

Opportunity for women to make their mark in fuel industry

South Africa's industry is in dire need of transformation, with figures from the Department of Energy showing the the average effective narrow-based black shareholding is 18.91%. Of this percentage, representation for black women stands at only 6.72%.

Consequently, there is plenty of scope for entrepreneurial women to make their mark, particularly in the areas of management control, employment equity, crude oil procurement and skills development. However, the challenge is that barriers to entry are high because fuel is an expensive commodity, whether you are manufacturing, marketing, or selling i

In spite of fuel being a growth sector in South Africa, it is also an extremely complex, highly regulated and competitive industry.

Ethel Nyembe, head of small enterprise at Standard Bank, believes that the way to de-risk the business challenges of entering the sector, particularly for women, is via franchising.

Established franchise

"Banks are far more willing to fund a new business if it is part of an established franchise operation because franchisors go to considerable lengths to ensure that their new recruits have all the training and business tools needed to succeed. They are also very careful about the selection of locations for retail outlets, such as petrol stations.

"For many women, the idea of running a fuel business seems more challenging than a food, clothing, or supermarket outlet. Women who have succeeded in fuel franchising understand that whatever you are selling, your success comes down to your ability to manage people and work in a team environment," Nyembe says.



Sebe Zondi

Sebe Zondi was a teacher before joining her husband in running two petrol stations, each a different brand, in Pietermaritzburg.

She says that working with different brands does make things a little more difficult, because each brand has its own way of working and its own metrics for success. However, when the time came for her and her husband to add another business to their first franchise, the only opportunity available was that of a competitor. Their desire for growth outweighed the complexity of juggling two different approaches to selling petrol.

Cash for a commodity



Nombini Bundwini

Nombini Bundwini came to fuel franchising having already run a fast food franchise for 20 years and a clothing franchise eight. Describing herself as a go-getter who did her first business deal at the age of eight when she and her mother were struggling to make ends meet, Bundwini is not fazed by the fact that she is one of very few women in fuel franchising.

"If there is an interesting way to exchange cash for a commodity, I will make it happen, regardless of my gender - or the industry sector. I can do any job at my petrol stations and I can challenge any of my mentors within the franchise with ideas on how to improve the way the franchises are run. I am 60 now and I fully expect to be running businesses for the next 20 years. Success is all about what is important to you."

Monica Kekana, who took over her husband's two fuel franchises in Atteridgeville and Mamelodi in Pretoria seventeen years ago when he was killed in an armed robbery, agrees that having a franchise takes a lot of the guess-work out of starting a business.

"That does not mean, though, that when you are established and you have a good understanding of what works in your own particular business and what does not, that you should not discuss your ideas with your franchisor. Every organisation, even a large, established franchisor, is always looking for ways to do things more efficiently and cost effectively."

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