

2018: The Plan

We live in a world where a small group of people can build something immensely valuable with limited resources (Whatsapp had ~50 employees when it was valued at \$19 bn) –this is an exciting time to be alive. I cannot promise that we will also build an immensely valuable product, but I can promise you that in trying to, we will build a wealth of knowledge and friendships along the way.

The purpose of this document is to articulate the thoughts I have about our company's past and the plan for the year ahead. I have decided to add a few additional reflections in an effort to address some of the questions posed by the team and to improve transparency, these items are shown in italics.

A REVIEW OF 2017

In 2017 we made a massive leap in our tech capabilities where we built ~50% of our solutions from software we developed ourselves. This is in contrast to 2016 where ~90% of our solutions were built using software developed by others.

This shift from imitation to innovation was important as (1) we were able to deliver on our approach set in late 2016 and (2) the path of moving from imitation to innovation has been proven by thousands of other companies and is cited as the reason for the success of South Korea, China and Taiwan¹.

One of our suppliers Chuwi, now a \$1 bn dollar company started of assembling phones for Apple and Huawei. They were given instructions and executed them, they did this well and were paid for it, they used this money to invest in skills, “feeding” smart people (more about this in later sections), these smart people started designing their own tablets and soon the Chuwi brand was born. This allows them to have more flexibility in their design, target new markets and off course increase their profitability.

The achievement I am most excited about is our Point of Sale solution, christened Marc 1, firstly because it's our first real shot at generating stable annuity income (more about this in later sections) and secondly because of the monumental achievement. Over a period of 3 months, we went from a concept to building a Point of Sale company. We did this with brand new technology, integrated hardware, software and the cloud and did this with a team of 5 people none of

¹ <http://people.tamu.edu/~aglass/Glass%20IMN%20Taipei.pdf>

which have ever even seen a POS device up-close. This is truly an amazing feat. And not only did we design and build this, but we operationalised it, setting up maintenance, support and a call centre. We beat the odds when we managed the peak volumes of Black Friday. We did this whilst delighting our customers bringing heaps of praise from the CEO of our client firm.

In our healthcare projects we have made the lives of the thousands of patients and families easier. We brought new processes and technology to some of the toughest of the tough environments in the world (Steve Biko, George Mukhari and Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital are 3 of South Africa's 10 Central hospitals which deal with the most complex cases and Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital is the third largest hospital in the world).

Our work at the medical supply depot has eliminated lost medicine orders, helping to prevent hospital stock outs which helps patients receive the medications they require. We built MSD online from scratch in 2 months, integrating it with an "un-integratable" application, doing what others told us was impossible.

Our invoice processing system FastTrack revolutionised the invoice receiving process, cutting the time suppliers take to submit and reducing the cost of doing business in South Africa.

And of course our work with the Mental Health Department, whilst at times sad and emotional helped thousands of patients' families get closure regarding their loved ones. Through days of intense work we scoured over 10 thousand patient records, to help track down 1 000 patients. The work we did is still being used today as part of the enquiry process and has been referenced for its quality by the National Institute of Communicable diseases and the Health Ombudsman of South Africa. Not only did we do this work with our high standards of quality and efficiency but we brought new technology to the process, building a mobile app to help with patient transfers, during the rescue project.

Our work to support the redesign of the South African Governments IT strategy has in part let to a revitalisation of an entire industry and whilst our role was small, it was a critical and recognised component of this turnaround.

In every single one of our projects, our conduct has stayed true to our personal values, and in every case we can be extremely proud of our work, always delivering beyond expectation.

A measure of our success is the amount of work which we deliver to clients which is not thrown away. This at first seems a tragic measure even to myself. But on reflecting, I previously worked for a \$8 bn dollar company where clients paid \$1m for 100 slides. I'd say half the time these slides ended up in the bin. For a 15 person company running out of a house we have a pretty high non-trash rate. Our work is being used religiously and appreciated at Pie City, MSD, Fast-

track and Bara. Yes we're not at 100%, but we're higher than the 50% mark the bn company with 20 000 employees and a 90 year history.

We should also be open about the hurdles we faced in 2017, Danny leaving us, uncertainty on our Healthcare projects resulted in unplanned changes and certainly frustration in terms of reporting lines, project assignments as well as scope change. For the most part these challenges were externally driven, however we can always do better in how these are managed. *(Let's use part of our January OKR workshop to discuss and learn from these and figure out how we can avoid some of the downsides in future).*

What capabilities have we built?

Our single most important strength lies is our ability to deliver i.e. get stuff done. Not only are we able to get stuff done, we get it done quickly, using the best available technology in a way that makes and our clients and ourselves proud.

- **Execution:** Defining a goal, identifying the dependencies, planning, GETTING STUFF DONE
- **Customer service:** going above and beyond to meet our clients' needs, responding rapidly to their request, managing their expectations and over delivering on our commitments
- **Web:** Researching, designing / architecting and building web based applications
- **Open source:** Researching, designing and modifying open source software to solve a particular problem
- **Serving the South African government:** In depth understanding of the procurement process, relevant acts, as well as the culture and way of working (we have secured the required minimum experience to qualify for ~80% of tech related government tenders)
- **Amazon Cloud/ Hosting:** Researching, designing and building server infrastructure and services hosted on the Amazon cloud (AWS)

REFLECTION ON OUR BROADER MISSION

Before diving into the details of what we need to do in 2018, I thought it is important to reflect on our mission, to guide us when making decisions.

- What type of company we are building
- **0% bureaucracy and "office politics"**, we strive to eliminate red tape, so we focus our energy on value adding activities i.e. we hate doing things for sake of doing things or to simply please a more senior member of the team

- **Conduct ourselves at work in a way that makes us proud**, we stand by our decisions, can be open about them, knowing that when we took them we had the best intentions, striving to bring good to the world
- **Improving ourselves every day**, we are the Olympic athletes of the business world, we are focussed on our goals pushing ourselves every day, We operate in a sweet spot with a balance of stress and growth. When we are in this zone we are constantly learning, building new skills and are energised. We acknowledge that when we move to either end of this sweet spot we either suffer from excessive stress, or a complete absence of it, both situations we actively work to manage.
- Why are we excited about building this company

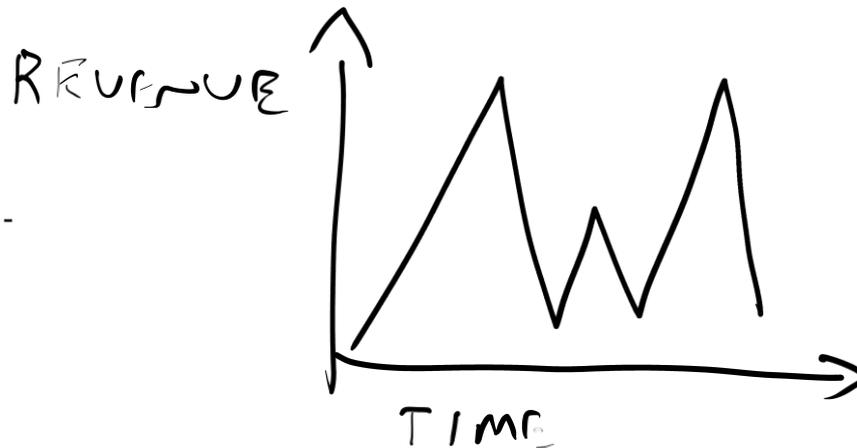
We love building things, that is taking ideas and seeing them materialise. We are most excited when these ideas are valued by their users i.e. we have built something of value. Our ultimate goal is to build a product valued by millions of people, something we will be remembered for – this is our mission. We believe this product will be built by solving a pressing problem using technology.
- What do we do as a company

In our effort to build a product of immense value we actively search for clients who are eager to work with us to solve their challenges. We combine our problem solving and technology skills to build and implement a solution which solves their solutions. We believe that the skills and network we build in repeating this process will lead us to our ultimate goal.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

Our biggest challenge: Creating predictability in our revenue

Whilst we have done well financially and secure our cash flow for ~24 months we continue to face massive variability and unpredictability in our revenue stream (see illustration below). Whilst I believe that some revenue - even “lumpy” revenue - is better than no revenue at all, the best type of revenue is revenue you can predict with some level of accuracy i.e. predict in July 2018 that in January 2019 we will generate R1m of revenue and then actually get R1m in January 2019. Having predictable revenue will allow us to plan, make investments to grow our company and have less stress.



The approach

Our approach to addressing the revenue challenge will be based on:

1. **Productising Marc 1:** turning the Marc 1 into a product, marketing it and deploying it to multiple companies. To achieve this we will need to build a completely new set of skills, we need to read books, study, speak to experts and experiment with new ideas.
2. **Actively pursue new tech related projects:** Continue on our current approach of finding interesting profitable tech work both in the public and private sector
3. **Search for a massively impactful tech solution** either through partnering with a government / agency to solve an impactful humanitarian problem or through a direct to consumer solution

Analogy for the approach: The company as a person

Our company is like a person, it needs the basics, food, clothes, place to live. Once these basics are in place the person has the opportunity to thrive, be creative and excel.

In our case revenue is the food for the company, this revenue helps us build new capabilities and explore our individual creativities.

We need to continue generating revenue to feed the skills, literally - our biggest risk is not generating this revenue and thus, this must be our biggest priority. Visions and missions are important but without an income all of us will have to give up the mission for food - but getting this balance right is hard i.e. we need to balance the need for revenue with opportunities to continue on our mission to solve meaningful and impactful technology challenges.

My basis for the feed the company analogue is based on my personal experience starting the company. When I started, I would often take on projects that were different from my initial vision of solving technology challenges - an example of this is a project I took on in Heidelberg. I was not solving the world's toughest challenges and it was a pain to travel there every day but the cash flow generated from this project allowed us to take on the EBMS project which lead to our first ever technology solution targeting a real and impactful problem.

IMPLEMENTING THE APPROACH

Below are my initial thoughts on the intervention we need to deliver the approach, we will refine these and update them during our January OKR workshop.

Principle	Intervention
Productising Marc 1	Finalise killer product features
	Develop marketing and branding
	Sell
Actively pursue new tech related projects	Streamline the tender process
	Host client events
	Structure the approach to secure new clients
Search for a massively impactful tech solution	Identify potential government partners
	Explore health care solutions based on our current experience and insights

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN THE MISSION

- You are without a doubt in the game of this decade, using tech, building tech, deploying the tech and getting people to use tech – from Zendesk to AWS, these are the tools of the decade which you have mastered
- The best way to learn the game is to play it, there is no training like this, soak it up
- If we succeed we will need a CFO, COO, executives, team leaders - you will be the best placed, knowing our culture, our norms and the skills you gobbled up

- You will continue to bring positive change to our world, creating jobs, improving services and making people happy
- And of course if we succeed you will make money
- If we fail you will be left with skills, don't underestimate the value of this

WHY I BELIEVE WE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL

- All around us we witness staggering levels of inefficiency, in stark contrast to our get stuff done capability
- We have built a team with exceptional talents and values, genuinely nice, authentic people whom I look forward to working with
- There is a monster demand globally for the work we do
- There is severe skill shortage of our skills globally but exasperated in South Africa for what we do

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Whilst all this may sound exciting and it is, one thing is certain, grit and hard work is what it takes to succeed, from Chuwi to Uber, people poured thousands of hours of dedication to execute. I leave you with a saying often referred to by the people of Shenzhen - time is money, efficiency is life

Muhammad Simjee