

# Free Wi-Fi zones giving township startups a hand-up

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Startups, small business and micro-entrepreneurs are enjoying a 'connected hand-up' thanks to the expansion of free Wi-Fi zones across Gauteng's townships. These Wi-Fi spots can be found in bustling townships such as Dobsonville, Naledi, Diepkloof and Tembisa to name a few.



Grand-Pa activation in Tembisa

The announcement of 2020 National Lockdown marked a mass exodus for office-based workers from the traditional workplace to a remote work-from-home environment. As many white-collar service industry employees would have found, having steady and reliable Wi-Fi connectivity was one of the biggest challenges of managing day-to-day tasks.

The number of big businesses that shut their doors during the past two years, coupled with mass retrenchments across the country, ignited the innovation and tested the entrepreneurial mettle of township communities.



Med-Lemon activation in Soweto

“Ours is a business which operates at the coalface of township life, the people and the businesses which are the lifeblood of these vibrant communities. We started seeing just how invaluable spaza shops are in townships, not only as the go-to for daily household items, but also for a sense of connection, both socially and for business,” says Paseka Molelengoane, co-founder of Indaba Media & Billboards.

He says his team identified spaza shops as an ideal and central location within townships to market consumer brands and to enable small business owners with free high-speed Wi-Fi solutions. The company’s free Wi-Fi zone solution was first introduced in 20 Tembisa and Soweto spaza shops in 2021 and since it has proven a hit for both brands and consumers. Indaba Media is on a huge expansion drive in Soweto and other regional township communities.



Grand-Pa activation in Tembisa

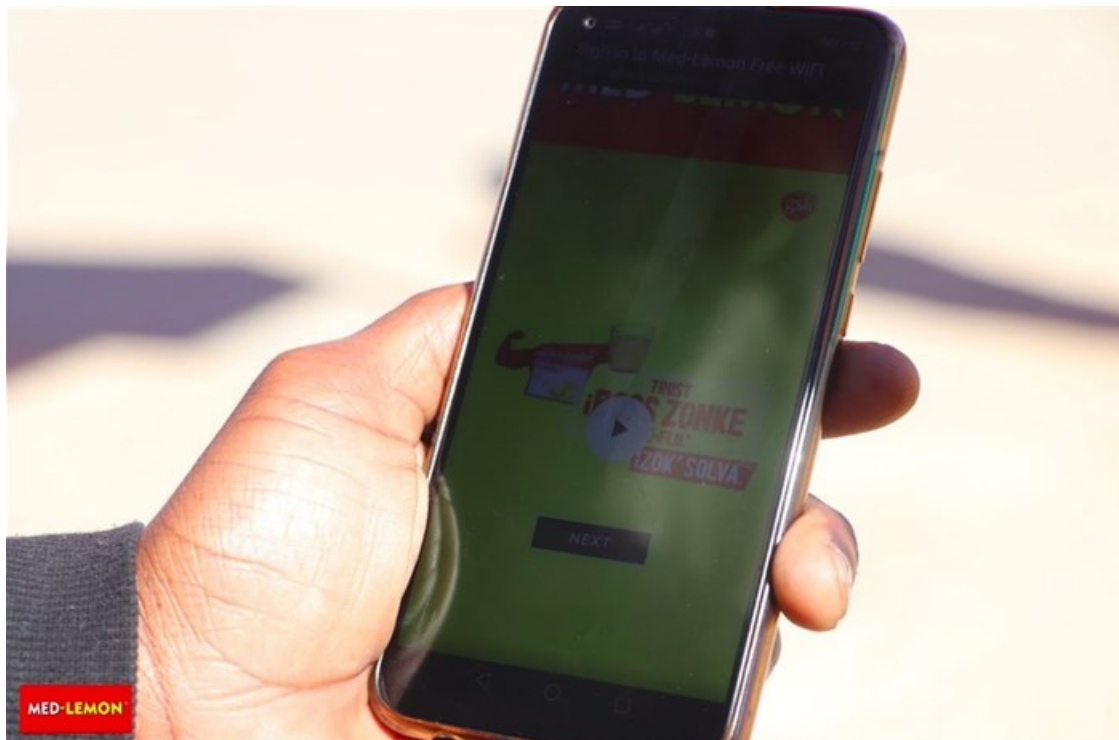
**Here’s how it works:**

When spaza shop patrons connect to the outlets free Wi-Fi service, they are automatically connected to the brands product and service campaigns, for the entire period that they remain in the free Wi-Fi zone. Brands are able to conduct polls, promote new products and run competitions to a captive audience and a very clearly defined market segment.

### **Why it works:**

While data costs remain comparatively high in the local market, Molelengoane says Indaba Billboards and Media was “intent on making data accessible and removing this barrier to entry for startups and entrepreneurs, in townships which have always boasted a thriving local economy and a loyal consumer base”.

It has been estimated that 17% of the country’s total employment can be attributed to the informal or township economy. While this may not impact the country’s GDP, the value of this sector of the economy continues to make a significant contribution to creating much-needed jobs and supporting township family households. According to Stats SA, the informal economy employs around 2.5 million workers.



Med-Lemon activation in Soweto

Co-founder of Indaba Billboards & Media, Neo Molefi adds: “Over the past two years, we’ve seen a staggering number of young creatives starting new businesses, offering internet-based service solutions not only for the community but for businesses alike. These young startups often work as cooperatives, pulling the resources and capacity of two or three additional people, and they’re taking full advantage of the free Wi-Fi zones we’ve invested in. Some of these spaza shops double up as their ‘office’ and we love it.”

The free Wi-Fi service was developed to build engagement and to gather data for businesses and brands alike while creating a portal for communities to stay connected to each other. Enabling startups has been a welcome spin-off for the team from Indaba Billboards & Media.





Med-Lemon activation in Soweto

“Through the Wi-Fi service, we have been able to simultaneously increase brand exposure for consumer brands and offer a ‘connectivity lifeline’ for small business. We’re boys from the kasi, our roots run deep, so we’re always looking for ways to give a hand-up to young township startups. We’re putting our money where our mouth is and doing everything, we can make the small business circle bigger,” concludes Molefi.

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