

# To succeed, learn from your failures



FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: Brendan van Staaden started Inter-Active Technologies from a single room in a friend's house. His call-centre business has grown to three offices and employs 500 people, making R120-million a year

## Van Staaden failed twice on his way to prosperity

STEPHEN TIMM

**F**AILURE is one of the best friends an entrepreneur can have, says Brendan van Staaden, who grew his call-centre business from R400 000 to R120-million a year in just six years.

When he started Inter-Active Technologies in 2004, it was from a single room in a friend's house while his wife worked from home. Now he has three offices and employs 500

people. Today, his clients include MTN, Multichoice and Vodacom.

But Van Staaden says that he hasn't always been this lucky.

He succeeded after failing twice in business, and there were many times when he woke up in tears.

"Failure is the biggest friend of the entrepreneur—the more you fail, the more you have the ability to recognise what is a success," says Van Staaden, adding that he learned a lot from failing.

An experienced sales manager in the telecommunications sector, Van Staaden says he made the mistake of drifting away from his core service, PABX systems, and into software development, something he knew little about.

His attempt to arrange a management buyout of his former employer, Phillips Business Communications, also didn't work out, when a partner pulled out and a rival telecommunications company beat

them to the deal.

But rather than give up, he simply shelved his idea and returned to his corporate job, selling call-centre services and equipment.

"The thing about being an entrepreneur is that you don't always make the right decisions first," he says, adding that not all of his creations turned out to be good.

He says he always enjoyed doing things for himself, which was a key factor in why he started his own

business. "The beauty is if I want to do something, I can do it. I don't have to go to someone else for approval."

But he admits that he isn't the best manager.

"The easy thing for me is to motivate. The hard thing is to manage. So I employ good managers."

He says it isn't easy to be both a manager and a leader.

He funded the business himself with R80 000 and grew it.

He says the most important thing is

to keep the customers you have and know how to pace yourself so that you don't overspend on unnecessary office and business expenses when starting out.

He reads books by entrepreneurs Richard Branson and Donald Trump, as well as the *For Dummies* series and the Harvard Business School journals, to inspire him, but admits that reading alone won't teach you

how to create your own original take on business.