

## Rokundo in the director's seat!



Rokundo Netshiluvhi of DirectorRo has managed to ride the Covid-19 wave and come out tops, using this time to learn, establish himself as a talented lighting designer and set up a virtual platform at Vision View Productions based in Cosmo Business Park, Johannesburg. He is also a walking testament that all things are possible.

Rokundo resigned from full-time employment at rental company Murangi Productions and started his own company as a freelancer in November 2019. "I decided to register myself as a business so that I could be accountable in everything I do," he explains. "I myself freelancers pay attention, they can do what I'm doing. It starts off by thinking of yourself as a business instead of living hand-to-mouth. Many freelancers rely on receiving a phone call and being booked for an event. They think that to get work, someone has to call, instead of thinking let me try and make something myself, let me pitch an idea to people, let me do something for myself. If work can't come to you, find work. For people to trust and take you seriously, present yourself as a business, ensure you have a business profile and have a voice outside your personal self that will enable you to work for a company or event."



Rokundo Netshiluvhi of DirectorRo

With gratitude to his former employer, Murangi Productions, where Rokundo worked since 2016 as an audio engineer and a self-taught lighting designer with an interest in technical directing, Rokundo established DirectorRo. Admittedly the prospect frightened him. “But when I looked at where I wanted to go in my life and the direction I needed to take, I could only see it happening if I did it for myself. I took a leap of faith and the reason I survived is God. God came through for me because as soon as I resigned, I started getting phone calls for events. I was shocked!”

Working as hard as possible to make an income which included a December bonus, Rokundo pushed hard. More work trickled through in January, and then, just as his calendar started filling up with bookings for the upcoming year, Covid-19 happened.



“How I normally react to situations that terrify me is to start planning,” Rokundo shares. “When I feel I’m locked in a space and can’t breathe, I have learnt from my mom. My mom is a strong woman who will never allow you to put yourself down. She would say, get up, stop being a chicken, find a way out of this, you can do it.” And Rokundo did.

With live events initially banned with the Covid-19 lockdown, Rokundo pulled out the skills he had shelved over the years to help him. With tools like Photoshop and Sketch Up, he created a brochure to advertise his designing ability – another skill he previously learnt online – and was soon commissioned to create designs and renders for people’s apartments, restaurants and mini-restaurants. In addition, he and his friends made a pact to gain as much knowledge as possible during the lockdown period. “So literally every single day I learnt something I didn’t know before,” he explains. “I probably watched all the MA Lighting videos presented by Christian Jackson on YouTube. On top of that, I would attend webinars and I made a vow that this thing would not break me but would build me one way or another.”



Rokundo also started an online chat show from home, and then, on a day, received a phone call. Vision View Productions, known for their live outside broadcasting, live or pre-recorded studio work, live streaming and music and drama productions, needed someone to do the lighting for an on-line show. What was meant to be a one-day job for Rokundo, organically expanded.

Once at Vision View Productions, Rokundo couldn’t help but notice a large, empty and unused warehouse and his mind raced with ideas. “I made four proposals to utilise the space, and with the fifth proposal, I convinced them. I had to write down my plan, how I would make money and how the new studio would run. I submitted renders and got the go-ahead. I have three partners including Thakadu Productions who supply the LED screens, TMM Productions for the stage, structure and some of the lighting, and Vision View for the cameras and certain graphic work. I plan the shows, supply the crew and pull everything together.”

Within two weeks, the studio was built and launched with the performance of a music production. Because it’s not in his nature to sit still for too long, Rokundo has changed the set a couple of times, and photos taken from the various shows hosted on this platform, depict his excellent eye and attention to detail. The virtual platform has played host to government programmes, conferences, sports awards and music shows to mention a few, all the while bookings are steadily coming in.



“I knew that waiting for someone to rescue me was not going to happen,” said Rokundo. “I decided to do something, and even if it’s not all about the money at this point, it does help. It is also about the relationships built during this time and creating potential work for the future.”

Rokundo hopes that freelancers will position themselves in a space where they can stand for what they believe in. He would like to encourage freelancers to register themselves for UIF, and then to apply and believe themselves. As the founder of Director Ro, he hopes to align himself with some of the best technicians in the country.