



grow



# Montana Data Company

Plugging into data driven  
opportunities





**Elmar Schorndorfer had left a high-powered corporate position at IBM where he was head cloud lead for Sub Sahara Africa, to start his own data back-up company, Montana Data Company.** Having an intimate knowledge of the industry and having been exposed to some of the best technology available, Schorndorfer had developed a superlative data back-up system for companies of any size, yet he was battling to translate his innovation into sales.

## Introducing Montana

**Montana is a boutique, cloud-based business that focuses on all aspects related to data from data protection and data back-up, to data-recovery, archiving and data transfer.** The company has also added a POPIA assessment and workshop offering to assist customers in reaching their compliance requirements for June 2021. On the technology side, Montana will be moving into the data analytics space. What makes Montana's system stand out is the speed with which data can be transferred. "If a company has large volumes of data to move, most systems can take days, if not weeks, to make the transfer. In the case of an emergency, companies cannot wait eight or nine days to recover their data", explained Schorndorfer.

"In a proof of concept, it took some prominent back-up solution providers eight days to restore a company's data, this took us six minutes. So, from eight days to six minutes – this is a game changer," he added.

Five years after launching his business, however, Schorndorfer was becoming increasingly frustrated that Montana was limping along, rather than sprinting. One evening, he found himself listening to a talk by Tony Robbins, an acclaimed life coach and public speaker.

**Robbins noted that every successful sportsperson or team has a host of coaches driving to them to be an even better version of themselves. "If sportsmen do this, why aren't businessowners?," Robin asked.**

This got Schorndorfer thinking. "I believed I knew what was needed to run a business, I had a background in finance and ERP (enterprise resource planning) systems, but then I realised I had blind spots, I realised I had personal weaknesses, and I realised I needed help."

# Coaching for growth

After doing extensive research, Schorndorfer came across Grow and attended a presentation where he not only got to hear from the various Grow coaches, but also had an opportunity to chat to them. “They were a team. In that initial presentation, I identified two or three people who were specialists in the areas where I was falling short. I knew sales and marketing were my weaknesses, so I phoned them up to see what could come from it. To this day I am not sorry,” he said.

Schorndorfer’s coaching journey started with the group coaching sessions run by Sakhile Mkwazi. Together Schorndorfer and Mkwazi analysed Montana and started to formulate a plan. They outlined three key areas to start working on during their coaching sessions:

## Sales and marketing

Schorndorfer admitted that selling was never his forte. As a technical engineer with a financial background, he battled to turn leads into customers. Schorndorfer had a tendency to try and educate potential clients around his offering, rather than selling his product. Coaching helped him realise that sales was not about education, but rather about identifying a customer’s problem, offering a solution, and then agreeing on a price for your product and service. “Coaching helped me with the sales cycle, how to identify what the customer really wants to know about you, where you need to focus, and how to shorten that sales cycle,” he said.

Mkwazi also worked with Schorndorfer to identify exactly what Montana’s value proposition in the market was and how to articulate it. Schorndorfer came to realise that, in his industry, clients’ needs evolved as quickly as the technology they were using, so companies had to keep up with these shifts and adapt their message to meet market needs. To make his product appealing, Montana’s value proposition had to continuously remain relevant in an evolving market.

## Identifying core clients

The next big step in Schorndorfer’s coaching journey was to correctly identify who Montana’s core clientele was. The coaching revealed that Schorndorfer was intent on chasing corporate business. “Being out of the corporate environment, Schorndorfer thought he would easily be able to land corporate clients,” explained Mkwazi. “But his experience over the five years was that he was just not geared or ready for them.”

They needed to change tack. “We started identifying who his core customers really were and who he should target in his marketing and sales,” Mkwazi explained. To give his business a kickstart and a much needed boost in revenue, Schorndorfer started building a base of smaller clients. As his sales and marketing skills improved, Schorndorfer was able to consistently bring in new clients and start stabilising his revenue stream.

While he was building a solid customer base, Schorndorfer worked with Mkwazi to reimagine how he could land the bigger clients he had been targeting. The outcome of this was the realisation that rather than target large corporates, Schorndorfer should rather focus his efforts on forging partnerships with larger ICT firms. His first big success came when he landed BCX, one of South Africa’s largest tech companies, as a strategic partner.

This was an ideal solution for Schorndorfer and Montana. Strategic partners, like BCX, that have their own sales forces were now taking Montana’s back-up solution to market and selling it as a complementary product to their offering. “What we realised was that Schorndorfer got more traction by going out with partners than if he was going out on his own,” said Mkwazi.

“This is where the change took place in the business. Elmar started focusing his energy on closing partnerships and landing new partners that would take him to the customer,” said Mkwazi. Montana started to take off as a business.

# Getting the right people on board

“A challenge for a small business like Schorndorfer’s is that getting good technical people on board is very expensive,” said Mkwanzazi. To manage this problem Schorndorfer used freelancers who would work on his business after hours, this made their skills more affordable. He secured his partnerships with companies such as BCX, Schorndorfer was able to leverage the symbiotic nature of the relationship to make use of his partners’ skilled technicians to service clients.

This set up, although working, was not ideal. Montana’s customer service always played second fiddle to these technicians’ primary employers. Although Schorndorfer still believed in outsourcing everything that was not core to the business (such as office space and people), he realised he needed to utilise the company’s stabilised revenue stream to recruit critical full-time staff. This saw him employ a skilled technician, a key accounts manager, and sales staff. In addition to these four key people, he kept about 20 external contractors working on the business.

**Montana was finally becoming a fully-fledged, independent data solutions company, that could start being taken seriously and competing as an independent operation able to support corporate clients.**

## The sky is the limit

The impact coaching had on Schorndorfer’s ability to grow Montana was significant. In just two years the business was turning around. “We are at the point where we can have good people employed full time in the business to focus just on our needs. Impeccable people,” said Schorndorfer. In addition, Montana secured a good client-base and stabilised its revenue stream, allowing Schorndorfer to manage unexpected challenges ahead: The COVID-19 pandemic proved that.

With the help of Grow, Schorndorfer has now set up a business that is able to weather the storms that come its way. “Montana is a remote format business, where we need to be available 24/7/365.

**Fortunately, we are not limited by people to grow the business, our technology allows us unlimited growth,” said Schorndorfer.** “We are also not limited in the number of customers we can bring in and manage. Our business is perfectly focused to deliver at a time like this.”

Stepping into a future where going digital is the name of the game, Montana is poised to take great strides. “Everyone says that if you have a business you must be on the front-end of the wave. I think we are very well positioned for that. In the last seven years, we have worked through our challenges, we have matured in the way we run our business,” said Schorndorfer. With the right structures in place now, the only thing Montana can do is grow. This is exactly in line with its founder’s intent.

“I am taking it one day at a time,” said Schorndorfer. “I would like to grow our footprint across the country through partnerships. I would like to be offering a service that is mature and is at enterprise level, with speed.” He adds that the next step would be to start crossing borders and taking Montana international. “We already have a customer in Namibia,” said Schorndorfer.

Explaining why this move into Africa is feasible, he added, “Our speed of data movement is not influenced by network quality, so this will help us in a move into Africa. So that is where we are going next.”

In addition, at the time of interview, Schorndorfer was signing a Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment deal that would take Montana to a Level 2 or even Level 1 BEE status. This means that the sky really is the limit for Schorndorfer and Montana’s cloud business.



## Turning good to great

With a complete focus on turning his business around, Elmar Schorndorfer realised he needed a team of people to support him, which he found in Grow. He explained, **“Grow gave me a lot of motivation in the dark times, they held my hand, and walked alongside me from the beginning to where we are as a business.”**

Schorndorfer explained, “Coaching really helped me with my weaknesses with regards how to address sales and marketing. They gave me a platform to be confident. After seven years we are actually starting to walk, we are not crawling or sitting anymore.”

The value that Schorndorfer and his company, Montana, received from coaching has meant he can **look to the future with confidence and excitement.** “I think that is the true value I have with Grow, and I am very grateful for that. I can see our journey together, going forward for a while as Montana starts growing and becomes better.”





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