

Leaping into the future of design with Springleap



By Leigh Andrews

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Springleap Founder/CEO Eran Eyal's had a very good year, with a chance to swing around the missed opportunities of being just a 'design contest company'. Here, he talks about lessons from 'Woz' (that's Steve Wozniak to you) and an industry-changing research tool that's set to launch soon...

When Springleap first started, with its focus on [crowdsourced t-shirt design competitions](#), it was very different to the company you see today. Eyal bought the business from the old shareholders a handful of years ago and completely re-invented the business overnight. Now, the business has moved on from its initial [design crowdsource focus](#) to an all-encompassing, business-bettering e-commerce platform.

Intrigued, I asked Eyal a few questions...

■ *How has the business changed since you took the reins?*



Eran Eyal

Eyal: We see my buying of the business back in 2012 as ground zero - where the real business started. We realised there was great disconnect between the great creatives of the world and how agencies and brands could access them. Initially we were focused on a competition model, where we believed we could allow brand fans to express their support for creative content, share it and both the creatives and fans get rewarded. It was an attempt at bridging the gap between gifted content creators, design talent, brands and the brand fans.

We learned a lot about the market from the old business, especially that we didn't want to be defocused and we were already ahead of the ecommerce curve. Ultimately, how it was wasn't going to change the world. There famous saying 'Make stuff people will use' is our core mentality, in terms of how we can change the way brands and agencies access design thinking and supreme execution, without the spec work/pay model.

Newly appointed MD Trevor Wolfe and I were talking about the transition recently. He said it well: "It kinda happened organically at first that we became a tool for major SA brands and agencies like Lexus, Vodacom, Ogilvy to source fresh graphic design 'from the crowd'." At that point we decided to pivot and invested heavily in a technology platform to keep up with demand. We knew that building our community would pay dividends no matter what direction Springleap's future took, and are currently sitting on over 30,000 creatives - and that's growing by a rate of knots every day - which we heavily vetted, and are creatives with agency backgrounds.

■ *And there's an industry-transforming new research product in the works too, can you tell us more about that?*





By Whyball

Eyal: Well, my team would be upset if I spilled too much, but in broad terms: We've discovered a very exciting way to connect our community of creatives to brands and agencies before and after the actual creative is developed.

Imagine a copywriter having access to 10 on-demand agency-level copywriters and creative directors to brainstorm campaign ideas, or a creative director who had an army of creatives across Africa providing them with emerging trends and local insights, or a brand manager that could bring objective third party creative experts with relevant brand and industry experience to review a campaign with their agency. Imagine feedback from a panel of creative experts that is actionable and constructive that could get to the 'so what' or 'why' that traditional consumer research can't achieve.

We've hired some research rockstars from Nielsen, Millward Brown, and TNS to lead the initiative and have launched over a dozen pilot projects with some progressive SA brands and agencies. Ultimately, everyone in the industry's constantly talking about scale-ably tapping into design thinking in a structured way. Here's the takeaway: We've productised it, and the clients love it.

Before I get into too much trouble, I'd suggest agencies and brands give us a shout if they want a sneak peek. Otherwise keep an attentive eye on [Bizcommunity](#) for our more official announcement!

■ What's the basic work flow or creative process at Springleap?

Eyal: Whether we are working with a client to produce fresh graphics and package design or feedback on a campaign, it is very streamlined:



Designer 3

The client supplies us with a brief, we use our technology platform to identify the creatives with the most relevant skills in the right geography for the projects that are available, then manage the entire project, from revisions to payment processing.

We have very deep relationships with our creatives and have profiles that help us match the right brand projects to the right creative minds and talent. It's a very symbiotic ecosystem to manage both sides but we've invested in a community management team to always keep both groups happy.

■ **List the exciting new developments in the team that have enhanced your overall skillset this year, locally and abroad.**

Eyal: We brought on Wolfe to run Springleap Africa, with an eye on expanding the team in New York. Within a short time period, he was busy revamping our business model, how we go to market, and what products are most sustainable as a business. He brings a very powerful balance of corporate expertise, having headed up product innovation groups at TNS, Kantar, Gerson Lehman Group and WPP, as well as agile and lean start-up mentality at a Techstars-winning company Movieline, where he took them from a few sales a month to hundreds of thousands of dollars. He's been managing and building our staff through empowerment and fostering a culture of innovation, risk-taking, and an unrelenting attention to client service. Our offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town are buzzing with extremely qualified, hardworking and energetic Springleapers, which will make it very easy for us to grow our company quickly.



Miss Maple by Nightshadeberry

■ **Tell us about 2014 at Springleap - all the successes and lessons learned.**

Eyal: Well, we were fortunate enough to come into the new year having won the United Nations World Summit Award for Innovation as well as receiving a round of funding.

Both of these events allowed us to recruit some strong team members in Cape Town and Johannesburg. One of the biggest lessons learned was that by being a graphic design contest company, we were missing a great opportunity to become

essential partners with our clients. Don't get me wrong, we had amazing success with campaigns with brands like Two Oceans, Volkswagen, and Samsung, but we could feel a lot of clients wanting stronger relationships with us. That realisation really lead us to a period of product innovation where we tried and tested several new models of crowdsourcing before coming across a few winning concepts, and the soon-to-be-announced research division.

Ultimately, we realised that great business models are about scalable, predictable revenue models - they are a reflection of the intrinsic value we deliver on a constant basis to our clients and community. We want to be a utility, not a "nice to have". What's a utility? Think about your electricity and water- those are utilities. You don't think about them when you use them, but they are there every day, making your life work.



Extra Cold Live by FixelPbet

Earlier this year I got to hang out with Steve Wozniak for a few hours for some one-on-one time he graciously afforded me out his hectic schedule. Woz said something that really helped me keep my mind on track. He said: "Eran, do you know how I realise that technology is really working well? It's when it frees my mind from thinking about the things it helps me do. I don't think that the tech is there helping me... it just is, and my mind has more capacity to focus on the things really matter."

Even the move away from spec work is good for both parties. We work on a model where everyone gets paid now in the bulk of our work. I think we've found an ingenious solution that allows crowdsourcing, quality, variety and no spec work to exist in symbiosis. It's definitely different from what's out there and the quality of the work is exceptional.

■ **What's next for Springleap?**

Eyal: We will be officially launching our research division very soon, and spending a good amount of time early next year bringing the solutions to market. International expansion is already happening with clients signed up in US, Australia and Asia, but we will also be investing significantly next year. The two main regions will be North America via New York and wider Africa/Middle East. We have some more funding rounds currently being raised that will help us accelerate very quickly while keeping our product innovation efforts running at full speed. I've recently launched an ambitious internal personal project to grow our creative community to over 150,000 vetted creative agency professionals before the end of this year.



Spring rain

What trends do you see as the biggest to come in 2015?

Eyal: Commoditising and accessing design thinking in a tangible and scalable way. Going beyond data and analytics to find efficiencies in scale and understanding. Big data is an awesome space, especially with The Internet of Things, but making sense of that data, the inferences and how we creatively view that data to drive consumer uptake is really the challenge.

Creativity lets us unleash the power of big data. Without access to a view on creative solutions from a sophisticated agency-experience perspective that can arise from that data, mobilizing that data towards the ends of the brands and consumers results in classic fails. The time of the creative is on the rise... nay, it's here.

Indeed it is. Keep up to date on the latest from Springleap by [following them on Twitter](#) and [click here](#) to find out more about Trevor Wolfe.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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