

Nominee: *Eugenie Windt Nsubuga*
Company Name: *Swanair Travel & Safaris / Carlson Wagonlit Travel*
Plot 33 Luthuli Avenue, Bugolobi
Industry: *Travel*
Years in Business: *23 years*

Introduction

I am Eugene Windt Nsubuga. My mother is Ugandan and my father from Poland. I am a single mother of three children, two young men and one daughter and a grandmother of two. I lived abroad for a while and I came back to Uganda in 1990. I was in employment for three years and when my contract expired, I left and started my own business. Swanair Travel and Safaris offers Travel Management – Air Tickets, Hotel Reservations, Holidays, Team Building, and Adventure Park.

At first my area of interest was in insurance but later on a friend of mine in Kenya who was in the travel business sold to me the idea of starting up a business in the travel industry. I did a quick course in travel industry and in December 1993 I started this company. I am so passionate about honesty and integrity.

For anyone to succeed, persistence, belief in themselves and change of attitude are a must have values.

What would you describe as your biggest achievement?

My biggest achievement is being able to move to the company's permanent home in 2015. We have also expanded and opened up an adventure park at the shores of Lake Victoria called Lake Side Adventure Park. Without a lot of retail bills to worry about, our business is on a strong foundation. It has been a journey of hard work, sacrifice and persistence.

How is your product/service unique from others in the same industry?

Unique is not the word, because we are different and we like to do things differently. What makes us different is we are partners of a global leading travelling company. So this affiliation exposes us to global standards. The point is not what we do but how we do it and the technology we use. And that is how our partnership with MTN has been particularly important. Our business relies on fast and stable Internet connect which we get from MTN Uganda.

Commitment to excellence by having a 360 view of a company's travel needs is key. We add value to the travel ecosystem by aligning with a global travel management company (CWT) that ensures global standards in everything we do and how we do them. This strategic partnership has been critical to our business success.

What would you say are the major challenges experienced by your business and how have you managed to overcome them?

The business is capital intensive and the cost of money is very high. We have managed to raise finances by re-investing the profits back into the business.

The bulk of the money from the service we are selling belongs to the airline it's like the money is in transit to them through us. As long as I have issued a ticket I have to pay for it within 15 days whether the client has paid or not and clients including the big ones usually do not pay within 15 days. We have to find a way of clearing with the Airline since we may be cut off from business by the airlines or IATA. The only option is one has to either utilize their savings or borrow at high interest rates in this market.

You'll always experience a catch in our kind of business. The supplier is not certain as to when to receive payments and yet the buyer needs it within 30 days. This debtor days mismatch with creditor days strains the business and affects liquidity. Without a solid plan and strong leadership, especially to have a fall back position in case of cash flow strains, it is possible to get debt that could easily suffocate your business if at all you don't get stress related blood pressure.

Where do you see your business in the next 3-5 years?

We plan to open a second branch that will specialize in niche products for the growing middle class clientele. Develop an app that will enable our clientele to access our services in the palm of their hands.

We hope to utilize technology so that people can be able to work from home and take care of their small families at the same time. And in terms of expansion instead of saying we open up many branches, we may be looking at coming up with many outreach programmes where young people can work because in our industry we need to be there 24 hours so we intend to introduce working in shifts. The future is about enabling convenience, competitive rates and choice by leveraging the power of mobile devices and the Internet. We want to be at the top of this innovation in our business, God willing.

Apart from providing the product/service offered by your business, how has your business contributed to your community?

- Partnered with Standard Chartered Bank in the Blood Bank fundraising drive to raise funds for the new blood bank.
- Made contributions and donations to different charities including an orphanage along Gayaza road
- Had a retreat for girls who have been affected by FGM – 2015, we hope to have this each year.

- We are also looking to contribute to a project that ran by a gentleman for raising funds for cancer treatment for the children whose parents would find it very expensive to keep taking them to the hospital for treatment.

What have you done to develop/empower other women?

- Mentoring women in the village where I live who are involved in small scale economic activities like charcoal trading, small kiosks and tailoring business, and imparting financial literacy skills.
- Our type of business largely favors women, more than 50% of our staff are women.

Advice to women

Our society has always taken women to be in the second place, but I believe women are strong both emotionally and spiritually and if they can believe in themselves, then they are a power house.

Naturally women are persevering so we just need to bring that persistence in the business area because without persistence it would be hard for any business to prosper. Businesses goes through ups and downs, we do not have to give up at the slightest down. So for me persistence and belief in oneself are key to manage any business and any woman can make it.

How has MTN Uganda contributed to your achievement?

By offering reliable and affordable voice and data connections. We currently use MTN Land Lines, Mobile and Data services. Our business is highly dependant on stable and fast Internet. Our partnership with MTN offers value for money and great responsiveness.

Her Story and use of ICT in Business:

WRITE-UP FROM EUGENIE NSUBUGA WINDT - SWANAIR TRAVEL/CARLSON WAGONLIT TRAVEL

OUR PAST

We opened for business in December 1993 and our offices were located on Nkurumah Road. Office Space in those days were hard to come by and one had to pay goodwill just to get one.

At the time we used a reservation system called Getz which was connected to Sita lines and the cost of it was very high and if the Sita line was down we had not option of making a reservation. We would then have to call the airline to make this reservation for us. The Getz system did not allow ticketing and we would have to go to the airline to have the ticket issued. The passenger needed to have a hard copy of the ticket to be able to travel.

When we became IATA Accredited in 1995, the airlines operating in Uganda at the time allowed us to hold their ticket stocks. These tickets were manually written and so the chances of mistakes and errors were high not to mention fraud from unscrupulous operators all over the world. Soon after that there came a ticket printer and we got hard copy tickets supplied to us by IATA and we had to collect these from Standard Chartered Bank. Should you forget to plan to a re-stock and you run out before the tickets can be flown in from Geneva IATA Headquarters, you were in trouble since you would not be able to issue tickets for your clients.

PRESENT

The industry has several Central Reservation Systems known as GDS. In the market we currently have two of those systems namely Travelport and Amadeus. With these systems, we are able to make a reservation for air tickets, hotels, cruises and taxis all over the globe. We are also able to issue the Electronic tickets, pay for the hotels and taxis using a credit card and send all this to the client electronically. The client never need to step in our offices to get a service. He can either send an email, whatsapp, or telephone. The client does not even need to have a hard copy of the ticket to travel as long as he remembers his name. When he gets to the airport or hotel the booking and ticket will be visible to the check-in staff. When he shows up at the hotel the reservation will also be easily retrieved. With an App CWTTOGO we are able to push all this information to this app and as long as the client has downloaded this App he will be able to retrieve his bookings, get real time alerts and information from the airlines in case of changes or flight delays, check –in on line and get the weather forecast for his destination and much more. With E-Tracker we are able to track unused tickets for an organization and be able to have these refunded in time. There are several tools that the industry can use to increase efficiency and offer a hassle free service to the travelers. All we need to be able to do this, is dependable and constant internet connection. We are able to serve our clients 24/7 and from anywhere in case of emergency as long as we are connected on the internet on our Mobile Agent Tablet.

ICT has enabled us to work smarter, serve better and live flexibly.

THE FUTURE

With the ever advancement in technology in our industry, we foresee a very big possibility of our staff being able to work from home and be able to raise their families at the same time without compromising the quality of service.