

Listening to the voice of the people



By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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Under the theme One Pride, the Samsung Africa Forum 2017 took place on 23 February 2017 at the CTICC in Cape Town.

Samsung has been leading the way for many years on the continent of Africa and, unlike many other brands, truly want to listen to the needs and problems out there in order to create a solution.

In life, there will always be problems but not everyone sees that as an opportunity. Brands like Samsung are truly embracing customers' problems by constantly coming up with unique problem-solving ideas, innovative designs, quality engineering, and advanced technology.



Even though this was a day revealing the brand's new consumer solutions, I had the chance to chat to Mike van Lier, enterprise business director for Samsung South Africa, to find out how Samsung is using design to help its business customers:

Tell me a bit about your responsibilities at Samsung

I'm responsible for five categories within the enterprise business - probably lesser known categories than the products you've seen at the Africa Forum. Firstly, printers (A3 and A4) for the home as well as business environment.

Secondly, memory. There's a huge demand for memory and storage at the moment - whether on a device or in the cloud. This year Samsung will produce 46% of the world's memory.

My third-biggest category is commercial visual display. We do a wide variety of products, from monitors for home use or business use, to large format displays (LFDs).

If you go to a Sunglass Hut, for example, in the store window will be this massive display – that's not a TV, that's an LFD. It has a knock-down PC inside, an SSD drive, and it connects either wirelessly into the network or it can connect via a LAN cable. So let's say there are 500 Sunglass Huts around the country, they can actually centrally manage the content that's being displayed.

Another example would be a Burger King. Content can be management off-site in line with its marketing department or its operations department. It could run a particular special or launch a new burger by pushing the same content through to all the stores' screens. Another option would be if it's a particularly hot day, it could punt ice cream, whereas on a cold day it could push hot chocolate. If it's morning it could have breakfast specials, etc. And this could all be centrally located.

A snippet of IoT

What's also nice about that technology – and I guess it's a snippet of the internet of things (IoT) – you know IoT is about creating data and being able to react to that data in some way. In this case, it would be to drive revenue, so they have data on the temperature outside and based on that, start promoting ice cream, for example. And you could almost automate the entire thing, it wouldn't even need human intervention.



Mike van Lier

My fourth largest category is PBX, or what we call network. Of course, it's the old traditional PABX where you had the big box under the stairs, with all of your lines going into it and then you would have a big phone on your desk. It's moved away from that really, it's what we call fixed mobile convergence. So you'd have your phone, walk into an environment where it'd connect to the wireless and immediately that would be a voiceover IP phone, meaning it's using data to call.

The efficiency is very good. And if you think about a multinational that has 200 offices around the country, they can actually implement it in all the offices and call for free between offices.

And then my last, which is actually a very interesting category, is medical. We design and manufacture medical equipment - mainly digital x-ray and ultrasound machines.

What's quite important when looking at these categories that I cover is that Samsung is a much larger organisation than

people perceive. So today at the forum we're looking at fridges and TVs and washing machines, but behind the scenes, we're actually manufacturing memory, panels, and even solutions for hospitals.

▣ ***How much focus does Samsung place on R&D?***

The whole group is worth \$300bn. Samsung employs about 300,000 people worldwide, of which 60,000 people are in R&D. 5,000 of those people have doctorates. So we spend an enormous amount of money on developing technology.

We're the second biggest patent holder in the States at the moment, behind IBM, and we spend \$16.7bn on R&D every year.

It's something the general public don't know about Samsung and where all our products come from. I mean, we don't just use a Chinese factory to produce a phone, we actually develop all the technology within the phone or printer – and this applies to all our products.

▣ ***How does Samsung's smart technology, like we've seen in the fridges and washing machines, translate into the business environment?***

In terms of smart connectivity, today is all about consumer goods and that's all very important. By the year 2020, there are expected to be 50 billion connected devices in the world. Every single Samsung device, we predict, will be able to connect to the cloud. So whether it be a fridge, a washing machine or a TV, it will have some sort of smart technology built in and that will enable the realisation of IoT.

When this technology starts to flow over to business, however, it becomes incredibly powerful. An IT administrator or manager really wants visibility. And I can tell you, today many large corporates have no visibility whatsoever. They don't know how many printers they've got. They don't know how many Notebooks they have floating around, or any other device for that matter.

So just enabling people to be able to see those devices, what they're doing and manage them, is critically important. So the platforms that have been developed now, are extremely powerful. In our IoT commercial strategy, we've opted to have a completely open platform which means that any device can connect to that Samsung device. I don't think we're arrogant enough to arrive at a commercial space or business and say look, we've got to replace every single thing here with Samsung.

If you've got an air-con manufactured by another brand for example, but it has some type of connectivity, we want to be able to connect that into our environment. We call that environment [Artik](#) – it's both a hardware product (a little knock-down PC, processor, SSD, and some memory) as well as a platform management system. So you can download the Artik app and you can manage all the devices connected in that environment.

What's also nice is when it comes to after-sales service, we have an app in all our environments where you can tap the product, and it tells you what's happening inside that machine. If there's a broken part it will show you how to fix it, like which printer drawer to open, which screw to unscrew, and if you're still unsure, it will even show you a video explaining how to do it. So the design is not only about efficiency and ease of use, but also has maintenance in mind.

▣ ***Does your business customers' feedback influence product design?***

Yes, absolutely. When you install a solution into a business, that business has a very particular need. Often that need is different to what the next business' need is.

One example customer that jumps to mind is a franchised funeral home. A funeral home is actually quite a complex environment because when someone dies, of course, they have to do all the paperwork for the burial, and all of that stuff. But what they also need to do is get all of the death certificates sent to them from the relevant departments, and be able to save and send that to the insurance companies.

We designed a system around a printer. They receive the death certificate, scan the relevant documents in, save it very securely into the cloud, and then send it discreetly and encrypted to the insurance company for the speedy payout of a death claim. And this is all done off the printer - such a bespoke solution.

■ ***Do you then have a demand from other new clients to use that same technology, or is it usually a once-off solution?***

Sometimes. We're now dealing with a competitor funeral home actually.

People often ask us whether we have sites we can show them where we've done something similar to what they need. For example, say we're selling to a university, they usually want to know if we've sold the solution to other universities and whether they can go see it working. So it's quite important that we do have those sites available.

I think that also sets us apart from our competitors because we already have that solution. We fly engineers all over the world to be able to design these very bespoke solutions.

Samsung is a unique organisation due to the fact that the local employees run the organisation, but the Korean expatriates are the conduit between South Africa and HQ. So whatever needs the people have here – what we call the voice of the customer – gets fed through to HQ.

So all over the world, we have people listening to the voice of the people and we want to design the solutions that that will meet their specific needs.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work [here](#) and [here](#). Contact Ilse through her website [here](#).

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