

Rent toys for your kids from Smart Toy Club

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Imagine that you needn't have to buy new toys for your kids as they grow up. Imagine the idea of keeping your house less cluttered by the number of toys that possibly lay around. Imagine no more because this is what the Smart Toy Club has made possible

We chat to Lyneve Pieterse and Sarah Brown, co-founders of Smart Toy Club, who came up with the idea of toy rental for kids...

▄ *Can you tell us a bit about Smart Toy Club?*

We offer a monthly toy rental service for children aged 6 months to 5 years. Basically you get a bag of age-appropriate toys and then after a month, you exchange the bag for another.

We operate throughout South Africa and our clients are moms (and some dads) with young babies. Parents know that their babies learn through play so it just makes sense to be able to expose them to a huge variety of toys to let them do just that.



Lyneve Pieterse and Sarah Brown, co-founders of Smart Toy Club

On the flip side, parents don't want to be cluttering up their homes with toys that their babies are guaranteed to outgrow. Our company is based on the simplicity of play, learn, return.

▄ *When, how and why did you get started?*

About eight years ago, the two of us were single mothers to very small children (including a set of twins). We grew up on Fisher-Price toys so we're looking for the equivalent for our own kids.

We soon realised that the toys were ridiculously expensive, especially if you wanted the quality brands. We also found that after spending a small fortune on an item, it was quickly forgotten about, making us feel like we wasted our money. We were going to the library to loan books, we thought there must be a similar solution for toys so we began researching. With no viable company available, we decided to try to do it ourselves.

We started off very small, with little know-how of running a business. Our belief in toy rentals as a concept kept us going - we knew this made sense on so many levels.

Getting regular feedback from our clients solidified this, it's just amazing to see these pics and vids of our little Smart Toy Club members as they receive their new bag each month. We firmly believe that buying new toys is nonsensical and toy rental is the way to go.

🔴 ***What is the core function of Smart Toy Club?***

Keeping our parents and babes happy with a great selection of toys each month!

🔴 ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

Finding the right distributor, finding someone who understands your business model. Your distributor represents you, they are client-facing. We don't subscribe to the typical distribution model (as we exchange at the point of engagement), we needed to find distributors who understood this.

🔴 ***What advice would you give to other aspiring entrepreneurs?***

As corny as it sounds, it's really quite simple. Just start!

Do your research, join groups, go to seminars, draw, design, dream ... and don't stop.

We would also highly recommend joining the Lions Den run by Leon Lategan. It's a phenomenal platform, weekly webinar training sessions, and gives you access to a community of other entrepreneurs.

Coming from these sessions, we've adopted this concept of Kaizen - basically it's regular, consistent, small improvements. You've got to put in the work.



Lyneve Fletse with her twin boys

Personally, finding the right partner is also key. Many successful businesses have two founders - two individuals that have different skill sets that they bring to the table. It shares the load and the responsibility and also helps to keep each other motivated. When you feel despondent, a good partner lifts you up.

■ ***What has been your proudest achievement thus far?***

Hands down, being placed fourth in the Lion's Den South Africa - Lady Lions 100k competition. There were 5,000 women-owned SMEs that entered, so that was a phenomenal achievement for us and really helped us identify where we needed to put in more effort.

■ ***What does the future of entrepreneurship look like to you?***

With all the advances in technology, people are going to be drawn to products and services that offer a personal touch. That's where SMEs come in and fill the gap and that's why they will continue to grow.

■ ***What would you like to see changed in the South African startup landscape?***

Support, support, support!

■ ***What do you believe are the traits an entrepreneur needs in order to succeed?***

Passion, humility, dedication and faith.

■ ***Tell us about your biggest struggles as an entrepreneur, as well as some major highlights.***

The biggest challenge has always been time management. We both used to have full-time corporate jobs, so finding the time to work on our company was always a challenge. There is always so much to do so with the limited time you have, so focus your energy on the activities that will grow the company at the rate that you want it to.

A huge highlight for us is job creation and empowerment. With unemployment rates what they are in our country, it's the small businesses that are going to make the biggest dents in this.

Our first hire was a domestic worker who had no experience outside of cleaning. She now manages the inventory, does stock takes and quality control. She is learning about business and it's phenomenal that our company provides this opportunity for her.

With the expansion plans we have, we will be looking at new hires in 2020 which is very exciting.

Other highlights include being interviewed by [BBC Africa](#) and being acknowledged by Buzz South Africa as being one of the [Top 10 Innovative Startups in South Africa](#).



Sarah Brown with her son

▣ ***Why would you encourage someone to become an entrepreneur?***

Being an entrepreneur lets you focus on what drives you, what you are good at and you grow and learn so much whilst doing what you love. It also gives you control over your time. You tend to work so much harder when you are working for yourself but it's still your time. And if it all works out, you are the one who gets to experience the benefits of this.

▣ ***Where would you like to see Smart Toy Club in the next five years?***

We have had a lot of interest in expanding our company outside of South Africa so we would love to do that. There are a few countries we have in mind, but first, we need to solidify the South African market. Globally, there is a huge drive towards more sustainable living and experiences and Smart Toy Club ties into this.

ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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