

TURNING PASSION INTO PROFIT

A love for skateboarding, a school project and some ingenuity has given rise to the birth of Spawn Skate Co.



When thinking about entrepreneurship, one tends to imagine young people having an epiphany about doing their own thing when it comes to earning a living, usually while they're busy with, or have just finished their tertiary studies.

This preconceived notion is, however, proven completely wrong when meeting best friends Samson Scheffel and Mally Lord-Rule, 18-year-old matric learners from Kommetjie. Despite their youth and apparent lack of experience, these two young men have all the required skills and tenacity to be prime examples of what our country is all about; a country full of opportunity for those who aren't afraid of taking chances and hard work.

Both avid skateboard enthusiasts, and very conscious of the lack of understanding of, and support for this 'sport' in South Africa, they've decided to make their

hobby and passion a profitable business. And, they plan to use their business as a platform to educate the broader public about the intricacies and value of the sport. Both agree that skateboarding is, despite the apparent lack of set safety regulations, not only very safe, but, because it requires intense focus and attention, also serves as a venting mechanism to get rid of the stress to which our youth are subjected.

Though skateboarding is not currently fully recognised as an official sport in South Africa (trick boarding is but longboarding is not), it has a huge following throughout our country – we even have locals competing professionally in the international arena. However, because of a lack of understanding of the sport, skateboarders are generally treated as trespassers wherever they're trying to practise their hobby/sport.

When Mally, a learner at Waldorf School, had to start work on his final year project,



it was a no-brainer to use and incorporate the business idea these two friends had been talking about for some time. And so, Spawn Skate Co – a company manufacturing skateboards designed and handmade by these two enthusiasts with years of skateboarding experience – was born. A little over 18 months ago, these two teenage boys started doing research about building their own skateboards. Their aim was to produce customised skateboards and manufacture them locally in the most cost-effective manner.

Since the manufacturing of skateboards requires a very specific type of wood (veneer wood), which is not so readily available in South Africa, they had to call upon their international friends and connections in the skateboarding fraternity to source the best suitable wood. They ended up importing wood from Germany and Brazil.

Prototype developed

For Mally's school project, they began building their own skateboard press from scratch. An engineering friend of the family helped them with the design of this industrial machine. Both being creative and enjoying working with their hands, they built two skateboard presses using materials they've collected from

scrapyards or found in Samson's garden and/or Mally's father's workshop. The purchase of the necessary parts to build the presses was financed with their pocket money and wages earned doing casual work over weekends and school holidays in their respective parents' businesses.

When the presses were ready, they produced the first prototype of their own custom-designed skateboard. This board is made up of 21 layers of veneer wood from three different types of wood. After trial and error, they cut the production time down to two days per board and with their two skateboard presses they can effectively manufacture four skateboards at a time.

Skateboarding can be a pricey hobby – it needs certain safety accessories such as helmets, gloves, knee and elbow pads, shoes, and even clothing. Added to this is that one gets different types of skateboards for the various styles of skateboarding – some skaters own more than one skateboard. In the current market, a quality second-hand skateboard can cost anything between R300–R800, and a brand-new one R1 000–R3 000. That is why Spawn Skate Co aims to produce personalised skateboards [and all the accessories at a later stage] at the lowest possible cost. Their prototype has cost them just over R1 500, hence they're in the process of exploring alternative locally-sourced materials, without compromising the quality of their skateboards, before they start full-on production.

Having received their official first order for a customised skateboard from an overseas friend, they have had to put production on hold as Samson is currently busy with his final exams.

Expansion on the cards

True to the spirit of entrepreneurs, these two young men have

big dreams of where they want to take Spawn Skate Co. Apart from manufacturing skateboards and the accompanying apparel, they would also like to expand their company to organise skateboarding races in South Africa as currently there aren't any. The dream is to bring international skateboarders to our country. They also feel very strongly about developing the skateboarding culture and advocating for it to be recognised as an official sport in South Africa.

Not only do they intend to change the landscape of the local skateboarding arena, but they're also planning on taking their company global.

When Samson moves to Malta next year, they intend to run Spawn Skate Co as an international company with Mally looking after the local manufacturing plant, while Samson identifies and builds a European market for the company. They believe that trading on both continents will not only mean a bigger market, but will also help cut their production cost as they'll be able to export and import between two different branches instead of two different businesses. Once again, this shows that these two budding businessmen have done their homework.

At this stage, however, while having to attend to their final exams, their biggest challenge is the administration side of running a business: "Maintaining the balance between creativeness and the essentials of business."

Both young men believe that for their business to succeed, it is essential to make use of all available resources and "not be afraid to ask people if you don't know".

Samson adds that "while still at school, choose the correct subjects. Think of everything you do as potential tools to equip you for your future – whether you're planning a business or not."

