

Van Schaik Bookstore expands into Southern Africa

The expansion of Van Schaik Bookstore into neighbouring countries dates back to 2006 when it opened its first store in Windhoek at the University of Namibia. The second Namibian store was opened in 2012 at the Oshakati Campus. More recently, the bookstore opened a branch in Gaborone, Botswana at Fairgrounds Mall, followed by four shops in Swaziland - three at the local university and one at the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, in July and October, respectively. This affords Van Schaik the opportunity to service students from the respective universities, tertiary learning institutions and schools in surrounding areas, as well as those studying through correspondence.

 By [Jessica Taylor](#) 3 May 2016



Here, Stephan Erasmus, MD of Van Schaik Bookstore, shares his vision for education in Africa and how he believes providing access to textbooks in other disenfranchised markets is a step in the right direction...

 Why did you expand into Southern Africa as opposed to further afield? Comment on your expansion strategy.

Van Schaik decided to expand due to the limited bookshop opportunities remaining in the South African higher education market. Van Schaik services most of the 26 higher education tertiary institutions in South Africa and had to look outside South African borders for expansion.

It is easier, logistically, to expand to the countries around South Africa, compared to African countries further north.

Things we look at before deciding on any possible location for a bookshop are:

- Market size;
- Ease of doing business;
- Availability of funding;
- Adoption of textbooks; and
- Language of instruction.

■ In a press release you mentioned that it's "Van Schaik's mission to supply academic resources to all students Africa via retail stores and digital channels".

Van Schaik plays a role by opening a bookshop on, or close to, the campuses of academic institutions. These bookshops service the needs of students by supplying academic prescribed textbooks as well as supplementary academic materials like stationery, computers, lab coats, calculators, tablets, stethoscopes, dissection kits, etc.

Van Schaik bookstores, together with publisher's representatives, introduces the latest books from leading international authors to academics at institutions. Van Schaik assist the bursary departments at institutions by opening accounts per student, applying credit limits, and reporting back to the institution on a per-student basis.

• Comment on the infrastructure required to achieve this.

Van Schaik has a central head office infrastructure supporting stores in various functions. We also use an in-house developed IT system that supports the unique requirements of the academic market.

• Comment on the opportunities and challenges you've experienced thus far.

The expression 'Africa is not for sissies' is also true in business. Opportunities are few and any business must be careful to pick viable ones. Challenges include transport of stock, setting up companies, internet connectivity, availability of bursary funding, exchange rates, etc.

■ What is your vision for education in Africa, and how do you believe providing access to textbooks in other disenfranchised markets is a step in the right direction?

I believe that education opens up a new world for people. This world is filled with opportunity, fulfilment, satisfaction, the ability to earn a living and provide for your family.

The role of textbooks in achieving a proper standard of education is indispensable.

Textbook publishers don't regurgitate unedited manuscripts. They undertake careful research into the market needs of students, commission the right academics and pedagogical experts to write the required works, introduce the valuable aspects of textbooks highlighted below, ensure the books meet the standards of peer reviewers prior to publication, and the requirements of local students and lecturers, and then distribute them via booksellers to ensure that students have access them.

Textbooks support lecturers in delivering higher education. Lecturers fulfil multiple roles including teaching. Textbooks help them teach themselves where necessary, and to prepare content and application for lectures and tutorials. They have more time for other value-added activities, such as research. Textbook publishers create additional materials, such as exercises tutorials, case studies, questions and answers, and test banks.

Textbooks create capacity for academics. Academics who don't write textbooks and have to teach students can rely on textbooks for their lecture preparation. They therefore have more time and energy for original knowledge creation and research in their disciplines or consulting work.

By utilising textbooks, written by international experts in their specific fields, an institution ensures teaching of an international standard. Publishers ensure that the latest technologies are incorporated in new, updated editions of textbook. By adopting the latest editions of textbooks, academics ensure that students are exposed to the latest international technological developments.

■ This year saw the launch of Van Schaik's rewards card programme into Africa. What does this entail

The card allows members to earn points on purchases that can be redeemed against future purchases. It also allows Van Schaik to offer unique deals and benefits to members of the rewards programme.

• Why do you think such programmes have become fundamental to customer retention?

A relationship with your customer is fundamental to retaining a customer. The rewards programme is just the tool we use to build this relationship.

▣ You sell academic textbooks in both electronic and print format. Have you noticed an increase in electronic purchases over the last few years?

Yes, we have seen a slight increase in sales of e-books, but it has not been adopted by a large portion of the market. At the moment e-books is less than 1% of our book sales.

• Which medium is generally preferred, and why do you think so?

Currently, print is preferred. I think the main reason is that students are used to studying on print medium in school and not change their behaviour at university. Once more learners become used to e-books at school level, we will probably see an increase in student use.

▣ Van Schaik has been awarded the Sefika Academic Bookseller of the Year Award the last five consecutive years. Comment on this achievement.

This is a great achievement for everyone working for Van Schaik as it recognises our efforts to bring books to the market at the quality of our service.

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