



15 Years of Excellence

Online Innovations remains light years ahead.

"In 2007 Barry Hilton walked in to our offices," said Online Innovations co-owner Dirk Erasmus, "He sat down at our boardroom table and said: 'I have a vision. I want to sell DVD's online'. That was the start of a great product, probably one of the first online DVD outlets, where customers can browse the full DVD catalog from the couch, rent a movie, and in some stores even have it delivered right to their door. We had to research the industry from the ground up to develop a specification for the online system. Today the brand boasts stores on a national basis."

Recognised as one of the top ICT companies in South Africa, Online Innovations has consistently

proven their expertise with a long and varied client list. From Barry Gibb of Beegees fame to Continental Tyres to Eveready; from the House of York to Shamwari and the Mantis Group, the list just goes on and on.

"From my point of view," said co-owner Bronwen Burger, "while the public sees many of the gorgeous end user things we produce, a lot of what we do is high-end development that allows our clients' businesses to function smoothly. So we do things like e-commerce solutions for secure customer ordering; we do online statements; we do intranets. We specialise in making the lives of our clients a lot easier and hassle free by taking a

function in their business that was previously a real pain to undertake and turning it into something elegantly effortless."

"In 2001," said Dirk, "we developed an online statement solution for a large multi-national company. And, barring a few upgrades here and there, it has remained largely unchanged and the client is still using the same system for their monthly statement distributions." Remember that this solution was developed in a time before widespread broadband in South Africa; before the invention of the iPhone, and definitely before social media platforms were actually a thing. "We only gave it a complete overhaul last year January. So until 2014, it was the exact same system as the one we first developed almost 15 years ago when we first started Online Innovations."

Considering that the average lifespan of a piece of commercial software is anywhere between 3 to 5 years (like Microsoft Office, for example) having software in regular use by a client for over a 14 year period speaks to the expertise of the Online Innovations team.

The company's strict adherence to high standards means employing a specialist over a 'jack-of-all-trades'. "We have in house specialists for every aspect of a project. We have dedicated liaison personnel whose sole job is to stay on top of the process. We have a qualified graphic designer whose sole mandate is to produce conceptual and final artwork. We have programmers who specialise in their own fields, so our CSS coder will only code in CSS, for example. Our copywriters only work on content for websites and social media."

"A lot of web developers," explains Dirk, "will make extensive use of free or open source templates which work in a framework. So when you as a client engage with the developer, often they will be shoehorning that framework into something that you like, but more than likely the client is forced to fit in to the frame, the typical square peg and round hole scenario. For us that represents a disconnect in the chain. Since the developer does not own or control the underlying or base foundation source

code, they are often limited to what they can do or how they can change the product. We start at the conceptual / artwork level, and once you approve of the design our guys ensure that it works regardless of the difficulty. We build all our solutions from the ground up using our own source code.

We have developed our own in-house framework which we maintain and know back to front, so we have as close to complete control over the critical aspects of the project. If something goes wrong, we'll know how to fix it."

"A common scenario we often come across, is when a client comes to us and says the person who developed their site has disappeared," said Bronwen. "Either the business has closed down or the person has dropped off the face of the earth and is simply uncontactable. Now the client is left without a website and without a backup of it. For me, that's what makes us different. We have a solid infrastructure in place and the stability to ensure continuity. Your website won't go missing with us."

"Using your website as a base from which to advertise to social media is extremely beneficial," says co-owner André Olivier, "because in the event of rebranding, launching and conducting marketing campaigns, all the data and ownership is local to the website."

"Imagine," says Bronwen, "if your free platform suddenly switched to a paid model. Many people would suddenly find themselves without a page and the content along with it. That's why we always try to get our clients to use social media to drive traffic back to their websites."

"Social media platforms should never own your content. You should own ALL your own content. Remember that if something changes on the platform, say Instagram changes their rules, you stand the chance of losing all your content. So share your content by all means, but always make sure that it's being shared from your ownership on your website, to social media. A good example of this is sharing a link on social media that points back to your own website," explains Dirk. "With platforms like Facebook, you don't make the rules. With Online Innovations, you do."

Online Innovations is owned and managed by Bronwen Burger (Clients & Sales), Andre Olivier (Development and Technical) and Dirk Erasmus (Administrative and General Management).

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Camden, a Place to Shop

Camden carries a signature ensemble range of homewear and decor personally chosen by owners Donné and Nikki. Of particular interest is their range of bespoke African designer craft brands, which represents a fresh new interpretation of what constitutes 'modern Africana'. From uniquely South African silver pendants by Symbols on Silk; to high quality hand-made bags by Mongoose; and expertly crafted pottery and porcelain by South African design houses Urchin Art and Wonki Wear.

Think of Richmond Hill, and you think of Camden. Sisters Donné and Nikki were part of the first wave of young and edgy entrepreneurs prepared to risk it all in what has become PE's lifestyle hub. It took a lot of hard work, but what started as a little slice of retail heaven has since grown into one of the Eastern Cape's best kept secrets.

Camden has also started selling nationally with their exciting 'A Place to Shop' online store. "It gets pretty hectic at times dealing with the sheer volume of orders that come in," says Nikki, "but we focus heavily on keeping our clients happy by giving them the levels of service we feel should be the norm in South Africa." "After all these years I still get goose bumps when we get emails from happy customers," smiles Donné. "It's like 'yeah man!' and high fives all around." Delight your senses by visiting Camden the next time you're in Richmond Hill, or check out their online store, Facebook and Pinterest pages.

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Dolla Sapeta

How to Fix a Broken Country

Boomtown brings Design Indaba 2015 to PE.

Have you ever stopped to think that maybe we're partly responsible for letting the country slide into ruin? How many people in your immediate social circle didn't bother to cast their vote during the last election? How many armchair activists do you know whose sole purpose in life is to spew negativity on Facebook, instead of actually getting out there to help fix things?

Yes, I know. You pay your taxes, so why should you bother to get involved? See, just as the role of government changed, from that of a repressive regime into a free and open democracy, so did your role as a citizen. Our democracy is designed to be participatory. Every citizen of this beautiful country needs to take ownership of the problems that plague our society, instead of pointing the finger at someone. Continuing freedom, just like a good marriage, takes lots of work from all sides to be successful.

So the power to fix things lies largely in your hands, dear reader, and never has there been a greater time when South Africa has needed you.

Brought to you by Boomtown, the focus of this year's Design Indaba was centred around the concept of Design Activism which aims to use design thinking to create products, environments, solutions or services that enhance quality of life for the other 99%.

We called on Amy Shelver of Numb City; Andrew Mackenzie of Boomtown and Reino Erasmus of Ampersand Studio to give us their thoughts on how creativity can enable change.

"Can creativity change our world? I would answer with an emphatic 'yes'." said Andrew.

"With the many challenges we face in South Africa today, design activism has the ability to drive home awareness around key issues and get people talking, thinking and acting on solutions."

"I think design activism is also criticism for social commentary," said Amy, "as it is a mixture of elements of design to get an idea or point across, which is where art and design really meet. Because it's non-commercial, so you're not selling a

product, you're selling an ideology or call to action. I feel that's where design activism really becomes an important and powerful medium for expression and calling people to rally around an idea or ideal."

Design activism can take many forms, but the important end product is to get you to re-evaluate the status quo.

"Well, this very publication [The Soapbox] can be seen as a piece of design activism" says Reino, Creative Director of The Soapbox. "Our editorial team and those involved in every issue - actively promote the idea that standards should always be constantly evaluated. We aspire to be a publication that subtly educates the public on what is possible given a little extra care, instead of having to settle for a lifetime of 'just good enough'."

"I feel that many creatives misinterpret this concept by 'jumping on the bandwagon' - I strongly encourage you to engage in conversations about political or social issues but to be responsible about it. Do so without resorting to narrow-mindedness or uninformed and borrowed opinions. By all means; stand as tall and proud as you can, but be vigilant in your approach and be determined to motivate change on issues that mean the most to you."

"A fantastic example of good design activism is the Street Store (www.thestreetstore.org) campaign," said Andrew, "in which people are encouraged to donate old clothing to an open air street store where the homeless can pick and choose suitable clothing without prejudice or ridicule, a concept developed in South Africa that has now rolled out globally. I have always been of the opinion that creativity has the ability to answer business problems via paying clients, so why can't we apply our minds to solving societal problems that will benefit humanity? Sometimes bringing a smile to someone's face and improving their circumstance is worth far more than the hourly rate billed for business solutions, isn't it time we used are skills to make change?"

"A few years ago, Numb City commented on the controversial Secrecy Act. We chose the then closed Uptown theatre which had an old billing for a long past Robin Auld performance. Those letters were a fixed visual marker for anyone driving that route on a regular basis." Said Amy. "So one night we re-arranged the letters and numbers to read 'Jou ma se secrecy Feb 2012'. After it was discovered, all the letters were taken down. We did it to make commentary on a subject that at the time was highly topical. Design activism will always have an element of public art to it, because you're using public spaces and you want the public to see and engage with it."

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A BETTER WORLD THROUGH CREATIVITY



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For the Little Person in your Orbit

Ruth Nesbit launches a new series of children’s books

Embark on an epic adventure with three iconic characters (and you and your ‘little person’)! Sail the seven seas with Sarah, Gofree the Giraffe, and Jim the dog in a charming new series by author Ruth Nesbit.

An acclaimed artist, Ruth Nesbit has had a career which spans over 30 years in the language of communication via the visual image. A past alumni and lecturer of the NMMU University’s School of Art and Design, she has produced various works in media such as sculpture; ceramics; stained glass; collage; drawing; print making and illustration.

“I have a passion for art, and I would like my work to convey some of the vitality, colour and humour that is so much a part of life in South Africa.” explains Ruth.

The Paper Boat Story was inspired by her granddaughter who lives in England. The pantheon of memorable characters that feature in the Paper Boat Story was born as a result of the correspondence shared between these two generations.

“I was inspired by my granddaughter, who is lives far away. I sent her many drawings and illustrated poems which have since grown into the adventures of the Paper Boat Story.”

The adventures of three intrepid ‘sailors’ (Sarah, Jim the dog and Gofree, a very capable giraffe) is ongoing. Ruth gives attention to topical issues for adults such as parenting; global warming and other current events, while the beautiful collaged illustrations entertain and explore the world through the eyes of a child.

“Each and every child needs to know they are loved, special and unique. It is my wish that through the pages of the Paper Boat Story they will begin to learn pathways to resilience and to overcome their fears.”

Join Ruth Nesbit on an unforgettable journey where your little ones will learn to get up after falling down, and proceed on life’s journey.

For more information, please visit:
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The Paper Boat Story
by Ruth Nesbit

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New Sheriff in Town

Roccella's brings the ultimate in comfort food to PE.

I like Antony Hanson. He's the kind of tough guy I grew up around in restaurants when I was a kid. He's hard as nails, but with the soul of a poet when it comes to the food he loves. He's the Real McCoy, and what you see is what you get.

"The reason I chose Italian food is because of my travels. I backpacked around Europe, hitchhiking through Italy and eventually ended up in Sicily," explains Antony. "And that's where I got the name Roccella's from. It means 'the Little Rock'. So I stayed in one of the local villages, and the way they ate their meals there was so very different to the way we eat Italian food in this country. For instance, Italians will eat for 5 hours. Every meal is like some sort of festival, or major event. They eat, and eat. Little bits by little bits. Bread, meat, pasta with a little sauce. They enjoy good food, and the act of eating so much, that they enjoy it for as long as they can."

"Now us South Africans, we want all those 5 hours on one plate. We want to eat, and get full. We put our entire meal on one plate and finish the plate. So I fell in love with the culture; the people and the way they cook. And that's why I've always loved Italian food, from my travels."

Originally from Johannesburg, Anthony moved to Port Elizabeth in search of a better quality of life

for himself, and his family. And with that, Port Elizabeth just gained a fantastic new culinary talent.

Antony's Johannesburg restaurant attracted the support of many prominent South Africans, from sportsmen to radio personalities. His pizza is so good that it was voted the best by 94.7 (Highveld Stereo), on Jeremy Mansfield's breakfast show. "It's quite an honour in Jo'burg. Out of all the Pizza up there, mine was voted the best. I ended up befriending many of my regular customers. Jeremy, for instance, still pops in to visit me when he flies down to visit his Mom in Port Alfred."

The secret to Antony's success is an attention to fine detail, and to pass on the warmth he felt in that little Scicilian village.

"We make all our own pizza bases. The same goes for our pasta, except penne, spaghetti and fettuchini because to do it properly requires a kitchen larger than the one I currently operate from. My lasagne, panzarotti and ravioli are also all made by hand. My sauces are also handmade to order. Nothing is premade. So when you order it, that's when we make it."

The food at Roccella's is like nothing you'll ever find at a franchise. Deliciously satisfying, it is the ultimate in comfort food. Hot crusty pizza with fresh herbs, cheese and lashings of slow cooked

tomato, it's a balm to soothe the roughest of days. My personal favourite is the one with Chorizo and Pepperdews.

"Do you know the sheer satisfaction you get when someone comes up to you and says 'this is the best I've ever had!' and 'this is better than everyone else's and it's fresher than everyone else's.' When you get that feedback from customers, it gives me such a rush. That feeling, there's nothing better! And you're getting that feedback from thirty, forty customers a day! Man, you just want to continue bettering yourself."

"In my restaurant I want to build up a community, where the tables start getting to know each other. I'm finding that you need your regulars. You got to build on that, once your customers keep coming back they start telling their friends and it starts snowballing. PE people are loyal to 'their' restaurant, but once you get them they will stay with you."

It's not all about money. It's in your blood. I want to do something I enjoy. I believe that if you enjoy it, you will do it well. That's my philosophy. And for my, 'It' is the restaurant trade - this trade. Some people have it, some people don't. I've got it, it's in my blood.

Roccella's can be found in Verdun Road at the Kamma Crossing retail centre.

Roccella's

📍 2 Verdun Road, Kamma Park. PE

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