



Mbukwashe Zwide

Shops are closing around Africa and yet still they throw more money. Entrepreneur Mbukwashe Zwide is one of them.

"I took a decision of balancing social media, pop-up sales with brick-and-mortar. This was informed by the understanding of the market. The type of clothing one sells, being vintage, tends to be tricky selling it online, seeing a picture looking all pretty online as compared to seeing the garment and feeling the fabric," she says.

Vintage-meets-urban chic fashion is her game. Zwide, who holds a national diploma in information technology, ditched her permanent job to pursue her passion for clothes.

"It was then that the fashion bug bit and it was just too strong to ignore and I left the corporate world to pursue what was dear to my heart and soul; fashion," she says.

In 2014, she started Hombakazi

opened a shop.

Zwide turns over R1.3 million (\$98,000) annually across the counter, making 20%. Her profits online are 30% and pop-up sales [temporary store] are 50%.

She has 75,000 followers on Facebook and over 2,000 followers on Instagram.

"Social media still gives us the reach, marketing and online orders, while pop-up sales is part of our customer touch points and market development across the country. Retail has its own function [over social media and pop-up sales] of growing and sustaining my business," says Zwide.

Not everything has been a perfect fit.

"My biggest challenge is the conversion rate of walk-in customers. Since I have opened my store, I have observed that during certain periods of the month I have high volume of traffic in the store but a low percentage of converting the traffic into sales. This could be caused by not finding a specific

Stores Of The **FUTURE?**

Shops are closing across Africa; still they come like lemmings to a cliff. Entrepreneurs prepared to throw good money after bad.

BY MELITTA NGALONKULU

Vintage Cabin (HVC) from her mother's garage in Port Elizabeth, and with just R10,000 in stock. She advertised her clothes on social media and would travel to different provinces in South Africa, with a black plastic bag, to sell. As the demand grew, she

garment at that particular time, and also size tends to be an issue at times. ...I plan to introduce an incentive-driven program for my team to work on a 30% conversion rate of traffic during certain periods of the month," she says.

Zwide says it is up to newcomers, like her, to make sure that retail does not die.

"The industry reports predict continuous decline in revenue generation from store traffic holds, as we have seen with the 159-year-old retail giant [Stuttafords], and probably a consolidation of retail businesses... these open opportunities for emerging players like HVC to come up with unique offering to your counterparts. That way one can then convert these newly unattended customers from affluent areas and traditional in-store shopping to online and pop-up sales. Given my background in information technology, I'm considering the use of emerging technology, such as virtual reality and digital innovation, with the sentiment of improving store productivity and aggressively enhancing customer experience," she says.

Zwide is also concerned that not all likes and shares mean money.

"My social media posts directly generate 1,000 likes on clothing items we post, however, this is translated into 10% sales from likes; my ambition is to have a 100% conversion rate," she says. 