



# Vinny Lingham

## Tour de force

The 28 year old visionary cites his career highlight as the recent raising of \$5m in funding for his new venture SynthaSite which offers free websites and hosting.

● An achievement of note considering that it was only four years ago when Vinny sold his house and used the funds to act on an opportunity he had spotted in e-marketing: selling pay per click advertising. His appetite for risk combined with his drive, enthusiasm and passion for technology ensured that this local lad from East London was rewarded.

Vinny is the CEO of SynthaSite, a Web 2.0 startup and founder of global search engine marketing experts incuBeta and its subsidiary Clicks2Customers. A self-confessed "serial entrepreneur that loves growing businesses", Vinny has the magic touch.

Operating from a lounge at first with three partners and one employee, incuBeta turned over R2.5 million

in its first year which catapulted to R15 million in its second year and a staggering R24 million in the year thereafter.

The road to success was not without its obstacles. Cash flow and funding presented major challenges from the outset. Unable to understand the concept, banks refused to provide funding. Undeterred, Vinny funded the business with the R125 000 in capital from the proceeds of the sale of his house as well as maxing out his credit cards.

Citing the success of incuBeta as his first, he admits that he hates failure. "I do my best to succeed at everything. And that doesn't mean that I haven't failed – just that I hate it." >>

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Constant innovation and performance-based search marketing solutions have ensured that Clicks2Customers drive more online traffic than any other agency in the USA. A considerable feat in the online domain for a South African company!

His prowess has been recognised both locally and internationally. In 2006 he won the Top Young ICT Entrepreneur and in the same year incuBeta was also bestowed with the award for South Africa's Top Technology Company. International accolades include being selected as an Endeavour Entrepreneur and Clicks2Customers was awarded with the Horizon Award for Global Vision in 2006.

Widely recognised as an industry expert, Vinny is a sought after speaker and also serves on the international advisory boards of Yahoo and Commission Junction.

A minefield of information, Vinny's blog [www.vinnylingham.com](http://www.vinnylingham.com) is the number one media marketing blog in South Africa with more than 100 000 hits a month and has been cited in The Wall Street Journal.

Raised in the 'Indian areas' of East London, he vividly recalls the days of apartheid when his parents were very overprotective. He understood what apartheid was at the time though it never made any sense to him. His mom and dad, from Lenasia and East London respectively, started a small business in the late 80's which blossomed and afforded the family the opportunity to buy computers and other technologies to play with. Atari, Spectrum and Commodore 64 were the building blocks of his future.

As a child, Vinny spent many hours in the library going through endless amounts of books to satisfy his appetite for knowledge that hasn't changed to this day. It's no surprise then that Vinny joined Mensa at 16 years old!

Working for an online marketing company in Johannesburg was his first real break where he admits, "I learned a heck of a lot".

Prior to that he floated between corporates where the learning curve was not as steep. He adds that an immense amount of value can be extracted by working for smaller, younger companies. They may not pay as well as the big corporates but the learning opportunities are invaluable.

Happy customers are his passion and he emphasises that "if you focus on the needs of your customers, you can often learn a lot about your industry".

With its global footprint, running an Internet business is demanding and finding a balance has been hard. When he does find the time, he can be found at the gym, reading, watching sport, relaxing with family and friends or playing computer games.

An entrepreneurial success; his advice to the youth of South Africa is, "Get together with one to two friends (not more) and start your own companies – make mistakes, learn from them and repeat!" His belief is that the youth have an edge in the understanding of their peers and should utilise this to their advantage to take on the established industry giants in South Africa rooted in old money. This young maverick is emphatic that the youth should not fall into the corporate trap.

His plans for the future are of a philanthropic nature and he plans to start a non-profit foundation with his wife and business partner, Charlene, but for now his focus is firmly set on SynthaSite. He is in the process of relocating to the United States where Silicone Valley will no doubt receive this success story with open arms. ■



Above: Vinny and friends on his wedding day

He commends SUTRA magazine for focusing on a niche segment and delivering contextually relevant information to its readers in a time where the magazine and periodical industry has grown to such an extent that it struggles to offer value across the board. Great encouragement from a business guru!

**Qualifications:**

B.Com Information Systems from UCT  
Honours Degree in E-Commerce from UNISA

**Recommended reading:**

Rich Dad, Poor Dad – Robert Kiyosaki  
Dell Direct – Michael Dell

**Favourite online game:**

World of Warcraft

**Favourite movie:**

Armageddon

**Message to the youth:**

Start your own companies – make mistakes, learn and repeat!



Above: Vinny Lingham and his wife

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