



WasteWhales

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www.wastewhales.herokuapp.com



WasteWhales is an app which gamifies recycling by connecting all stakeholders in the waste system, streamlining the process, incentivising action and rewarding users. The founders hope that the app will improve how society deals with waste, maximise our recycling efficiency and encourage the transition towards a more circular economy.

“The Sustainable Development Goals for the world are very much our goals, we want to work towards them by partnering with organisations and individuals and letting the app be a tool for that collaboration.”

Words and photography by Chris de Beer-Procter



ABOUT THE BUSINESS

What if taking care of your recycling was as easy as calling an Uber? Does it seem too good to be true? Brendan Visser doesn't think so. In fact, his company, WasteWhales has developed an app to streamline the recycling process for households, companies, recycling plants and waste collectors. The app, which shares a name with the company that built it, has recently become available in app stores and aims to make recycling easy and rewarding for everyone involved. The concept is simple: If you have waste you need collected, just open the app, log a waste drop, place your waste outside (you get bonus points if you separate your waste before doing so) and wait for a nearby waste picker to collect it on their route.

“We see WasteWhales as an app that can give households visibility of who their reclaimers are and get them more comfortable with the idea that someone is going to come to your house and separate your waste at source. We want to legitimize them and give them a platform.”

users open the app. From simple clips that help separate waste inside a typical black bin, to an upcoming call centre to answer user questions, the team hopes to support all stakeholders in our waste system (which is us all) in their various roles. “We want to aid all points of contention in the system and give people all the tools they need to recycle,” says Jaco.

The service is free (for households and everyday waste collectors) and users are rewarded with points (or ‘Droplets’) which they can use for deals and discounts in the app’s marketplace. The app is also primed to connect with social media networks, bringing a social aspect to the process, further incentivising activity and spreading the word.

The platform is developed with the specific desire to benefit the waste pickers, who do much of the unrecognised and often informal work in South Africa’s waste management system, yet are largely unappreciated or invisible to households despite their invaluable service. “You put your waste out on Tuesday and on Friday it’s not there anymore. You don’t know where it went,” Brendan says. Either that, or “households get annoyed when collectors rummage through their trash, without realizing that they’re doing them a huge favour,” adds Brendan. Along with the other two directors of WasteWhales, Mark Gibson (Chief Operating Officer and Head of Sales) and Jaco Du Plooy (Co-Founder & Chief Technology Officer), Brendan hopes that the app will help legitimize the work of waste collectors and integrate them more into the formal economy, partly by logging their collections into a database.

Mark also notes that the app’s database capturing capabilities have huge potential. “Imagine we gave brands the option to buy back certain items, which they can recycle and use to make new products instead of just going to landfill,” muses Brendan. “It’s an interesting use case for WasteWhales and the circular economy, to answer how we can keep resources in use in the economy.”

The usefulness of a database doesn't end there, though, as Mark notes, “the whole idea is to provide valuable

information to the waste stream associations so that they can report back to local government as part of their extended producer responsibility,” he says, adding that the company aims to partner with all waste stream associations in South Africa. E-waste, which are electronics that consumers no longer use or want, is the waste stream which producers seem the most interested in claiming back at this stage, says Mark. Gizzelle Uys, who is Miss Eco 2020/2021 and something

of an unofficial ambassador for WasteWhales feels excited by the potential of the app. “I don’t just like awareness, I like action. I’d really like to see it flourish” she says. “I hope it’s an app that you want to use every day, I hope it’s fun, that it changes your social circles and that it changes your life,” says Brendan. Jaco adds, “and to change the way people view waste, that it’s not just something to ignore or feel guilty about, but to make recycling easy and something that you’re proud of.”

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

“As a business, we’d like to see the app used globally. We think that could make a huge change. We’d also like to minimize waste that ends up in landfills or polluting our environment,” says Mark. “I want to see anyone who needs work be able to sign up as a collector and make an income while helping the environment.”



ADVICE ON CIRCULARITY FOR ENTREPRENEURS

“Entrepreneurs should make sure they aren’t on autopilot. They should take a moment to think about everyday decisions instead of just following the status quo.”

Be mindful of what we use and what we throw away. Question why things are the way they are and ask yourself if there’s a better way. Maybe you have the solution.

