

# SIYAVULA



Siyavula is a for-profit educational-technology company that creates textbooks and integrated learning experiences. Founded in 2012 in South Africa.

**www.siyavula.com**

**Revenue model:** charging for custom services, sponsorships

**Interview date:** April 5, 2016

**Interviewee:** Mark Horner, CEO

*Profile written by Paul Stacey*

Openness is a key principle for Siyavula. They believe that every learner and teacher should have access to high-quality educational resources, as this forms the basis for long-term growth and development. Siyavula has been a pioneer in creating high-quality open textbooks on mathematics and science subjects for grades 4 to 12 in South Africa.

In terms of creating an open business model that involves Creative Commons, Siyavula—and its founder, Mark Horner—have been around the block a few times. Siyavula has significantly shifted directions and strategies to survive and prosper. Mark says it's been very organic.

It all started in 2002, when Mark and several other colleagues at the University of Cape Town in South Africa founded the Free High School Science Texts project. Most students in South Africa high schools didn't have access to high-quality, comprehensive science and math

textbooks, so Mark and his colleagues set out to write them and make them freely available.

As physicists, Mark and his colleagues were advocates of open-source software. To make the books open and free, they adopted the Free Software Foundation's GNU Free Documentation License.<sup>1</sup> They chose LaTeX, a typesetting program used to publish scientific documents, to author the books. Over a period of five years, the Free High School Science Texts project produced math and physical-science textbooks for grades 10 to 12.

In 2007, the Shuttleworth Foundation offered funding support to make the textbooks available for trial use at more schools. Surveys before and after the textbooks were adopted showed there were no substantial criticisms of the textbooks' pedagogical content. This pleased both the authors and Shuttleworth; Mark remains incredibly proud of this accomplishment.