

# A TRUSTED ADVISOR

Nadia and Zahra Rawjee of Uzenzele Holdings know what businesses need, and they understand the struggles that founders go through, which is why the pair often understand their clients' needs before the first meeting has even taken place. **BY GG VAN ROOYEN**

**S**ISTERS NADIA AND ZAHRA RAWJEE grew up in a family business, so they understand the challenges that the average SME faces. They also realise that the average entrepreneur is unaware of the opportunities available to him or her when it comes to government and developmental funding.

"We realised what an impact government and developmental funding could have had on the family business, but like so many SMEs, it never accessed the funds available," says Zahra Rawjee.

The fact of the matter is, many business owners are unaware of the funds that are available through government. Others, meanwhile, do not think that they would qualify, or they simply think that delving into this ocean of bureaucracy would simply not be worth the effort. This is a mistake. It can absolutely be worth the effort.

"Companies looking to grow can access millions through

government," says Nadia Rawjee. "We've seen clients receiving tens of millions in funding."

That said, there is some truth in the view that accessing these funds is sometimes difficult. The application process can be complex, and the process as a whole can be a long one. However, if you know what you're doing, you can get funded.

Because the Rawjees understood the challenges that businesses faced, and they possessed the arcane (and often shifting) information needed to access these funds, they decided to launch a consultancy that would assist clients in the process. Uzenzele Holdings has now been around for more than five years and has helped many clients secure funding. As you might expect, theirs is a business driven by relationships. Here's their advice for building a successful service-driven operation.

## 1 KNOW THY CUSTOMER

As mentioned, Nadia and Zahra understand the wants

## VITAL STATS

### PLAYERS:

Nadia and Zahra Rawjee

### COMPANY:

Uzenzele Holdings

**ESTABLISHED:** 2012

**VISIT:** [www.uzenzele.com](http://www.uzenzele.com)

**ABOUT:** Uzenzele

Holdings is a consultancy that focuses on business development and accessing governmental funding for business expansion projects. The company uses its expertise to help clients navigate the complex process of applying for government and developmental funding, helping to unlock funds and opportunities that many entrepreneurs aren't aware of.

and needs of their clients, even when the clients themselves don't. "We find that many clients underestimate the amount of capital they'll need to make their growth and expansion plans a reality. They go into the process looking to raise less money than they'll actually need, which can result in disastrous cash flow problems down the line. Because we know this, we can advise them accordingly. If you don't understand your clients' businesses, it's tough to give them the right advice.

**KEY LESSON:** True success comes from becoming a trusted advisor to your clients. This can only happen if you have real empathy for your clients, and if you understand their businesses intimately. Without these two characteristics, any relationship will be purely transactional.

## 2 FOLLOW THE MARKET

Following your passion is admirable, but it doesn't mean that you should ignore the realities of the market in the process. To their credit,

PHOTO: MIKE TURNER

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Nadia and Zahra initially wanted to focus on small/micro businesses because they believed that this was the area where they could make the biggest impact. However, they quickly learnt that these businesses were so cash strapped and focused on survival, that they weren't looking at growth, and they didn't have the money needed to invest in advisory services. As consultants themselves, they decided to invest in advisors who could help them reposition the company. "We brought in marketers who helped us reposition Uzenzele Holdings and make it visible to the companies who were actually looking for our services."

**KEY LESSON:** Don't make any assumptions about the market. Your target audience might not be where you think it is. In fact, your ideal audience might be very different from the one you have in your head. It's worth spending time and money to find out exactly who your ideal audience is, and where they can be reached.

### 3 EDUCATE YOUR AUDIENCE

Because so many of Uzenzele Holdings' clients are unaware of the funding options available, knowledge transfer is an important activity for the consultancy. "You have to be willing to give out information freely," says Zahra. "For this reason, we have a blog on our website, we do talks at conferences, and we contribute to business publications."

"At the moment, for example, we are focusing on the Black Industrialist Programme through the DTI, and funding available for agro processing. There

are great opportunities open to those looking for funding, but people don't know about it," says Nadia.

**KEY LESSON:** Signing clients is nearly impossible when they don't understand what you're offering. For this reason, you need to see education as part of the selling process. The payoff might only come way down the line, but that's not an excuse to ignore the process.

### 4 NETWORK

Speaking at conferences and writing articles for publications not only educates potential clients, it also builds the Uzenzele Holdings brand and ups the profile of the Rawjee sisters. "Networking is important," says Nadia. "You have to be out there – you need to get to know people, and they need to get to know you. It takes time and work, but you have to do it. Networking is important in any business."

"You shouldn't underestimate the value of LinkedIn when it comes to networking. It's a great place to connect, and to post content. When it comes to the B2B space, LinkedIn is definitely one of the best platforms," says Zahra.

**KEY LESSON:** You have to build your brand and get to know people. Most young companies land their first clients because of connections and referrals. To succeed, you have to establish yourself as a presence in your industry. You can do this by joining organisations, attending conferences and going out of your way to connect with others. **EM**