

Double Apex - seasoned journo builds his own online automotive news platform



By Imran Salie

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If you have ever worked in South Africa's automotive media space, there is a very good chance that you have met Sudhir Matai, commonly known as 'Banzai'. If you have not met him, there's still a good chance you know of him. Matai is a seasoned automotive journalist that has worked for a well-known car publication in SA.



Sudhir 'Banzai' Matai, founder of *Double Apex* | image supplied

He has been to different parts of the world on media trips to test drive the latest and newest cars from various manufacturers. Following his tenure working for a car publication, Matai launched his own automotive news platform called *Double Apex*, which is steadily growing in popularity and becoming a household name for comprehensive car reviews and motoring news. I caught up with Matai to find out a little bit more about himself and what swayed him to start his own online news publication.

■ What prompted you to start your own online automotive news publication?

I have been in the motoring media space for over 20 years. During that time I served at various leading automotive print titles. However, as we all know that print has been on a downward spiral, that worsened pre- and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

My last employer saw fit to replace a group of very experienced and knowledgeable journalists with interns, ostensibly to reduce their wage bill. This left me and a few others with no employment. I already had DoubleApex.co.za registered as a URL for my apparel business. With the help of a very generous, tech-savvy friend we converted it from a showcase for Double Apex apparel into a content website for all things motoring. Soon we will be celebrating our fifth anniversary.

■ Tell us more about the Double Apex online store and the story behind it.

The [Double Apex clothing label](https://DoubleApex.co.za) actually pre-dates the content website by a few years. I used to see motoring-themed T-

shirts for sale on international websites. However, getting them landed in SA cost more than the product itself, so I decided to do it myself.

I used my knowledge of the field to create unique, usually funny, designs aimed at petrolheads. Initially, we were using social media to market the clothing, but when we launched the website, it was a natural marriage of the two. The apparel range is a nice brand extension for the website. You can read and wear *Double Apex*.

▣ ***What does it take to successfully run an automotive news publication in South Africa?***

That is a great question. I like to think of it as a learning experience and we are learning all the time. Step one is to be relevant. We try to cover news as it happens. With a small team, this proves quite demanding. DoubleApex.co.za has been growing at about 25 per cent year-on-year, which is great and shows we are gaining followers/readers all the time.

We already enjoy a good working relationship with some of the biggest automakers in SA, which shows that we are doing something right. More recently we've started to attract small-scale advertisers into the fold. That is a real indication of the work we are putting in and the reach we currently enjoy.

▣ ***What did you have to do to get your site up and running with daily visitors?***

We were lucky to have very experienced help setting up the website. From the very start we had friends and supporters who know the platforms well and were happy to provide help when needed. Without these people the road would have been far rockier and it'd have taken us much longer to get up to speed.

One of the biggest compliments we receive is when people look at the site and ask me what I do for the company. They think the website is owned by some large corporation. That, in part, comes from the clean and simple design language we've chosen for the layout.

Attracting eyeballs to the site is a daily battle. We promote ourselves heavily through social media. We have an active [Facebook page](#) as well as a strong presence on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#). We share all our content via these channels. There is a lot of noise out there to compete against, and not all of it good. We try to keep our info short, factual, and punchy. People's attention spans aren't long and they easily bail on a piece of content that is dragging on.

▣ ***What do you do to keep Double Apex relevant and appealing to readers?***

We stay very topical and try to cover as much as we can about the automotive sector as it happens. We are an enthusiast platform, appealing to petrolheads and motorsport fans. As a result, you won't see too many articles about bakkies or commercials, unless there is relevance.

We publish fun and interesting articles that we would want to read ourselves. We try to cover events and vehicles that are not always covered by the larger/mainstream outlets. We also aim for a high level of engagement with our readers via our

social media channels, that way we are not a faceless, characterless machine that simply churns out articles. There's a sense of connection with our fanbase.



Sudhir 'Banzai' Matai with Takuma Sato, F1 driver and Indy 500 winner | image supplied

■ ***Tell us more about yourself and what makes you tick...***

Anyone who knows me will attest that I am a petrolhead. If you ask my family it has been this way since I was a little kid. I used to play with toy cars as a rugrat and it seems I didn't grow out of that. The cars just got a lot bigger!

I love all aspects of motoring, from classic cars to modern performance machines and everything in between. There is a fundamental joy to motoring that transcends class, race, gender, and socioeconomic barriers. I have made friends across the board through a mutual love of all things motoring. I am also a motorsport fan and, when time/funds permit, I like to compete as well.

As for what makes me tick... I am always trying to improve, whether it's myself, my website, or my products, I think there is room for improvement. I think complacency is the first nail in someone's professional coffin. If you sit back and think, this can't be any better then you are probably overlooking something.

■ ***Where do you see DoubleApex in the next five years?***

For one, I would like to see the site grow in terms of traffic. I think we're doing okay now but the online world is a large one and we can always attract more eyes to our content. I'll know *Double Apex* is doing well when large-scale advertisers start to contact us instead of the other way around.

In the longer term, it'll be great to get to the point where *Double Apex* grows from being a small startup to being able to employ a few key people, such as journalists, photographers, and videographers. I'd really like to do more video content, but I won't compromise on the quality of the output. And it'd be great to have a dedicated sales team. Right now I am wearing too many hats, and that can divert one's attention from some of the fundamentals.

On the apparel side of things, the short-term plan is to increase brand awareness nationally. We have a good product but we just don't have enough exposure. Whenever new people see the products, they love it and order two to three items at once. It seems as though we're still seen as a Cape-based brand. I'd much rather be considered a South African label. There are plenty of petrolheads in other parts of SA who we want to connect with and to see wearing our gear.

■ ***What advice do you have for aspiring entrepreneurs and journalists?***

That is a tricky question as I didn't really think of myself as an entrepreneur. I think I still have plenty to learn as an entrepreneur. But I am happy to answer after a few years of this grind. One lesson that holds true is: Don't give up. This is just a great lesson for life in general, but it really applies to entrepreneurship. If you have a good/relevant product, you gotta believe in yourself and cannot falter at the first hurdle. People often see the end result and think "Wow, that person is so lucky" but they have no idea of the slog that came before.



Sudhir 'Banza' Matai interviewing Sebastien Loeb, multiple WRC champion | image supplied

Journalism has come a long way and it has changed dramatically in the last decade or so. The fundamentals, however, remain the same. Know your subject matter inside out. People will rely on you for accurate info so it is imperative to, at the very least, report the facts accurately. Another important point is to always be truthful. Many people will take your words as fact, so be honest, always. Lie to readers just once and you will not easily recover.

ABOUT IMRAN SALIE

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