from the court to take away our hard drives,” Siya says.

The competitor tried to sue Organic Matters for R1.5 million, but lost. “They were only trying to discredit our business,” he adds. “It didn’t impact our business, though, and we continued to grow, because our clients value our service offering.”

A Sustainable Future

One of the general managers in the City Lodge Hotels nominated Siya for the SATSA Tourism and Business Incubator programme, implemented by Sigma International. “When I joined the programme, my business didn’t have a website because I had spent so much time trying to get the right material. I didn’t want to reuse content sourced from the internet – it needed to be authentic and original,” he says.

Sigma International helped him build a website and has been supporting the business. “I call them my mini-board, because they’re always there for me,” Siya adds. “SATSA and Sigma International’s support has been phenomenal and they’re so keen to see me succeed.” Over this two year journey with Sigma International, key grants and loans have been facilitated to complement the growth of the business , in addition to business support.

Now that sustainability is everywhere and waste management is a common occurrence in most households, Siya’s leap into entrepreneurship couldn’t have come at a better time and continues to set a standard for others in the industry.



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