

# MONEY



**Empowering Tax Payers:** Janine Connor provides practical information for the lay-person

## [SNAPSHOT] Talking Tax

SPECIALIST TAX PUBLICATION DEMYSTIFIES A TECHNICAL SUBJECT

BY MONIQUE VERDUYN **JANINE CONNOR BEGAN** her professional life as a secondary school English teacher. Today she heads *Tax Talk*, one of the country's top providers of tax-related information. The leap from teaching to the world of finance was not such a great one, however, because her focus remains on education and the role it plays in empowering people. Her experience in adult basic education and training has also stood her in good stead, as has her eight-year stint in corporate

sales, marketing and business development.

Connor launched *Tax Talk* as a website in 2002 after realising that there was a gap in the market for a specialist tax publication aimed at demystifying a subject that is often people's worst nightmare.

"The world of tax is shrouded in jargon and technical language," says Connor. "My aim in launching *Tax Talk* was to remove people's fears and apprehensions, and to simplify South African tax laws and regulations as much as possible so

[TOOLKIT]

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By MONIQUE VERDUYN

**VITAL STATS**

**NAME:** Janine Connor  
**AGE:** 35  
**BUSINESS DESCRIPTION:** *Tax Talk* comprises a website and a magazine aimed at empowering South African tax payers by providing unique and interesting information and insights into the world of tax.

**BUSINESS SECTOR:** Publishing  
**BUSINESS ESTABLISHED IN:** 2002  
**BUSINESS FUNDING:** By running seminars and workshops and bringing in shareholders  
**STAFF IN YEAR 1:** 1  
**STAFF TODAY:** 5  
**BUSINESS 'X' FACTOR:** We

cater to a niche market, and we are the only tax-focused publication in the country that is practical and easy to read for the layperson.  
**CURRENTLY ON THE LOOK-OUT FOR:** Partners who can benefit the business by adding value for its clients.  
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that any business owner can understand and even benefit from them."

Two years ago, *Tax Talk* had around 30 subscribers; today it has 600, as well as a circulation of 4 000. The magazine started off as a quarterly publication, but demand for information has been so high that Connor is publishing it every second month this year. The response from the SME sector has been particularly good.

Connor funded the business herself by running educational tax seminars and talks, and eventually brought shareholders on board to help her grow it. Today, the multimedia business is a comprehensive tax forum that provides easily digestible and interesting information and insights into the world of tax. Other services offered include tax symposiums, sponsoring television talk shows and arranging in-house tax education workshops on specialised tax topics.

"We approach well known speakers and tax specialists and ask them to host events on our behalf," says Connor. "With the tax amnesty deadline coming up at the end of May 2007, for example, we will be hosting an event to educate people about the amnesty and provide them with the information they need to take advantage of it."

The toughest part of start-up, she says, was establishing *Tax Talk's* position as a neutral information provider. "We do not take sides. *Tax Talk* is a platform for the discussion of topics that impact people's understanding of the South Africa Revenue Service. It took some months for people to realise that we were not a mouthpiece for the Government, or for tax consultancies."

Connor says she set her audience right by ensuring that the publication answers every tax question that people put for-

ward. "When one person has a question about a piece of legislation, you can be sure that 100 others have the same query. By providing direct and practical answers to the questions we receive, we have been able to carve a solid reputation for the magazine and the website."

*Tax Talk* sources its information from industry professionals and experts with whom Connor has established partnerships. The publication prides itself on the reliability of its sources, and has been embraced by the industry.

Connor and her team of journalists ensure that they keep abreast of any developments in the tax world by conducting ongoing research, networking with specialists in the field and basically keeping an ear to the ground. She stresses, however, that while all the information is reliable, the onus is on individuals to ensure they obtain professional advice on more complex tax questions that affect them directly.

*Tax Talk* sponsors Tax Issues, presented by tax law expert Daniel Erasmus on Summit TV every Monday night. The business uses this channel to market its services. In addition, a monthly newsletter goes out to its entire subscriber base. Connor also engineered the introduction of *Tax Talk* magazine into the online FNB and RMB Private Bank eBucks loyalty rewards programme. She is planning to take the magazine into retail outlets in the future, and to establish an online tax chat forum that leverages *Tax Talk's* popular website.

Asked what single discipline has stood her in good stead in business, Connor replies: "Persistence and self-motivation have been key, as well as my ability to interact with people. These are skills I learnt in my teaching days." □

