



CLEO JOHNSON, 29, SOUTH AFRICA

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, NUECLEO

INDUSTRY: HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

While many businesses were hit hard during Covid-19, Cleo Johnson's company had the reverse effect. Here's how.

When she resigned from the Radisson Hotel Group in 2017, she had no idea what she was going to do.

Her initial plan was an 'eat, pray, love' experience in India, blogging about it.

She registered a company to monetize her blog and in the three weeks that she was preparing to leave for India, she met her first client at Starbucks in Rosebank, Johannesburg, who needed someone to assist with his social media.

So, she decided to stay.

Using her savings, she developed her corporate identity, and shortly after, was approached by the developer for Signature Lux hotels to get their brand off the ground and she received her first real retainer payment in April 2017.

As a result, Nuecleo was born, as a hospitality marketing consultancy firm that operates solely on a digital platform with every 10% made injected into community projects.

"I initially thought that my goal should be to have a massive social media agency with floors of employees and as I started navigating this journey, I realized where my passions lie. I am grateful that I no longer have the dream of having a high-rise building, but I have found my niche which utilizes my years of expertise in the industry to not only better it but deliver out-of-the-box concepts not found in traditional establishments," she tells FORBES AFRICA.

Currently, Nuecleo is working with international clients in the US, UK, Dubai and Togo.

Like any other business, the pandemic hit Nuecleo indirectly, as many of her clients were in the hospitality business, which The World Travel & Tourism Council predicts would cut 50 million jobs worldwide in travel and tourism.

This left the Cape Town-born Johnson feeling like a sitting duck.

"The time away from my normal busy schedule gave me time to strategize and come up with innovative ways to help my business and the industry as a whole and the idea to build certain platforms and software for the industry was born," she says.

She was able to secure two clients the same year; one a hotel and the other a restaurant, which is no easy feat for a small business run by a woman.

"I'm a lone consultant so [the challenges I face are] trying to persuade my clients that I am capable of doing the job and also being the youngest and only female in the boardroom is extremely difficult because I am very much overlooked most of the time but I am a little fighter so I make my way," she says breathlessly.

From the lessons learned during the pandemic, she is currently working on hospitality-related software and platforms for the continent suited to her infrastructure, that are "cost-effective and will foster a financially sustainable industry and mitigate losses as we experienced with Covid-19".

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