

Africa's continental opportunity for digital and technology

By [Johnny Aucamp](#)

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Over the last 16 years, I have had the pleasure of travelling across Africa and during this time I've witnessed many things change. I have seen air conditioners installed in Lagos airport which, to my knowledge, are still not functional.



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The Botswana pula became stronger than the South African rand. I have seen the Ghanaian cedi depreciate weekly to the US dollar, affecting households and businesses in ways they have yet to feel, and I've seen the Gaborone airport take shape. Massive though it is, it is still not completed after many years due to change of plans, lack of funds, change of strategy, and so it goes.

Stagnant connectivity

On a more personal note, I have presented to the Ethiopian Telecommunications Ministry the various ways in which opening the telco market up to more players could benefit the entire nation – with many listening and agreeing. Surely a dramatic change from 10 years ago! What I have not seen change much on the continent during this time is connectivity and its ability to become the stable means of worldwide access – the hype of which has been around for years.

Of course, it's true that submarine cables, such as WACS, EASSy, Seacom, Sat3, etc. have all brought the promise of stable and cost effective connectivity to the masses, but the reality is that there are still obstacles to be overcome. Some of these are bringing cables further inland from coastal landing stations, while others are still stuck in exorbitant prices being charged for this access. These issues are being addressed and will eventually change, however progress has been slow.

Technology is changing a lot quicker than the cost of access to it, and with the economic landscape constantly changing, a business' success and relevancy means that they must continue to innovate, develop, and improve on the value they provide to customers. Technology is necessary to this journey, particularly, one might argue, if a data centre service is involved. The challenge with connecting customers to a data centre service is that if the lines or the power goes down, businesses cannot transact.

Digital dealerships

Consider motor dealerships who use digital advancements for the convenience of their customers, such as online bookings

and other digitally-driven transactions. African businesses like these could connect to South African data centres, but connectivity fees and potential in country power and line failures still pose a risk.

Having been in Lagos, Gaborone, Nairobi and other major African cities where a telco exchange has gone down and affects many providers at the same time, make this particular solution null and void. It still offers up intermittent problems. It is for this reason dealerships can mitigate this risk by providing in-house (on premise) installations, ensuring that these dealerships can manage their own risk with generators and redundant links to the internet.

I am confident that the continent is changing – more so in the past few years and especially with telecommunications companies acknowledging the fact that 80% of internet connectivity takes place via a mobile device, such as MTN, Airtel, and Vodacom.

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