

The health bar that said "Baaa humbug" to a pandemic and went on to shine

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*Outdoor media owner Tractor Outdoor's **#20in21 SME Initiative** was born out of a desire to support South Africa's small and medium businesses (SMEs) that were dealt a blow by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, Tractor Outdoor celebrates its 20th birthday, and thus aims to give 20 qualifying SMEs a marketing boost via its nationwide outdoor media network, with a total media value of R8m, helping these businesses increase top of mind awareness.*

This is the story of Baaa Health, one of the beneficiaries of Tractor's #20in21 SME Initiative.

Baaa Health, a health bar that was founded in 2017 by CEO Bontle Tshole out of a desire to offer consumers healthy and convenient meal options, was on a very promising trajectory.

Her business had caught the eye of the SAB Foundation's Tholoana Programme in 2018, and was selected from more than 2,000 applications nationwide to participate in the programme, which aimed to develop entrepreneurial capabilities. Tshole was also the winner of the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller and the Ekurhuleni Youth Summit in 2019, and her business had bedded down big name clients such as Nestlé and the Gauteng Department of Health.

That is, until 2020 rolled around and the pandemic hit South African shores.

Says Tshole: "Baaa was in the process of launching our first benchmark store, and Covid-19 completely derailed these plans. We experienced a major dip in business during that time."

However, Tshole says that the easing of restrictions led to a gradual return in business. "We also saw a sharp spike in sales of our Baaa Vitality Shots, immunity boosters – which are made from a blend of ginger, lemon, cayenne and other ingredients – and these potent little powerhouses played a significant role in our recovery."

Despite the initial blow to her business, lockdown had a silver lining in that it gave Tshole an opportunity to realise her true resilience. "We found other avenues to pursue, such as e-commerce. What worked for us before lockdown, didn't work for us during lockdown and, as such, we pivoted. This pivot is, ultimately, what allowed us to gain traction."

This agility paid off, and Tshole was recently recognised as one of *Forbes Africa*'s "30 under 30" young innovators and risk takers – especially poignant in the era of a pandemic. Today, she remains focused on the future: "We're in the process of working on a new model that will allow the business to thrive beyond our initial plans, and we are also gaining great momentum in our retail offering, which we launched during lockdown."

Tshole aims to make the brand a household name through marketing, and she believes that the advertising package she receives through Tractor Outdoor's SME Initiative will play a critical role in this. "The exposure it gives us will assist us in growing our market share by strategically placing our brand in areas where our potential clients are likely to be."



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Remi du Preez, commercial director at Tractor Outdoor, explains that there were a number of criteria the outdoor media owner took into consideration when selecting the 20 deserving business that would receive the media package: "We were looking for innovative businesses that demonstrated the potential and desire to scale, as we believe that OOH media has the necessary presence to accelerate this trajectory."

"With unemployment skyrocketing as a result of the pandemic, we wanted to support businesses that were primed for the rapid growth this opportunity would bring, helping create jobs for more South Africans."

"We were blown away by both the innovation and resilience Bontle and her business Baaa Health demonstrated, and we are excited to partner with them on this journey. Baaa is definitely one to watch, and we are excited to see it grow from strength to strength!"

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