KUKHU BOX IS a homegrown concept that embraces African township culture and speaks to the now Kasi generation. While their well-devised menu clearly demonstrates their understanding of African flavours and preferences, at Nkukhu Box they don’t only serve great food, it’s also about the experience.

With the understanding that location plays a big role in the success of any business, Nkukhu Box outlets are conveniently located within residential areas frequented by their target demographic. Their street front locations mean that while Nkukhu Box is the place to be seen, it is also the place where customers can enjoy watching the cast of Kasi characters passing by.

While the concept has been under development since 2013, opening day in Mamelodi West in July 2016 was a day concept founder, Itumeleng Mpatlanyana, will long remember. A successful pre-opening marketing campaign meant that on opening day the entire community was on hand to welcome their new resident. Launch day specials included a full chicken sold for only R50 and, says Itumeleng, “The queue was insane!” In the first four hours of trade they sold 300 chickens and by the end of the first week Nkukhu Box was a household name in Mamelodi West.

KASI SWAGGER
Contrary to the perception that this market makes buying decisions based purely on price, in keeping with international trends, township residents are becoming increasingly health-conscious and have developed an appreciation for superior quality food and excellent customer service.

NKUKHU BOX CULTURE
The relationship between franchisor and franchisee can make or break a franchise. With this in mind, Itumeleng and his team have

OFF TO A FLYING START

Historically there has been a general perception that any product or service originating out of a township is substandard — Nkukhu Box is about to turn this notion on its head.
developed a business model and support structure that promises to provide across-the-board guidance, wide-ranging support and comprehensive training. Marketing and product innovations that keep customers excited about their product and overall brand experience, are an integral part of the Nkukhu business model.

From their central kitchen in Midrand the franchisor will supply franchisees with all the core menu products. By establishing a central kitchen, the franchisor is able to take advantage of bulk buying prices and passes the benefit of the lower prices on to their franchisees, ultimately contributing to improved gross margins.

NKUKHU BOX IS SPREADING ITS WINGS
The stores currently trading, Nkukhu Box Mamelodi West, Nkukhu Box Atteridgeville and Nkukhu Box Klerksdorp, are all corporate stores and the plan is to have at least one corporate store in every township, starting with:

- Nkukhu Box Jouberton,
- Nkukhu Box Mamelodi East,
- Nkukhu Box Mamelodi North East,
- Nkukhu Box Nellmapius, and
- Nkukhu Box Elandspoort.

COULD YOU WING IT AS A NKUKHU BOX FRANCHISEE?
Achieving success in this industry demands hard work and long hours. To ensure that would-be franchisees are a good fit with the Nkukhu Box culture and understand what they are in for, applicants will be required to ‘serve time’ in a store before opening a franchise of their own. This approach weeds out all but the most serious and well-matched candidates, thereby eliminating much of the risk of franchisee failure. Preference will be given to owner-operators and applicants with at least five years’ managerial, significant other leadership or teaching experience.

A MAN WITH A MISSION
Born and raised in the ‘not so privileged’ environs of Embalenhle in Mpumalanga, it was the young Itumeleng’s dream to have a nice lunch box when going to school. When he was 14 his parents bought an electric lawnmower which, back then, was quite a big deal. The arrival of the lawnmower also meant that come Saturday morning, at his mother’s insistence, Itumeleng could be found tending the lawn. A couple of Saturdays into the dreadful task he noticed that their neighbour’s lawn was not receiving the same diligent care and he decided to offer his services — at a fee, of course. A few months later he had worked his way around the neighbourhood garnering customers and earned the nickname: The Lawnmower Boy.

The money he earned over weekends allowed him to carry the much-desired better tasting lunch box, “A tastier lunch box meant I could hang out with and trade my lunch with the more privileged, cool kids,” says Itumeleng. This earned him a sense of belonging that encouraged him to pursue other moneymaking opportunities throughout his high school career.

After matriculating, Itumeleng enrolled for a BCom Entrepreneurship degree at the University of Pretoria where he continued to pursue various business ideas, including a successful student accommodation letting agency. Says Itumeleng, “At one point I had 20 apartments under my portfolio.” His big break came when one of the bursary-giving institutions contracted him to house their first-year students. From this deal he bought his first car, a 1979 VW Beetle.

Ever the entrepreneur, Itumeleng was looking for a new business opportunity when a friend suggested purchasing a Fashion TV Café franchise. Not having access to the necessary capital themselves, they spent many a sleepless night writing proposals and business plans in the hopes of attracting funders. Their determination eventually paid off and in 2008 they opened a Fashion TV Café in Irene, Pretoria, becoming the franchise’s first young black franchisees in the world. It was here that Itumeleng learnt the ins and outs of franchising, but it also opened the door to other opportunities when one of his regular patrons approached him to become a BEE partner in a coal mining operation. When the mining operation was bought out by a larger corporation, he decided to get back into the food business — this time, however, he wanted to go big, and so Nkukhu Box was born. Contact +27 11 805 0232 or visit www.nkukhubox.com.

“We aim to change the township fast food industry. We want to become a household brand in every Kasi.”
— Itumeleng Mpatlanyana

Photographs by Shawn Driman Photography

Nkukhu-Box
Grilled Kasi Flavour

“Grilled Kasi” with an Afrikaans twist

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