



The Global Language of Business

GS1 barcodes case study

12 Teaspoons: Building confidence and market access through trusted GS1 barcodes

GS1 standards and services are helping South African natural skincare and haircare brand 12 Teaspoons grow with confidence, access new retail channels and build trust with customers through verified product



Challenge

Founded from a deeply personal journey, 12 Teaspoons created natural skincare and haircare products designed to support women experiencing issues such as adult acne and alopecia. As the business began expanding beyond direct customer sales, founder Buhle Tati needed a trusted and professional way to identify her products and prepare them for online marketplaces and future retail opportunities, despite having limited experience with retail requirements and product identification standards.

Solution

Buhle partnered with GS1 South Africa to obtain official GS1 barcodes and learn how to correctly apply Global Trade Item Number (GTINs) across her products and packaging. With training and support from GS1 South Africa, 12 Teaspoons gained the trusted product identification standards, implementation guidance and industry expertise needed to prepare for broader market participation.

Benefits

Using GS1 barcodes helped 12 Teaspoons strengthen product credibility, improve product presentation and unlock new growth opportunities. Today, 31 products carry GS1 GTINs, supporting the company's continued growth across multiple sales channels. Official product identification gave the business greater confidence to approach retailers and prepare for future expansion while additional support from GS1 South Africa connected Buhle with industry resources that supported accreditation efforts and helped build a stronger foundation for long-term growth. Through Verified by GS1, retailers and marketplaces can also verify that 12 Teaspoons' barcodes are licensed to the company, helping build trust and improve product data integrity.



12 Teaspoons: Turning personal challenges into a growing natural beauty brand

12 Teaspoons is a South African natural skincare and haircare business established by Buhle Tati, founder/formulator. The business was created from Buhle's personal experiences with women's health, skincare and hair loss challenges—and her passion for natural ingredients and solutions.

After being diagnosed with an ovarian cyst years earlier, Buhle began researching ingredients commonly found in products marketed to Black women. Concerned about ingredients linked to endocrine disruption and long-term health effects, she became passionate about creating safer, more natural alternatives. Years later, after experiencing severe adult acne—and later alopecia during the pandemic period—Buhle began formulating natural skincare and haircare products herself. What started in her kitchen eventually evolved into a professional business after she trained in natural formulation through Formula Botanica, a UK-based formulation school.



Creating products with proven results

The first successful formulation created by 12 Teaspoons was a natural aloe gel cleanser that helped Buhle clear her acne. Encouraged by the results, she continued researching natural ingredients to address hair loss and scalp conditions.

Unable to source certain ingredients locally, Buhle began developing and extracting ingredients herself. After months of testing and refinement, she successfully created haircare products that helped manage scalp irritation and restore confidence.

Positive feedback from customers, friends and early product users confirmed that the products were helping others facing similar issues.



Preparing products for retail and marketplace channels

As interest in the products grew, Buhle began exploring ways to sell through professional retail and marketplace channels.

While researching how products were presented in stores, she realised that her packaging was missing one important element used by established brands: trusted product barcodes. Although many barcode providers appeared online, Buhle chose GS1 South Africa because it felt credible and trustworthy.

"Purchasing these barcodes was so simple. That was actually the key to the door that helped me gain confidence in spreading the word about my products," says Buhle.

After joining GS1 South Africa, Buhle attended training sessions to better understand barcode placement, standards implementation and the broader benefits of GS1 membership.

Using GS1 GTINs, 12 Teaspoons was able to begin selling seven product configurations on Takealot, South Africa's leading online marketplace, while also supplying product to three other retailers, with ambitions to expand further into larger retail chains.



Building trust and community through education

Beyond product sales, 12 Teaspoons has grown into a community platform focused on education and awareness around hair loss, adult acne, menopause and wellness.

Buhle shares educational content in Zulu to help women better understand conditions such as traction alopecia, androgenetic alopecia and frontal fibrosing alopecia—topics that are often under-discussed or difficult to explain in local communities.

Through trusted products and identification standards, 12 Teaspoons has been able to build credibility while empowering women with information and natural solutions.



Looking ahead: Expanding with confidence

Through conversations and connections made via GS1 South Africa, Buhle was also able to access guidance on product testing and facility accreditation—important milestones in preparing the business for future growth.

By implementing GS1 standards early in its growth journey, 12 Teaspoons has built a strong foundation for future retail expansion, digital commerce, product traceability and next-generation 2D barcode adoption. Today, the business continues expanding its product offerings and retail presence with the confidence that GS1 standards provide, reaching customers across all nine provinces of South Africa. "Because of the barcodes that I have with GS1, the sky is the limit," says Buhle.

This story demonstrates how GS1 standards can help small businesses and entrepreneurs strengthen credibility, access marketplaces and confidently grow their brands.



12 Teaspoons is expanding its retail presence and reaching customers across all nine provinces of South Africa, leveraging trusted GS1 standards to build credibility, access digital marketplaces and confidently grow from a kitchen-born startup into a thriving natural beauty brand.

About 12 Teaspoons

12 Teaspoons is a South African natural skincare and haircare brand specialising in botanical extracts and naturally derived products designed to support skin and scalp wellness.



About GS1

GS1 is a neutral not-for-profit organisation that develops and maintains the most widely used global standards for efficient business communication. We are best known for the barcode, named by the BBC as one of “the 50 things that made the world economy.” GS1 standards improve the efficiency, safety and visibility of supply chains across physical and digital channels in 25 sectors. Our scale and reach—local Member Organisations in 120 countries, 2 million user companies and 10 billion transactions every day—help ensure that GS1 standards create a common language that supports systems and processes across the globe.

www.gs1.org

GS1 AISBL

Avenue Louise 523, BE-1050 Brussels, Belgium
T +32 (0)2 788 78 00 | **E** contactus@gs1.org
www.gs1.org

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