

Zaio gamifies a developers journey

 By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Having grown up in a house with both parents who are principals, with a strong focus on education, Mvelo Hlophe created a platform which gamifies a developers journey to help them gain real-world experience. Through the completion of various levels, trainees build on previous learnings, ending with a final stage which is a real market place project from actual clients looking for junior developers.

We chat to Mvelo Hlophe, co-founder of Zaio, who has been solving problems in a creative way for as long as he can remember...



Mvelo Hlophe, co-founder of Zaio. Image by Mpumelelo Macu © / [Red Bull Content Pool](#)

■ Can you tell us a bit about Zaio?

Zaio is a platform where businesses can access the largest pool of elite junior developers to build their prototypes, hire as a team or recruit for full-time employment.

We equip our developers with industry-relevant coding skills through a gamified learning journey with a strong emphasis on getting them practical experience. The learning journey is completely free to users who build out a profile showing their hard and soft skills which we use to help them land their dream job after they complete the journey

■ When, how and why did you get started?

We registered Zaio in November 2017. Initially, it was a platform to help computer science students get practical experience to add to their CV. We began sourcing projects for them but soon found that there is a mismatch between what is taught in university and what is required in the industry. We then began upskilling the developers in industry-relevant coding languages.

Over time we saw that we could teach people who had never coded before so we created learning journeys for people with

no coding experience. We then built a platform to facilitate the learning process.

■ ***What is the core function of Zaio?***

We cultivate young leaders that will drive the future of African innovation. We are bridging the gap between the demand for technical talent that is required on the continent and supply which is currently under-produced.

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

We have had to build the business while studying. Trying to balance university work and the business has been our greatest challenge.

Other challenges came when we tried to ensure the quality of projects that were produced by our developers who were building applications for the first time.

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

Anyone can be an entrepreneur if you are able to solve a challenge that someone will want to pay for, but do not get caught up in the remuneration of it.

“ Focus on solving the issue and your business will do far better if you put all your efforts into impacting other people's lives rather than making a lot of money. ”

A business with a good purpose attracts the right employees, relevant support and survives long after those who only add to the bottom line ever will. Focus on creating a lasting impact.



Mvelo Hophe, co-founder of Zaio. Image by Mpumelelo Macu © / [Red Bull Content Pool](#)

■ ***What has been your proudest achievement thus far?***

My team and I have won a few awards now, but we have treated them as validation that what we are doing is indeed impactful. More than anything, the awards are the small wins that keep us going. My proudest achievement came after seeing the first person to earn a living through our platform.

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

“ *The future of entrepreneurship is inclusive across all industries.* ”

Anyone will be able to imagine a different way of doing business in any one field and will have the means and access to do so. The barriers of entry will be made very low with support readily available for the entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs that will thrive in this future are those with powerful visions that have social impact at their core.

■ ***What do you think is the importance of startup accelerator/incubator programmes?***

Every entrepreneur will need a helping hand at some point in their entrepreneurial journey. This may come in many forms.

Programs such as Red Bull Amaphiko are important for exactly that reason. Amaphiko does it especially well as they provide ongoing mentorship and guidance. They expose entrepreneurs to opportunities that they otherwise would not come across. Red Bull Amaphiko and programs like it help the entrepreneur to not only find a viable business model but shape it in such a way that the business creates a measurable impact.

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

I would like to see more startups creating solutions that solve our country's core issues. The public sector should then channel all their efforts in helping those entrepreneurs succeed.

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

They need to have a purpose above everything else. When an entrepreneur is purpose-driven, they can get through the most difficult challenges, will have resilience that is unparalleled and will be more fulfilled in all that they do. Courageous commitment is another trait that entrepreneurs should have. They need to see a vision that not many can but still have the courage to stay disciplined enough to make it a reality.

■ ***Would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur? Why?***

I would encourage people to walk the journey of entrepreneurship. We live in a society that has a myriad of challenges that other societies do not have. We need to find solutions that make the place in which we live better for not only ourselves but also for the next person.

■ ***Where would you like to see Zaio in the next five years?***

Over the next five years, we want to be operating across Africa.

By then we want to be taking 100 projects a month which means 400 people would be given an earning potential per month. We want to be holding a community of upskilled developers that is sitting at 150,000.

Right now, our next milestone is to be operating fully in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. This is our goal for 2020.

We are entering each region through tertiary institutions first, then opening up to people outside of these. In March 2020 we are opening up to Wits and UJ then UKZN and DUT in September 2020.

In the next 10 years we want to see people from Grade 9 choosing to upskill through us and get a certification as an alternative to going to traditional tertiary institutions.

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