Diederik Van ‘t Hof
FOUNDER, ROOF RATS

Diederik “King Rat” van ’t Hof’s business was born three years ago when he set about repairing a few things in his home. It was in his attic, where he cleared 19kg of rubbish, that he realised the effect cebrius was having on his family’s health and conjured up a business plan. He later created a website and Facebook page, began advertising and soon, business started to boom.

“We offer a unique service that people see as beneficial,” says Van’t Hof. “We also gained exposure by winning the 2013 Sage Pastel/Talk Radio 702 Small Business Award. The key to success is having great people working for me, which translates into great customer service. Careful financial management is also crucial.”

Today, Roof Rats specialises in the vacuuming of ceilings and the removal of pests from roofs. The company averages five clients a day, five days a week and the turnover for 2014 is R5 million so far.

“The biggest challenge is the never-ending management of cash flow. Finding the right people to work for you is also difficult. Trying to instil your love for the work in the staff takes time. For entrepreneurs,

“Seeing my former gardener buying his first car and successfully managing more than 35 staff members is amazing.”

business has to be an all-encompassing passion. You have to be prepared to work 18 or 20 hours a day, if necessary. Then your staff will be inspired to live up to your expectations.”

He adds that one of the most fulfilling parts of the job is seeing his team grow. “Seeing my former gardener buying his first car and successfully managing more than 35 staff members is amazing,” says Van’t Hof.

When asked about SA’s dire shortage of qualified artisans and tradesmen, he says he’s realised that there’s an abundance of talented workers.

“They just don’t have the formal qualifications to back it up. The regulations in this industry are way too complicated. There are people begging for work, but they don’t have the formal education to bring their value across to the employer. There needs to be an easier and more accessible trade licence or qualification system in our workplace,” he says.

He adds that businesses should be allowed to create jobs unhindered by bureaucracy. “Businesses grow the economy and create jobs. Government needs to have training facilities in place, with a system to validate the workforce that is already there.”

Currently based in Jhburg, Roof Rats has agents in Cape Town and Durban and there are plans to extend operations to Port Elizabeth and the Free State.

“The plan is to grow the business and franchise it. My advice to other tradesmen is to learn your trade and learn it well. A skilled artisan will always have a job,” he says.