

## NEWS RELEASE

### **‘Tech start-ups need to educate themselves about managing and protecting intellectual property’ – UP TuksNovation Centre Manager**



*Phindile Tshabangu, TuksNovation Centre Manager at the University of Pretoria*

“In order for the tech start-up to be able to maximise the value derived from intellectual property (IP), either by securing its market and preventing competitors from copying [its] product or technology, it is important to ensure that the IP is appropriately managed and protected.”

This was the advice of Phindile Tshabangu, TuksNovation Centre Manager at the University of Pretoria (UP) during a recent awareness-creation conversation titled ‘IP Fundamentals for Tech Start-ups’.

Following UP’s recent hosting of a gala dinner to celebrate its IP companies making social impact and playing a crucial role in driving economic growth in South Africa, Africa and the world, the UP Department of Institutional Advancement (DIA) spoke with Tshabangu to discuss the significance of proper management and protection of IP, particularly for tech start-ups.

**DIA: What do we mean by IP, and what is a tech start-up?**

**Tshabangu:** IP is a term used to refer to any creation of the mind. This includes inventions, such as a new product, for example a nano material with unique properties, or a pharmaceutical formulation; a process or method; a computer programme; a design; literary works such as books or drawings; artistic works such as paintings and sculptures; know-how; confidential information, and so on. Although IP is intangible, its contribution to the value of a product or technology, and as such a business, cannot be underestimated.

A tech start-up is a nascent company, typically having commenced operations less than a year ago, and has at its core a service or product offering that originates from a technology, for example novel software, hardware, and/ or an electronic and mechanical gadget.

**DIA: What do we mean when we say 'IP fundamentals'?**

**Tshabangu:** 'IP fundamentals' refers to basic concepts that one must know or understand about intellectual property and intellectual property rights. With this basic understanding one is able to identify the various types of IP that exists in or may be generated within their tech start-up, and at the least consider protecting their IP and, where necessary, seek further advice about the effective protection of their IP.

**DIA: You recently hosted a webinar titled 'IP Fundamentals for Tech Start-ups'. Why is this conversation important right now?**

**Tshabangu:** Tech start-ups are often based on a new technological product, process or solution which has some or other form of IP associated with it. In order for the tech start-up to be able to maximise the value derived from this IP, either by securing its market and preventing competitors from copying their product or technology, it is important to ensure that the IP is appropriately managed and protected. Many start-ups realise the value that lies within the products or technologies and recognise the need to protect it from others, but often lack the knowledge of the various methods of protection at their disposal. Therefore, the aim of the conversation was to create awareness about intellectual property and the use of intellectual property rights – for example patents, trademarks, registered designs and copyright – that can be used by tech start-ups to protect their products or technologies from being used or copied by others without permission, as well as to secure their potential markets and to leverage that also in raising funding and partnering with other role players in the value chain.

The significance of having this conversation right now is that there has been a steady increase in awareness by company founders of the value and significance of intellectual property and the need to exploit and/ or harness the intrinsic value thereof to maximise profitability. Globally, there has been an increased regulatory enforcement to ensure that smaller companies are not disadvantaged by big conglomerates. A case in point is the various antitrust regulatory enforcements in European countries against the likes of Google and Facebook, as some of their behaviours undermine competition by attempting to muzzle emerging start-ups.

**DIA: What were the highlights of the conversation for you, and what do you hope people who watch the webinar can gain from the conversation?**

**Tshabangu:** We would hope that those who watch the webinar can walk away with a lay person's view of the fundamentals of IP and armed with the knowledge of how to go about protecting IP. The tech start-ups should be able to go back to their businesses and at least identify IP or sources of IP in their businesses, and be able to seek advice on protecting their IP whenever it becomes necessary.

**DIA: What does our future look like with regard to 'IP Fundamentals for Tech Start-ups', and what advice would you give to tech start-ups?**

**Tshabangu:** Founders need to do educate themselves on the importance and relevance of IP. They need to understand their landscape and scout what industry leaders and competitors are doing in protecting their market position with the leveraging of IP. They should also seek appropriate advice, as IP is a specialist field and there is legislation governing matters related to IP. They should at least aim to engage with an IP firm for guidance. TuksNovation works very closely with the Technology Transfer Office at UP, which has specialist

knowledge and access to tools and resources that can potentially make an impact in the growth and development of a tech start-up.

Watch the webinar: [Click here](#).

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## **ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2023 QS World University Rankings by Subject ranked UP first in South Africa in Accounting and Finance, Law, Economics and Econometrics, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Mathematics, and Veterinary Science.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)