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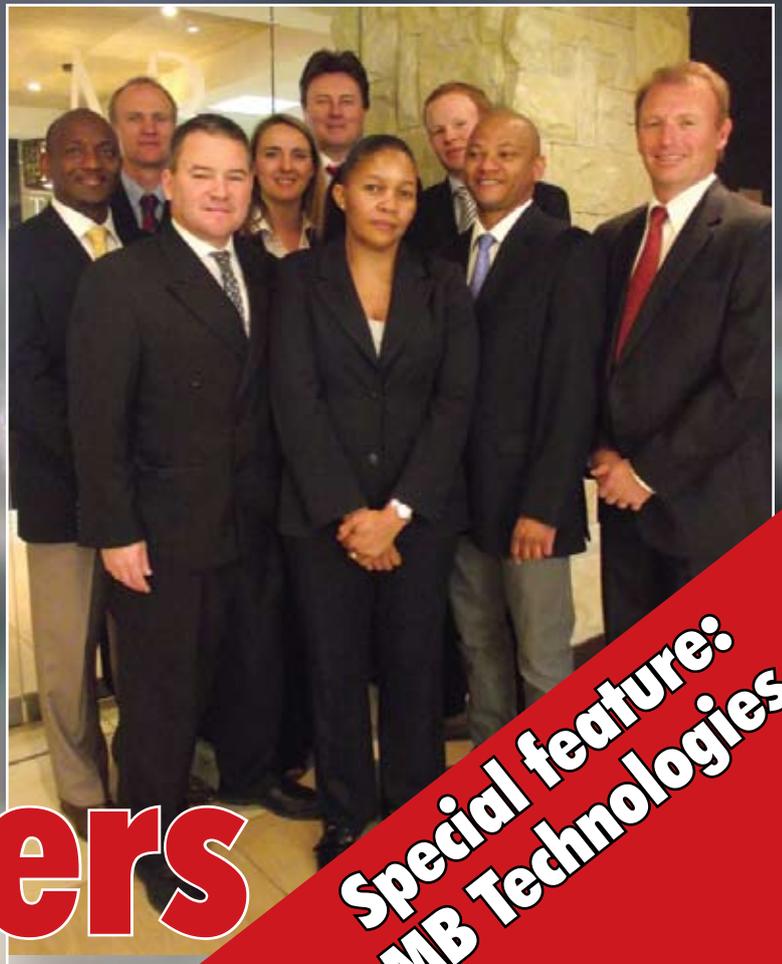
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Stonewalled by Brickwall

The Waiter formerly known as Prince and now the Symbol P, has formally been renamed BrickWall at The Local following an altercation with his boss, Raffles Rafa when the statement that "talking to him was like talking to a brick wall!" was clearly heard during what was supposed to be a discreet dressing-down.

BrickWall now stood in front of me miming a very good impression of his new moniker. "This beer's flat," I sighed as we both viewed the sad, headless, insipid-looking liquid in the glass. "It looks more like a urine sample than a beer! And it's obvious that I've got to dig out my SAB missive on how to prepare beer-clean glasses again."

A frown flitted across BrickWall's face. "But there's bubbles ..." he started.

Exasperated, I poured some of the watery fluid on the table and slapped my palm on it. It had been a tough day and the delayed first-of-the-day was the proverbial straw. BrickWall instinctively recoiled at the slap and the droplets splattering. "Well it's bloody flat now," I growled. In one flash of a movement, he swiped his cloth over the table surface, grabbed the offending glass and scampered off to the back of The Local to retrieve another brown bottle – and a cleaner glass.

I looked to pacify myself with a drag on my cigarette, but all I got was a mouthful of stale, burnt-out tobacco. Damn this new-fangled "reduced ignition propensity" bollocks! I seethed. In more than 35 years of practicing the still perfectly legal vice of inhaling tobacco products, I'd never experienced such frustration with a cigarette. Fags going out if you didn't suck enough ... ash tumbling, mainly down my shirtfront, after a few millimetres ... seems Big Tobacco is not only discouraging its own clients, it's actively promoting the illegal products it so detests. Not for them any reduced ignition propensity, no sir, just good old-fashioned tobacco mixed with the traditional hundreds of dangerous chemicals.

I was contemplating what my new brand of smoking pleasure should be when the familiar click-clack of cowboy boots without spurs came into earshot. I turned, but hardly recognised Ray-Ban Ray as he heaved his laptop bag and Woollies' packet on to the chair next to me (it was his "dinner night", G, so no Woollies boycott for our Ray-Ban, microwave masterchef that he is).

"I never realised Pringle made such drab looking shirts," I gouged. "Not like you to be such a plain pain."

He gave me the stony stare he usually reserves for plebs who share their unwanted cell phone conversations on the exercise bikes at the gym.

"Don't criticise what you can't afford," he spat at me. "But don't worry, it'll belong to the gardener tomorrow and I'll be back to pleasant pastels before you can say 'hair-tint and manicure, please'." I obviously wasn't

the first to make a comment on his day's attire.

BrickWall appeared with Ray-Ban's preferred double Irish elixir and took great pleasure in pouring my beer to full, resplendent, frothy head.

"Thanks, BrickWall," Ray-Ban said as he swirled the ice around his glass and then stopped mid-elbow bend when he realised there had been a sudden change in atmosphere ... as chilly as his ice.

He glanced at me and then turned to BrickWall. "What? Is it something I said?"

"I don't appreciate this 'BrickWall' name," P shook his head. "And that conversation was confidential ... you shouldn't have been listening."

"Well tell Raffles not to shout when he's being so furtive," I quipped.

Ray-Ban smiled. "Well, it's got to be better than Pee," he said.

"It's not Pee," BrickWall retorted. "It's 'P', the symbol. Just like Prince, the musician!"

I frowned as I reached for my lighter again, then smiled at BrickWall. "Okay, here's the deal," I said. "You promise to up the service levels, and we promise to go back to calling you P."

I was tempted to rename him Smiley at his response but, apparently, that has something to do with a sheep's head.

Ray-Ban settled back as P scuttled back into The Local's non-smoking area. "Funny how people get over-sensitive about a name," he smiled.

"You haven't heard the half of it," I smiled back. "Wait until you see the reaction in the next few weeks to a few names coming out in the IT industry."

"Do tell," Ray-Ban prompted.

"Oh," I said, drawing on my dead cigarette. "Names like Windows 8 ... Surface ... iPad Mini ..."

"What!?" he exclaimed. "I'll have to get one of those ... iPad Mini ... sort of rolls off the tongue, don't you think?"

He's just such an Apple fanboi!

I signalled to P for another round and made a mental note to leave him a bigger tip than usual. Plaster the brick wall, so to speak.



By Mark Davison

Contents

- 4 Scene Around
- 8 News & Analysis
- 20 Cover Story
- 29 MB Technologies Special Feature
- 50 Beyond Printing ...
- 64 Product Showcase
- 72 Channel Chunder

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SCENE AROUND

Toshiba's team Kenjiro Shinozuka recently competed in the Sasol South African Solar Challenge, a race for solar powered cars that saw local and international teams competing over some of South Africa's most gruelling terrain over 10 days to test the abilities of these uniquely engineered vehicles.

The race set out to promote renewable energy and clean mobility, and saw teams racing in vehicles that they had engineered and built to compete in the 5400km cross-country event.

The seven-member team Kenjiro Shinozuka, sponsored by Toshiba, kept fellow competitors on their toes during the course of the 10-day event, applying pressure to the leading teams each day.



Left: At a event in Centurion, Mustek and Huawei launched the latest range of Unified Communications Products offered by Huawei. Resellers were educated on Huawei's extensive range of Unified Communication and Video Conferencing solutions and the benefits to users in using these technologies. At the same time, various promotions were launched to very favourable review by the Huawei and Mustek reseller channel.

Right: Duxbury Networking will again back the all-South African Toyota Imperial SA Team in its efforts to win the world's longest and toughest off-road challenge, the Dakar Rally in South America, starting 1 January 2013.



As part of its CSI investments, Comztek is working with PWC, to assist in bridging the digital divide for the Diepsloot community who visit the Afrika Tikkun "Wings of Life Centre". The project will see a total of 12 computers being donated to the centre within the next couple of months.

Afrika Tikkun is an international NGO that provides education, health and social services to children, youth and their families through centres of excellence in South African townships. Its aim is to empower communities to develop productive citizens.





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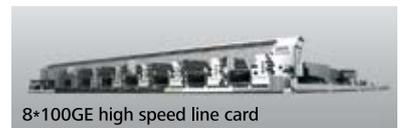
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SCENE AROUND



AxizWorkgroup's 17th Annual Ladies Lunch proved a great success as usual, with almost 200 ladies enjoying the day. All of the ladies dressed to the theme of the event, 'Old Hollywood', and accompanied their dress with pink ribbons to create awareness of breast cancer during the month of October.



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DEEP THROAT

Westcon to finally buy Comztek?

The rumour-mill has gone into overdrive over the fact that the long-delayed acquisition of Comztek by Westcon seems finally be coming to fruition. Our little twitters tweet that the deal could even be signed, sealed and delivered by the time you read this. David Kan was crystal clear in Mustek's annual report that the company would divest of its shares in Comztek "within the year" and the path now seems cleared. There has been no indication thus far of what price Westcon will be paying for Comztek, but when negotiations last stalled, a figure of around R110-million was being bandied about. Deep Throat will keep you posted on developments.

Petrol to the fire?

Adding further fuel to the above rumours was the sudden announcement by Westcon CEO Jacques Malherbe that he was resigning from the company after seven years at the helm. Malherbe has played a major role in taking Westcon to its current heights in both the local market and throughout the rest of Africa. He has been involved in other major acquisitions for the company including Sparnoon and Jet in east and west Africa, as well as Biodata and Sentronics in South Africa. While all parties involved stressed that the split had been "amicable", another little bird tweeted in our ears that Malherbe had grown "increasingly frustrated" over the Westcon/Comztek deal.

Debbie does Sun City ... bed!

Deep Throat was shocked and horrified this month when we visited Sun City for the SA Oracle User Group's annual shindig – and not just at the shocking decline of what was once an internationally acclaimed resort. Apart from the Entertainment Centre bereft of slot machines and simply an empty shell, we were irritatingly amused to note that waiters and barmen still haven't lost their touch for not making eye contact – or serving. Service at the various bars has been torturous since Frank Sinatra crooned the night away in the Superbowl and it's sad to note that nothing has changed. Anyhoo ... that wasn't our biggest shock, dear readers. That came at 10:00pm on the first night of the conference when a bunch of us had arranged to meet for an aperitif of an eve at Traders. I nearly fell off my barstool when informed that Joburg's Oldest Teenager, Debbie Hunter, wouldn't be joining us because she had gone to bed ... to sleep! We can well remember occasions in the past when JOT and ourselves would simply shuffle along from the bar into the first conference session of the morning. Sadly, we have to admit that, on the night, we were also safely tucked up in bed by midnight. Old age (sense? – Ed), it seems, creeps up on all of us.

PR Prick(le) of the Month: None so blind ...

Just to give you an idea of the trials and tribulations us poor hacks have to go through on an almost daily basis, here's some (verbatim) e-mail correspondence between a PR who, to save his blushes, we will call John and Esteemed Editor:

PR John: Hi Mark

I trust you are well, how are things on your side this morning?

Regarding our below correspondence did you manage to find space for the XXX "new money" article?

Thank you,

EE: John

I did pass it on to Kathy when I got it for IT-Online. Not sure if she used it. Maybe do a search on IT-Online?

Mark

John: Thanks David they did place it!!

Champion!!

EE: Pleasure, Jim

John: Yes my dyslexia kick in from time to time

And some people still wonder how we can manage to run a monthly insert called "PR Prick(le)" ...

Pic of the Month: None so foolish ...

A fool and his money, they say, are soon parted. Esteemed Editor found this out first-hand at the FNB Stadium after the test match between the Springboks and the All Blacks. When fervent All Black supporter Nenad Tomic, director of Mohlomi (and fondly known as the Serbian Suicide Sailor following a trip to New Zealand last year!), challenged his fellow Bryce Lawrence Hunting Party colleagues to put money on the match, only EE and Jim Thompson were prepared to put their hearts before their heads. 'Nuff said ... apart from the fact that we believe Nenad is now seriously hunting Jim instead of Bryce to try and retrieve the other half of his winnings!



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Of bread, circuses and pressing issues ...

The unexpected announcement by the Greek government of its intention to build a race track capable of hosting a Formula One Grand Prix came as a shock to the world.

Despite Greece heading into its sixth year of recession and in need of urgent financial help from Europe, its government is said to be stubbornly pushing ahead with plans to construct a track at Xalandritsa, 240km west of Athens carrying a price tag of around 94.6 million euros (about one billion rand). The proposed facility comprises both a street course and a purpose-designed closed circuit.

Greece's financial collapse is so severe that the Eurozone is threatened, while the country is seriously considering selling off its islands to pay for its sizable debts. Civil servants have been working unpaid for months, while some government workers haven't been paid in over a year. Hospitals are said to be running short of critical supplies.

Against this backdrop, the 500 jobs that are expected to be created by the much maligned project seem almost irrelevant.

The Greek scenario holds some important lessons for South Africa. While race fans would dearly love to see a return of the SA GP, we must not fall into the trap of entertaining panem et circenses (bread and circuses) politics as the Greeks are in danger of doing.

The phrase is used to describe the creation of public approval, not through exemplary or excellent public service or government policy, but through diversion and distraction. Historically, it reflects the practice of providing free wheat as well as costly circus games and other forms of entertainment to the citizens of Rome as a means of gaining political power ... immediately before the fall of the Roman Empire.

Could the renewed media "buzz" surrounding a proposed F1 race track in Cape Town, said to make use of existing road and spectator facilities in and around the Green Point stadium, be the precursor to demands made on government for the funding of an SA GP?

Would race fans appreciate a GP with the famous Table Mountain as a backdrop? For sure they would, but at what potential cost to the country if government is persuaded to step in as the financial guarantor?

Perhaps this question must be asked of the leaders of the various "bid committees" formed over the last decade to promote the idea of a SA GP. These self-styled quasi-official bodies have approached provincial governments to source funding for their pet motorsport projects with limited success. Is the national government now in

their sights because its coffers are the only ones deep enough to cover the huge costs – estimated to be a billion rand for one race in Cape Town?

Questions abound. Are these bids not simply a platform from which committee leaders are launching their own agendas? Have they counted the cost to the country, and considered how this money might be better spent on infrastructure development, including housing, to benefit all members of SA society, most importantly the poor?

As appealing as an SA GP is, we must not let it detract

from the real issues facing SA – labour unrest, an unofficial unemployment rate of 40%, the fact that a quarter of all South Africans live on less than R10 per day, and a groundswell of negative publicity in the world's press. They all must be addressed.

Late last year, F1 "supremo" Bernie Ecclestone said "a deal with South Africa is weeks away from signing." Are we close to a decision?

Currently, a meeting between the Cape bid team and Sports and Recreation Minister Fikile Mbalula is pending. Evidently, his department has indicated its willingness to consider funding a race if it's guaranteed to bring foreign investment to the country.

What concerned South Africans will want to know is: how much foreign investment will an F1 race potentially attract? And could the event possibly justify the massive up-front cost in the long-term? We need more research on this aspect if we are to entertain the idea in the first place.

Importantly, it's been shown that for circuses to prove an effective distraction for a population, bread must also be readily available. For many Greeks, as well as South Africa's disenfranchised poor, this is not always the case.



Graham Duxbury is the MD of Duxbury Networking, Formula 1 commentator, South African champion and Daytona Speedway USA Hall of Fame inductee.

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How many documents does it take to bring a product to market?

By Craig Green, Bytes Document Solutions national channel manager

In a global marketplace marked by rapid change and intense competition, introducing a new product to market on time can be critical to customer satisfaction, brand image and the bottom line. In many cases, millions of rands are at stake, which is why companies around the world have implemented process improvements and management methods to increase overall efficiency and time-to-market speed.

A key business process with a direct impact on launching a new product, however, is often overlooked. A wide range of documentation, including product-related technical and marketing information, must be available at launch to support customers, distribution and sales channel partners, and service personnel. In many cases, this documentation is even required for regulatory compliance.

Producing documentation can be inefficient and error-prone, and problems in the process can derail an ambitious launch plan and delay market introduction. In a marketplace where speed and quality are essential, companies can no longer afford to accept suboptimal performance of the documentation process.

Advancements in technology, best practices and strategic partnering make it possible for global companies to re-engineer the entire process to eliminate inefficiencies, take advantage of the power of automation and improve critical time-to-market activity. An optimisation effort can dramatically improve content creation and management, translation and localisation, multi-channel production and distribution.

Companies create a competitive advantage while making a breakthrough in the pace of product launch, improving documentation quality and reducing costs.

Key steps to consider when transforming the documentation process include:

- * Think like a change agent and break down the silos - in a standard supply chain scenario, several different organisations will be involved in the production of documentation, creating the potential for duplication of effort and version control problems. Integrate all of the operations for producing documentation into a centralised process designed for maximum efficiency and speed.
 - * Analyse the process with a disciplined methodology like Lean Six Sigma - since product documentation is a complex, multi-faceted process that often crosses organisational boundaries, it's essential to conduct an in-depth, data-driven analysis before taking action to engineer improvements. This analysis will help identify the redundancies and non-value-added steps that can be eliminated.
 - * Build the foundation for content reuse - a documentation process can be designed to maximise the use of content already created. Use a centralised digital repository to store all master content. When revisions are necessary, make them to the master set, which can be quickly exported to all appropriate material.
- Organisations can further streamline documentation with a structured approach to content authoring based on a nonproprietary standard like XML. It simplifies the task of content creation, ensures quality and consistency, automates formatting, and facilitates search and retrieval.
- * Simplify global translation and localisation - in the case of a global product, the original content must be

And, more importantly, steps on how to produce and manage them all by launch day

carefully translated and localised to reflect critical differences in languages, dialects, cultures and regulations – adding to the length and complexity of the project.

Depending on a number of niche service providers can lead to inconsistent quality, high error rates, production delays and compliance issues – all of which have an adverse impact on brand image. Instead, consolidate vendors and rely on a single partner to manage all globalisation needs.

A qualified partner will have expertise in dozens of languages and dialects, familiarity with the cultures, laws and regulations of key markets around the world, and high-quality translation technology.

- * Implement the latest technologies and best practices - take advantage of the latest innovations, like an enterprise content management system, to automate time-intensive steps, improve information security, break down barriers between paper and digital documents, and speed workflow.
- * Employ disciplined, data-driven management to maximise efficiency and deliver measurable results - in a complex undertaking like process transformation, it's essential to ensure that reliable mechanisms are in place for quality and brand control, and continuous improvement.
- * Consider a comprehensive business process outsourcing solution - for most companies today, the development of product documentation is not a core competence. Working with an outside expert can bring experience to handle the entire process – from globalisation to creation, distribution and end-of-life product management – while allowing the company to focus on its real business.

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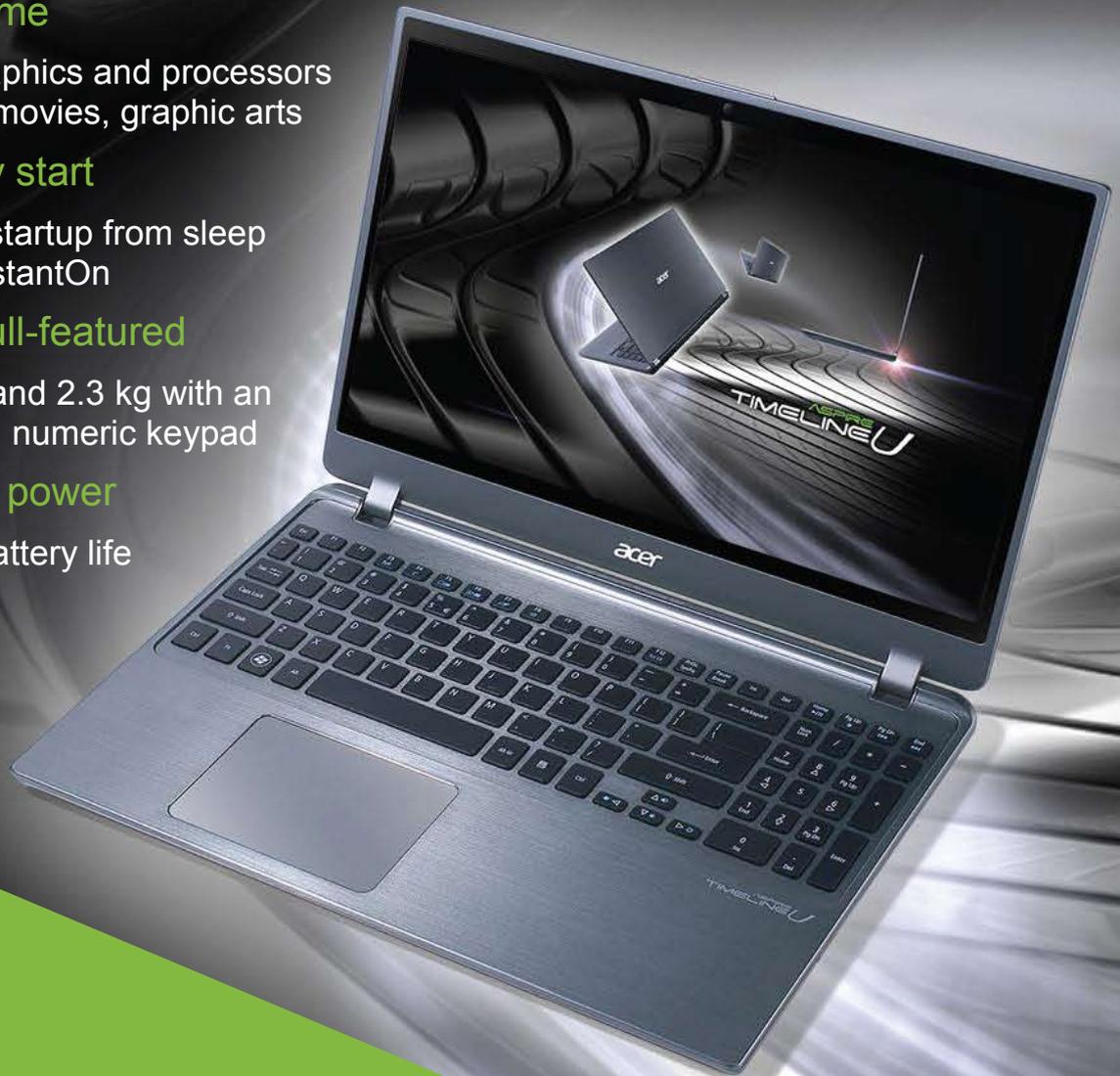
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SA users are more vulnerable

While cybercrime is burgeoning around the world, South Africans are falling victim to more than their share of attacks.

This is one of the findings from Norton by Symantec's annual Norton Cybercrime Report, aimed at understanding how cybercrime affects consumers, and how the adoption and evolution of new technologies impacts people's security.

With findings based on self-reported experiences of more than 13 000 adults, the 2012 edition of the Norton Cybercrime Report calculates the direct costs associated with global consumer cybercrime at \$110-billion over the past 12 months. In South Africa, the costs for the same period amounted to R3,7-billion.

Every second, 18 adults become a victim of cybercrime, resulting in more than 1,5-million cybercrime victims each day on a global level. With losses totalling an average of \$197 per victim across the world and R1 550 per victim in South Africa in direct financial costs, cybercrime costs consumers more than a week's worth of food necessities for a family of four.

In the past 12 months, an estimated 556-million adults across the world (with 2,39-million in South Africa) experienced cybercrime, more than the entire population of the European Union. This represents 46% of online adults (64% in South Africa) who have been victims of cybercrime in the past 12 months.

This year's survey shows an increase in "new" forms of cybercrime compared to last year, such as those found on social networks or mobile devices – a sign that cybercriminals are starting to focus their efforts on these platforms.

One in five online adults (21%) globally and almost one in three (28%) in South Africa have been a victim of either social or mobile cybercrime, and 39% (48% in South Africa)

of social network users have been victims of social cybercrime, specifically:

* 15% (also 15% in South Africa) of social network users reported someone had hacked into their profile.

* One in 10 social network users (almost one in five in South Africa) said they'd fallen victim to a scam or fake link on social network platforms.

* While 75% believe cybercriminals target social networks, less than half (44%) use a security solution which protects them from social network threats and only 49% use the privacy settings to control what information they share, and with whom.

* Nearly one-third (31%) of mobile users globally and almost half (47%) in South Africa received a text message from someone they didn't know requesting that they click on an embedded link or dial an unknown number to retrieve a "voicemail".

"Cybercriminals are changing their tactics to target fast growing mobile platforms and social networks where consumers are less aware of security risks," says Marian Merritt, Norton Internet safety advocate. "This mirrors what we saw in this year's Symantec Internet Security Threat Report which reported nearly twice the mobile vulnerabilities in 2011 from the year before."

The 2012 Norton Cybercrime Report also reveals that most Internet users take the basic steps to protect themselves and their personal information – such as deleting suspicious e-mails and being careful with their personal details online. However, other core precautions are being ignored: 40% don't use complex passwords or change their passwords frequently and more than a third do not check for the padlock symbol in the browser before entering sensitive personal information, such as banking details, online.

In addition, this year's report also indicates

that many online adults are unaware as to how some of the most common forms of cybercrime have evolved over the years and thus have a difficult time recognising how malware, such as viruses, act on their computer. In fact, 40% (43% in South Africa) of adults do not know that malware can operate in a discreet fashion, making it hard to know if a computer has been compromised, and more than half (55%) are not certain that their computer is currently clean and free of viruses.

"Malware and viruses used to wreak obvious havoc on your computer," Merritt says. "You'd get a blue screen, or your computer would crash, alerting you to an infection. But cybercriminals' methods have evolved; they want to avoid detection as long as possible. This year's results show that nearly half of Internet users believe that unless their computer crashes or malfunctions, they're not 100% sure they've fallen victim to such an attack."

More than a quarter (27%) of online adults report having been notified to change their password for a compromised e-mail account. With people sending, receiving, and storing everything from personal photos (50%) to work-related correspondence and documents (42%) to bank statements (22%) and passwords for other online accounts (17%), those e-mail accounts can be a potential gateway for criminals looking for personal and corporate information.

"Personal e-mail accounts often contain the keys to your online kingdom. Not only can criminals gain access to everything in your inbox, they can also reset your passwords for any other online site you may use by clicking the 'forgot your password' link, intercepting those e-mails and effectively locking you out of your own accounts," says Adam Palmer, Norton lead cyber-security advisor. "Protect your e-mail accordingly by using complex passwords and changing them regularly."

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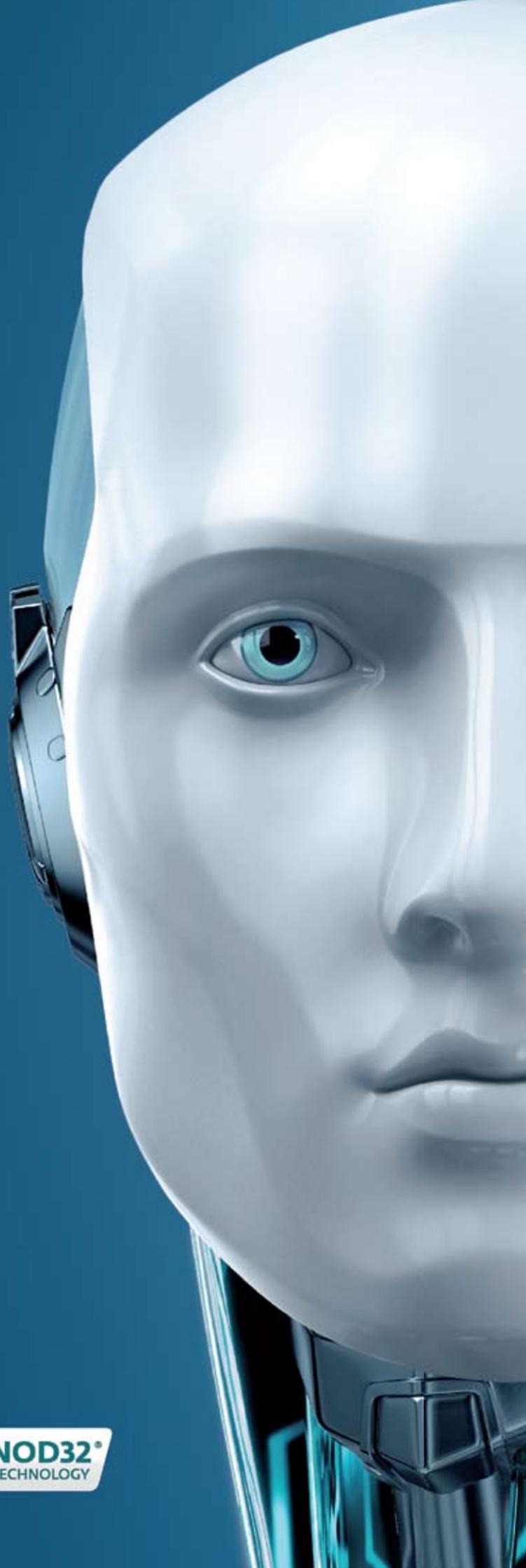
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Evolution of

Advanced Channel Technologies (Pty) Ltd (ACT) is a focused supplier of high quality IT consumables and accessories. The company's products and value-added services support cost-effective print management, risk management in the data storage arena, and quality output to all media formats, including specialty papers.

ACT is committed to the delivery of world-class products and services to a national network of resellers who address the entire potential market for IT consumables and accessories in South Africa and southern Africa.

The company operates as a fully-authorized supplier of a comprehensive range of high quality products that are manufactured by the world's premier vendors.

The product lines carried by ACT include printer toner and ink cartridges, storage media tapes, USBs, SD memory, optical, memory sticks, flash drives, computer accessories, gaming accessories, head sets, keyboards, notebook accessories, tablet accessories, iPhone and Apple accessories, Samsung Smartphone accessories, wireless speakers and docking stations.

ACT has always understood that it's the attachment products around the hardware that continue to offer value and profit to our resellers.

"We've always had a value proposition behind our consumables business, which we believed in and delivered on, and it was easy for us to see how this could be extended to deliver in other areas," says MD Gary Pickford.

The ACT consumables business has a value chain that delivers a superior service to our partners across southern Africa. This value chain specialises in the delivery of product with high volume and high margin opportunities for our resellers.

In the printer market, these opportunities would include photo paper and consumables; in the PC environment there would include wireless speakers, keyboards, cleaning products and digital storage; in the mobile world of tablets and smart phones these would include covers, wireless keyboards, carry cases etc.

Once it made the leap to extend its operations from a pure printer consumables player to add distribution of technology accessories, ACT had found its strategic direction, Pickford says.

The consumer is driving the demand for mobility and this will force companies to adopt mobile technology products. As a result the demand for the technology accessories and peripherals will increase in the workplace and availability will come through the reseller channel, not just from retail outlets.

"However these mobile products are no longer just about technology, they are lifestyle brands," he says. "Users want to choose accessories that are cool and functional. This will move demand away from the boring and cheap, to brands that reflect the user's personal preferences and identity".

As a result of this ACT has adjusted the way it thinks about product lines and brands, and how it will assist its resellers and retailers

a distributor



Gary Pickford, MD of ACT.

to sell them through to their customers.

“Now we need to look at accessories in terms of their unique customer segmentations – we can’t just focus on a broad product range all under one brand, we will need to carry a range of individual brands that satisfies the customer’s personal preferences and identity.”

Traditionally, the company has enjoyed strong relationships with vendors including: Bone, Brother, Canon, Epson, HP, Lexmark, OKI, Samsung, Sitecom, Verbatim and Xerox.

ACT acquired accessory distributor DCS in June 2012, which brought the following brands into the ACT stable: Angry Birds, Bugatti, Click Car Mouse, Emtec, Eurocase, Fellowes, Gear 4, Hercules, Ion, Moshi, Sitecom, Skull Candy, Thrustmaster, Trekstor and Trust.

As a distributor, ACT works with the traditional reseller channel as well as through the retail environment.

“We want to work with our retail and reseller partners in a value chain partnership that will negate the risks from the complexity that this customer segmentation will bring to stock availability and stock obsolescence – we have to look this holistically.”

What ACT brings to this partnership is the tools and expertise to manage this value chain efficiently so that our partners can optimise the profit available from this product segment.

It also brings the ACT brand ambassadors to the party who will help to predict market trends and maximise the appeal of product lines that are specifically suited to a segment.

ACT is a company in the MB Technologies Group, Southern Africa’s leading black-owned IT distribution group (www.mbtech.co.za).

ACT is currently a level 3 contributor and is a majority black owned enterprise. The shareholders are Royal Bafokeng Holdings (RBH) which is the majority shareholder, and Investec Bank Limited.

ACT has also extended its footprint into Africa with branches in Namibia and Mozambique. In addition ACT has a focused sales team that services the other territories in Southern African from its Johannesburg office.



Moshi – iGlaze

Slim and functional, Moshi’s iGlaze with VersaCover protects your iPad like no other. iGlaze excels at protecting iPad’s aluminium back from scratches, while the VersaCover protects your Retina display with a soft microfiber lining. The VersaCover’s built-in magnet assembly supports iPad’s auto-wake/sleep feature and also doubles as multi-functional stand. Its unique folding design allows iPad to be used in both portrait and landscape modes, providing you with both convenient viewing and comfortable typing angles. For complete protection and functionality, Moshi’s iGlaze with VersaCover is the perfect solution for your iPad.

Skullcandy – Ink’d-2

Leaving an undisputed mark on critics and believers alike, this popular bud has been re-shaped, re-tuned and re-produced for true fans. Complete with Supreme Sound, the Ink’d 2 is a remix worth hearing for yourself. Supreme Sound delivers attacking bass, natural vocals and precision highs. A flattened cable gives the product style and durability, while the Mic1–db collection lets you manage your device.



Skullcandy - Uprock Gear

The Uprock is a perfect blend of style, comfort,

and performance. This on-ear beauty fits close to the head, providing a low profile look, while delivering our Attacking Bass, Natural Vocals, and Precision Highs – a pure audio experience for every genre of music. All housed in a sleek design and boasting an audio experience that easily burns the competition, the Uprock is where urban-heritage meets Supreme Sound.



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Top channel



Once again, it's that time of the year when we select who we think were the companies – and the individuals behind them – which wielded the biggest influence on the channel over the past 12 months.

And once again, The Three Wise Men (with a bit of input from a Smart Woman) - who, between them, have more than a century's experience in the IT industry, and more specifically, the channel - huddled over innumerable cups of tea, mulled, moaned, cajoled and finally agreed upon who, in their opinion, this year's biggest influencers in the channel were.

Unlike previous years, this year proved a little more contentious than others. There was a time, for example last year, when you could tick off the most influential people in distribution on the fingers of one hand. But in the space of little more than 12 months, times have changed ... radically.

There has been more consolidation for one and, for another, there have been some new entrants and new 'movers and shakers' in the channel that few would have expected. One such example would be banking giant FNB which, with its unique IT purchasing options to customers, has literally turned the market on its head. No-one in today's market can sneeze at selling more than 100 000 units in less than a year. Another 'disruptive' company that the Three Wise Men agreed on was the Core Group, the sole distributor of Apple products in South Africa. As has been the case elsewhere in the world, there is little doubt that Apple has had a huge impact on the IT industry and this impact has been just as significant locally – if somewhat slower due to the delayed release of new product. And, although Core and Apple have never really been channel players in the traditional sense, they have had a major effect on it. Unfortunately, Core and its CEO, RJ van Spaandonk, declined to participate.

Totally subjective as usual, the gathered panel took into consideration numerous criteria such as growth, market share, aggressive agency additions, entry into new markets and pure re-invention, or innovation, in go-to-market strategies before deciding to divide this year's selection into three distinct groupings: The Trend-Setters; The Stalwarts; and Those To Watch.

So, without further ado and with teacups firmly in saucers, these are the companies and people we feel are the distribution channel's top influencers ...

influencers

The Trend-Setters

Pinnacle Technology Holdings

In an economic world where organisations are glad just to hold their own with any kind of single-digit growth, Pinnacle Technology Holdings has, for the past couple of years, proved to be a unique exception. Last year, the JSE-listed company posted revenue results showing around 30% year-on-year growth and this year it continued in similar vein. These results seem even more astounding when one considers the logistical and cultural headaches posed by the group's acquisition of Axiz and its subsequent merging of this with in-house software distributor Workgroup. Pinnacle's successful year-on-year performance continues to astound many of its critics but, according to CEO Arnold Fourie, there's still more to come ...

Arnold Fourie, CEO of Pinnacle Technology Holdings

Number of years in the channel: 19 years.

Business philosophy you live by: Be positive, nothing is impossible.

How do you see distribution evolving over the next few years: Distribution is in a very good space. Distributors will add more value over time, with a keen focus area of assisting our channel partners with the ever-increasing complex solutions on offer. There will be further consolidation among distributors resulting in less, but more efficient distributors doing a larger bouquet of product.

To what do you attribute Pinnacle's phenomenal growth over the past few years: Tenacity, never saying no, and believing that our customers deserve the best possible service and support.

What is your strategy in maintaining this growth: Consolidation of the distribution landscape, supporting our partners in their quest for growth, increasing our basket of offerings and entering new technology areas where we have not been represented up to now.

What are you putting in place in terms of succession planning: We have many capable directors in the group who, each in their own right, will be able to take over from me. Additionally, there are also some very good candidates outside the group who I know and who could be approached in the future. However, I still enjoy my responsibilities and

hope to occupy my current seat for a couple of years to come.

Personal likes: Positive, energetic people.

Personal dislikes: Negative people and long, boring meetings.

How do you relax: I love to travel with my family.

Your best business advice to deal with the current economic conditions: We do not live on an island and cannot ignore the international challenges. As a company, we must strive to remain robust and ready to withstand severe economic downturns. Therefore, we are absolutely focused on

Drive Control Corporation
As one of the few "independent" distributors, Drive Control continues to thrive as others flounder. With its traditional business based on components like disk drives, imaging and printing, consumables and PCs, DCC has in recent years upped the ante and moved into the networking, security and server sectors. Rumours abound about DCC being a prime acquisition target but whoever makes a bid would have to have a large chequebook for one of the most cash-rich and market-savvy distributors.



efficiency and elasticity. Having said that, we cannot wait for the international economy to finally decide what direction to take, hence we remain entrepreneurial and approach each opportunity with great enthusiasm.

Neil Rex, MD of Drive Control

Number of years in the channel: Too many - 24 I think.

Business philosophy you live by: Every decision must be able to sustain and support itself long-term. Never be short-sighted. If your cost to margin ratio is correct you will be successful.

To what do you attribute DCC's continued success in the channel: We believe we are a business with integrity and play by the same set of rules we did when we started out in 1988.

Is there still a place in the market for the traditional distributor: Not too sure how you today classify the traditional distributor. I do not believe there are many of them left. But to answer your question: As of today, yes, but



COVER STORY

>>> I do feel that position will change over the next five years. This change will be brought about by market forces and the change in how ICT products are used.

What is the biggest problem facing SA distributors: The increase in the cost of doing business in a maturing market place. Costs are increasing at a rate higher than inflation, while margins attainable are reducing and not supported by sufficient revenue growth.

How do you see distribution evolving over the next few years: Distribution cannot sustain the model of absorbing more and more of the costs between the warehouse doors and the end user. Either there is going to be acknowledgement of this value, or this route to market in certain instances will change in the future. Corporates are regularly looking at this cost for certain products where no external third-party value is created.

What is your strategy for DCC going forward: I do believe that we have a few opportunities open to us. The one is to increase our presence in the enterprise space. The viability of this has been confirmed to us via our Dell relationship. Then we need to continue to expand our services offering to the channel. We are slowly seeing this starting to bear fruit.

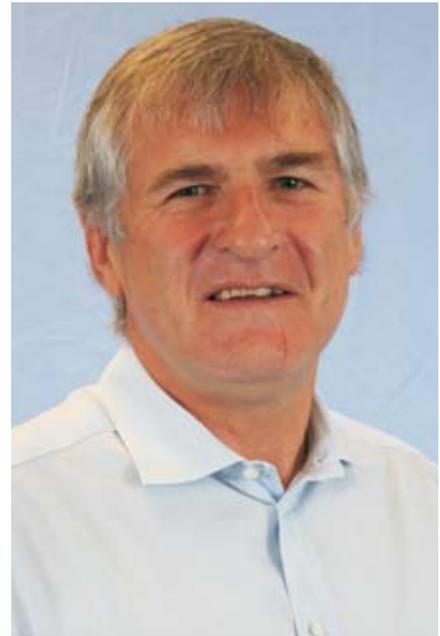
Do you have a succession plan: Still too young to think that far ahead.

Personal likes: Not cars, planes and boats, but buffalo and sable.

Personal dislikes: Any form of dishonesty. Right to the smallest lie.

How do you relax: Farming.

Your best business advice in today's economic climate: Do not do business just to show revenue. It will harm your business in many ways – from cash flow through to unwanted overheads.



Westcon

As one of the biggest networking distributors in South Africa, Westcon stole a march on its competitors by rapidly spreading its wings into the rest of Africa through a series of significant acquisitions. Those acquisitions, we believe, are not over and another significant announcement should be made in the coming weeks. At the time of going to press, however, Jacques Malherbe, CEO of Westcon for the past seven years and the driving force behind its success on the continent, announced his resignation. Andrew Moodley, his interim replacement at the local operation, subsequently answered the questionnaire.

Andrew J Moodley, executive director of Westcon

Number of years in the channel: 5.718 (give or take a few days).

Business philosophy you live by: Everyone has an inherent responsibility to allow those around themselves to understand the nature of the industry and thus achieve their full potential by providing guidance, mentorship, coaching and life-skills to those around them. As leaders, we so often just focus on the number generating potential of people and forget that we need to create an environment that gives them relevance, fuels their passion, as well as gives them a sense of community and belonging, be it employees, customer or vendors.

What is the secret to Westcon's continued success in distribution: We chose to not be a passive participant in the market. We are always testing new markets, exploring synergies between our vendors, ensuring that every vendor on our line card allows us to drive our channel services model into their offerings. As a result, partnering with

customers and vendors is pivotal to what we do - as is ensuring that their business is successful, beyond just selling them a box. Often a vendor will lean on us to find innovative and sustainable ways of opening up the channel or new markets., whereas channel partners are looking to us to give them the next-day entry into the markets they don't participate in, or to grow their relevance in their current markets. Our services-led sales approach and our business partnering are premised on this and we will continue to invest and develop these components of our business.

How important is the Rest of Africa market and how is Westcon currently doing in these countries: Westcon Africa is a sister company that operates in most countries in Africa, with our other sister company in the Middle East covering countries such as Libya and Egypt. Datatec and the Westcon Group continues to invest in Africa supporting organic and acquisitive growth. The recent acquisition of Afnia is testament to this.

Westcon has had more success in Africa than many others – what advice do you have

for local companies looking to expand there: Don't try and be the Americans of Africa, as a good friend of mine once said. He has led a few successful large scale telco operations in Africa, so I would say that his theory is sound. When we went into Africa, it was not with the intention of colonising it. It was more to provide the same levels of service, access to products and quality vendors - as well as the Westcon experience - that our partners in other parts of the world have enjoyed. At the same time, we planted our feet firmly wherever we decided to participate with investment in local infrastructure and, more importantly, local people.

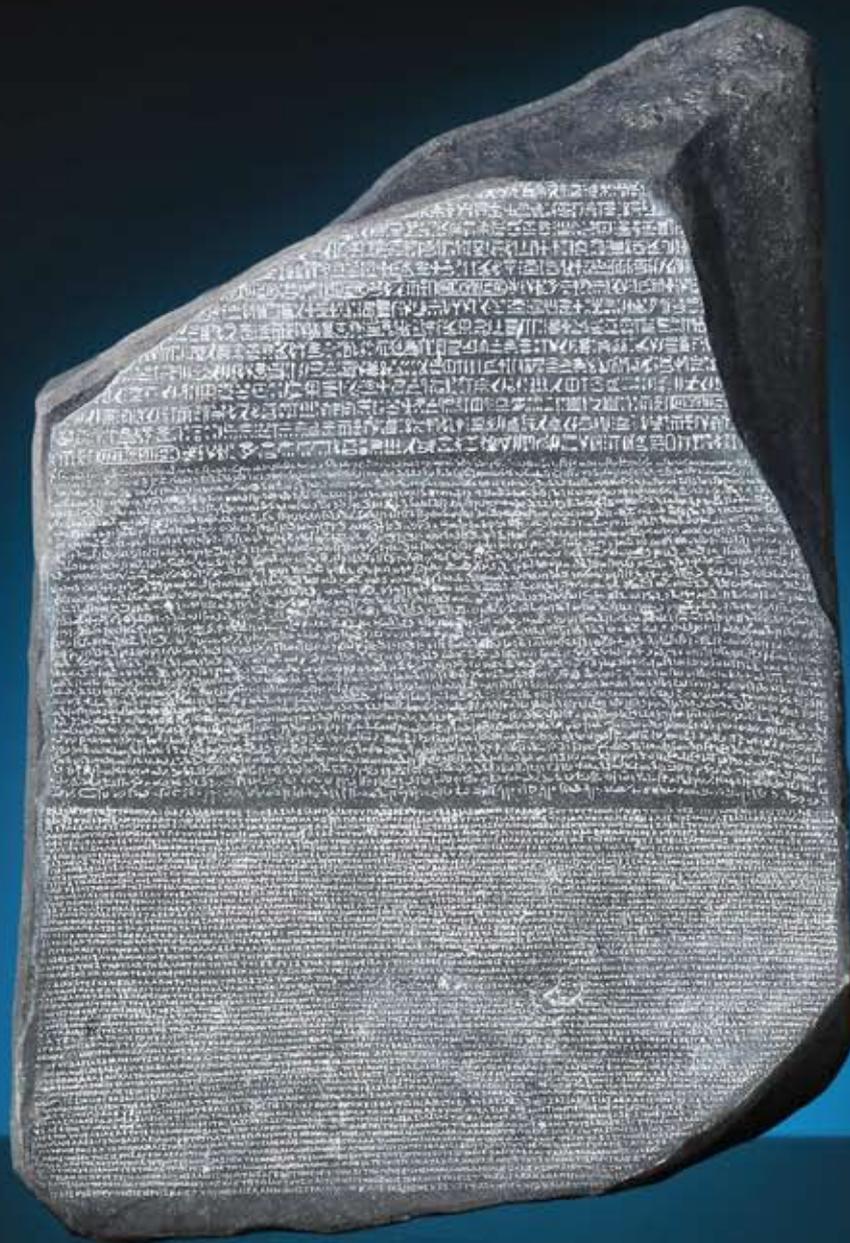
How do you see distribution evolving over the next couple of years: Distribution will become more important to the vendors. The channel will continue to demand more from distributors. The distribution model as it exists today, at a snapshot, even our own organisation will not be the model for tomorrow. Distribution has to become more of an aggregator of vendors' offerings coupled with being an aggregator of the channel's products and services. Our job will remain one of opening new markets and growing the channel. What exactly we sell and >>>

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For more information contact the HP Enterprise team at Tarsus Technologies: teamiss@tarsus.co.za

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BEYOND ALL EXPECTATIONS

COVER STORY

>>> how we package it will be the strength of the next generation distribution market. What I can say is that it will definitely not be about brown boxes.

What is your strategy for Westcon going forward: We will continue to grow and diversify the business through organic and acquisitive activities. There are a few projects that we have been incubating which we will announce in the coming weeks and months. Westcon SA has been about thought leadership and the channel has come to expect that from us, and we attract vendors based on this cultural

Asgar Mahomed, MD of Esquire

Number of years in the channel: 13

Business philosophy that you live by: Conduct your business life with commitment and passion so that, if you looked back, you wouldn't want to change very much – and that you would stand by most of your decisions and actions.

Esquire has burgeoned in recent years to become one of the country's leading distributors – to what do you attribute the company's success: Realising that, in the IT distribution channel, there is no five day working week – it is almost a 24x7 commitment. Additionally, we believe we have achieved our success by bringing the right products to the market – at the right price – and have surrounded ourselves with a good management team, and have tried to engender a sense of loyalty and commitment with all staff members.

What changes have you seen in distribution over the years and how do you see it evolving in the years to come: We have seen an increase in competition from more international players. At the same time, buyers are more discerning and are demanding better price performance and service levels. We have also witnessed, in recent years, a sharper move towards the online business model.

What are the biggest problems facing local distributors today: The continual decrease of margins, a worrying lack of integrity in the channel and a tough trading environment brought on by the recent global financial crisis and its lingering hangover affect - and the sense of uncertainty this garners.

How important is online, in terms of transactions, ordering etc., in distribution: It is strategically important and growing in overall importance, day to day. It cannot be ignored. To this end Esquire engineered – and recently launched – its Virtual Reseller Network (VRN), a world first for the technology distribution market. Since officially launching the VRN

strength. We will continue to be the distributor of choice for our partners that understand this model and want what we are offering to the market. Services will remain a key focus, business relevance selling is taking root strongly, our physical security business (Westcon Sentronics) is taking us to a new era in the security and video space, our security business remains a growth area, and our Datacentre business that started around our Flexpod (Cisco, Netapp and other vendor partners) will continue to grow and drive our road to the cloud strategy for our partners.

Esquire

For years, Esquire has seemed to flirt around the edges of the major distribution houses in South Africa. But over the past couple of years, with innovations such as its on-premise retail store – one of the best in the country – and its online procurement system, it has started to come to the fore as the distributor of choice for many local resellers. The company's continual innovative offerings to resellers, coupled with a more aggressive go-to-market strategy had the panel in agreement that it was definitely setting some new trends in local distribution.



earlier this year, Esquire has launched more than 200 fully-fledged e-commerce sites, which are now running off the VRN. We believe our VRN will turn the traditional reseller model on its head. What it has effectively done is turn participating resellers into 'multi-millionaires overnight'. Those Esquire resellers who participate in our VRN are given virtual access to the entire Esquire stock holding, which is updated directly to the reseller's web-site at regular intervals – often as frequently as every three minutes. In 2009/2010 there were only about eight to 10 fully-fledged e-commerce sites in South Africa.

Your best advice on surviving the current economic conditions: Don't get stupid about it. Draw your partners closer, protect the business that you do have and don't sacrifice your business model for short-term profit. There is business out there. It is going to take more sweat and blood, but the opportunities are definitely out there. We are working harder and are more committed than ever before. The speed bumps are harsh, but we are pushing through it and so should everyone else. Never waste a good recession, as they say in the classics.

With the launch of our VRN, there are now more than 200 e-commerce sites operating in the country. As pioneers we plan to be at the vanguard as the lure of online shopping - and the conducting of business online - increases exponentially over the coming years.

What is your strategy for Esquire in the years to come: Continuing to provide the market with products that are sought after – and providing them at the best price possible. Focusing increasingly on becoming a lifestyle focused technology distributor with the realisation that the digital lifestyle is not just a passing fashion – it is going to be part and parcel of the day-to-day fabric of life.

Personal likes: Companies who truly care for their employees, and people who have ambition but who, in achieving their goals, do not harm anyone in their pursuit of these goals.

Personal dislikes: Hypocrites in both the business and personal world and people who brag but really have nothing to brag about. People who say one thing to your face, but do something else behind your back.

How do you relax: By going to gym, swimming, co-producing films and keeping tabs with the film industry, making plans for the future of Esquire, and spending time with my family.

Your best business advice in the current economic climate: Provide your best at all times and provide your clients with as many value-added benefits as you can – whether you are providing services, or products, or a mixture of both.

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First National Bank

FNB not only stole a march on its banking competitors by offering its customers the opportunity to buy tech – interest free and at a reasonable price – it also turns the traditional channel on its head. While stoically accepting the intrusion of telcos in their space, resellers now have a competitor the likes of which they have never had to compete against – a bank. And for some of them, it is their own banker. While FNB is currently focused more on devices such as smartphones and tablets, it can't be long before customer demand forces them into other areas. And it can't be long, either, before their banking counterparts realise the value-add and join the fray.

Kartik Mistry, head of smart devices at FNB

Number of years in IT: I have a background in IT, but spent most of my working career in process optimisation, cost management, project management and, most recently, product development.

Business philosophy you live by: "Whatever actions a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues." Bhagavad Gita (3.21)

What was the driving force behind FNB getting involved in selling devices: In a price and cost sensitive environment, we understand that digital banking is the way forward for our customers and the bank. We find that most of our customers don't always have access to the technologies that aid digital banking. This is why we decided not only to provide the channels for digital banking, but to also provide a platform for a cost effective and exciting banking experience.

Did you realise you'd have as big an impact on the market as you've had: I knew that this offer would have a positive impact on the market, but I never imagined that the impact would have escalated to the current extent. It's been interesting to see how the market reacted to our offer.

Are your offerings simply a value-add, or does FNB view selling mobile devices as a viable business unit: We definitely see it as more than a value add. It currently operates within

Core Banking Solution to ensure an alignment with our core competency – banking. The business is measured separately with its own financial and business targets.

What are FNB's future plans in this space (ie. Will it go into other sectors of IT – PCs, servers, consoles etc.): Our plan is always to help customers bank in more convenient ways, as well as, adding as much value to our customers' lives as possible. The technology market is a dynamic one, with a very short product lifecycle in comparison with banking, therefore, we will always keep close attention to the consumer technology market and provide solutions to meet our customers' needs.

Who do you view as your competitors in this market: We are in banking and here to compete with other banks. Being rated as the most innovative bank in the world is a proud title to hold. As history has shown (and continues to show), innovation brings about opportunities for a more enriching life. This is what I believe makes FNB stand out, which is clearly indicated by our slogan.

Personal likes: I've always been a gadget freak, always wanting the latest "toys," but could not always afford it. I guess this is why I love the space I'm in, i.e. providing aspirational devices to those, who would not necessarily have been able to afford it otherwise. I love a variety of music and also sports, specifically soccer. I am a passionate Manchester United supporter. I also love reading biographies, spending time in quiet, spiritual places and meditation.



Personal dislikes: Negative people.

What do you do to relax: I spend time with my wife and nine-month-old son. I practice meditation daily (morning and evening). I find this a wonderful way to prepare for the day ahead which helps alleviate the stresses of the day. This helps me a lot.

Your best business advice in the current economic climate: Leadership is an essential element that can govern success in any economic climate, in this regard I like to reflect on the following statement "In these turbulent times, never has the world been more in need of centered, spiritually aware, compassionate, firm leadership – leadership that is practical yet visionary. Too much is at stake for you as a leader to limit your view to the horizons of your personal, organisational or national agendas, however worthy these may be. The increasing interdependence of all forms of life on this planet requires a broader perspective that looks outward to embrace the entire globe, forward in time to care for future generations, and inward to honour the divine in your heart." – BTSwami, Leadership for an Age of Higher Consciousness

The Stalwarts

Mustek

Not the easiest of years for Mustek as foreign exchange vagaries again took their toll on yearly results. But, as it continues on its quest to sign up Tier One brands and with probably the best service reputation in the market, it still remains one of the biggest and most popular distributors in the country. With the on-record statement that Mustek will divest of its shares in Comztek and seemingly new plans for group company Rectron, it is obvious that the ever-astute David Kan has a strategy to take the organisation to its next level.

David Kan, CEO of Mustek

Number of years in the channel: 25 years.

Business philosophy you live by: Do what I say, keep my word, and lead by example.

In the current economy, is there still a role for traditional distribution: A distributor does not only supply products into the channel, but also has to source the right products for the market, market these products, run logistics from the factories to customers, provide speedy and effective after-sales service, provide solutions to the customer when there are multiple products involved and also provide finance. So when you look at all of this in context, the answer to your question is: Yes, there is still a role for distributors in today's market.

How can distributors thrive in the market instead of simply surviving: >>>



Tarsus

Often regarded as the "Blue-chip" of local distributors, Tarsus continues to steam along in a turbulent market and is still the mainstay of the MB Technologies group. It is also the mainstay of a number of prominent vendors, most notably HP, and undoubtedly has felt some of the same pain this year that HP has. Sources indicate, however, that Tarsus is reducing its reliance on HP while bolstering efforts with other Tier One brands – a case of same basket, more eggs. Along with some group plans in terms of consolidated infrastructure, warehousing and logistics, it can't be long before the rousing giant once again awakes.

Pierre Spies, CEO of Tarsus Technologies

Number of years in the channel: I am in my 21st year in the forever changing channel - just about to become legal and still loving it!

Business philosophy you live by: - Do unto others as you would like to be done unto you. The wheel turns – it might turn very slowly at times, but it does turn. The old adage that people buy from people still holds true, so building and maintaining relationships is imperative. I also believe that one should lead by example.

How has distribution changed over the past couple of years: The biggest change in the distribution space has been the appointment of a multitude of distributors for most of the major brands. The South African market is way over-distributed which has led to the severe erosion of margins and this has resulted in, unfortunately, less investment in the general channel.

What has Tarsus done to address this change: Tarsus has been "forced" to diversify and as a result we have signed up a variety of major brands. In hindsight, this has actually worked out exceptionally well for us and has allowed us to better balance the business for the better. Sometimes things do happen for a reason.

What is your future strategy for Tarsus: Tarsus is still committed to the current channel model and we will continue to work closely with both vendors and resellers to see how best we can grow our respective markets in the years to come.

Where do you see distribution – and more specifically Tarsus - in five years' time: The next five years will be telling based on what international trends start to emerge. One thing I do predict is that there will be further consolidation in both the distribution and reseller channels.

Personal likes: The forever changing IT market we all operate in and the immense



opportunities it presents us with. People with the right attitude, which is key in any business. The many relationships in the channel that I have forged over the years. And, finally, healthy competition – it's always a good thing and keeps you on your toes.

Personal dislikes: Complacency is a "killer" and I despise dishonesty.

How do you relax: I try my level best to spend quality time with my family as I firmly believe that you must have some balance in life. I'm not a great golfer but, believe it or not, I do really find it relaxing chasing that small, white ball around a course. I am also an avid sports fan and recharge my batteries watching as much of it as possible.

>>> The distributor needs to add value to customers rather than just pushing boxes into the channel.

What are some of the future plans you have for Mustek: Maximising from the present infrastructure and identifying niche market and products.

What future plans do you have for the Mustek Group: The same as above.

Where do you see distribution and, in particular Mustek, in five years time: The distributors in South Africa will rapidly grow their business into other African countries as the local market is getting more mature. In the past 10 years, Mustek has established subsidiaries and associations in many African countries and we will continue with this strategy into the future.

Do you have a succession plan: Certainly ...

Personal likes: I actually enjoy working where I feel I can contribute and achieve goals.

Personal dislikes: I don't like people who cannot keep their word.

How do you relax: In the company of friends.

Your best business advice in today's economic climate: "Cash is King" and don't over-gear yourself. As a distributor or reseller, we need to develop value beyond the box.

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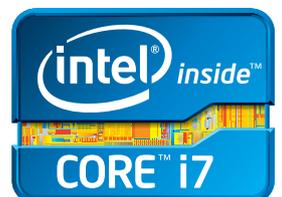
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COVER STORY

AxizWorkgroup

It's not always easy to take two such disparate companies as Axiz (a hardware distri) and Workgroup (for years the country's only software distributor) and meld them together. Different corporate cultures, different management styles ... not to mention different logistics and administration. So there have been some trying times for AxizWorkgroup over the past few months. But, under the stewardship of industry veteran Henry Ferreira, the company now looks to be on an even keel and, more importantly, with a single, focused corporate vision.

Henry Ferreira, CEO of AxizWorkgroup

Number of years in the channel: 27.

Has it been difficult for you adjusting from a vendor background to distribution: No. It has, in fact, been a very easy adjustment as I have worked very closely with distribution for many years.

What has surprised you most being "on the other side of the fence": The incredible blend of skills that are required to run an effective distribution business.

Is the merger between Axiz and Workgroup now finally bedded down: Yes it is – we are now truly functioning as one company.

How has this changed the nature of the company's distribution business: It has enhanced our value proposition to the channel, allowing us to provide our channel partners with the most comprehensive range of "best of breed" products, services and solutions.

What are some of the future strategies you are putting in place for AxizWorkgroup: We will continue to enhance our value proposition to both our channel and our key vendors through better service levels, increased skills, clear and focused product strategies, expansion into new areas of business, and on-going refinement of our existing product portfolio.

Will we see further consolidation between AxizWorkgroup and Pinnacle: We will continue to operate as two truly independent distribution companies.



Is there a succession plan in place at the company: Yes indeed. No company can survive and thrive in the longer-term without this. Succession planning has to be an integral part of your overall company strategy as this is the foundation on which the future of the business is built. Within AxizWorkgroup we are indeed fortunate to have one of the strongest and most competent management teams in the industry, and this does bode well for the future.

Personal likes: "Can do people" – positivity is infectious.

Personal dislikes: "Can't do people" and "Lone Rangers".

How do you relax: With my family and my two bulldogs.

Your best business advice in today's economic environment: Whilst we cannot ignore events that are taking place around us, and indeed need to take cognisance of these, we need to focus on our core strengths and the areas where we can "make a difference". Do not spend too much time and energy trying to change things that are beyond your control, but rather focus those energies on the areas that you can influence or change. Remain nimble and entrepreneurial, and seize the opportunities that are present. Continue to reinvent yourself and your company in order to position yourself where you expect the market will be, as opposed to where the market is.

Rectron

It's been just on a year since Lindi Shortt took over the reins at Rectron from Mark Lu and, despite some expected hiccups at the beginning of her tenure, she now seems to have settled in. New management styles, new thinking and new strategies are always difficult to introduce in established businesses used to a particular way of operating, but it looks like Shortt may have succeeded. There is definitely an air of a "different" Rectron emerging.

Lindi Shortt, MD of Rectron

Number of years in the channel: Too many to tell (officially 25 years).

It's been a tough year, how have you and Rectron weathered the storm: In the last year, to use a good computer analogy, we have "rebooted" and "reinvented" Rectron and navigated our way through the management transition, a further disruption in the tough business climate. The issues and problems are very much the same as they always are, global financial crisis, margin pressures - the challenge is to find a new way through them. One of our key priorities is to build value and create long-term sustainable success. In order to do this we need to understand our key drivers such as cost efficiencies, product portfolios, customer relationships, human capital, employee knowledge and technology. Our "hands on" approach to the business is one of the main drivers of our success and we will continue to engage at all levels. We want to be a partner to our resellers now and into the future, and will make sure we use information and resources to drive this. We are not in business for today, we are in business for today, tomorrow and the future, so we will continue to meet customer demands in an industry driven by economic conditions, demographic trends and pricing.

What changes are you seeing in traditional distribution: The value of a distributor is moving away from offering boxes at crazy prices. As a distributor, we have to justify our business by being the centre of information for the channel. This means working with vendors to understand new developments in product, understanding trends in the local market, and negotiating best deals and bulk pricing for efficient and timeous sell through. At Rectron, we give our focus and attention to all types of resellers - from the large corporate reseller,

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Those to Watch ...

Comztek

It still remains unclear what the future holds for Comztek except for the fact that Mustek will soon cease to be a shareholder in the company. Informed sources indicate that the on again/off again Westcon acquisition will finally happen in the next couple of weeks. If this comes to fruition, the resignation of Jacques Malherbe as CEO of Westcon could indicate that there are bigger things ahead for Comztek MD Paul Conradie.

Paul Conradie, MD of Comztek

Years in the channel: 25 years.

Is there still room in the market for a specialised distributor such as Comztek: As long as there are vendors and customers that require more than a "box-dropper", there will be a place for the Comzteks of the world.

What are the challenges you face as a specialised distributor: The managing of opportunities and expectations from vendors that are being marginalised in broad-based distribution and that require the services of a true value-add distributor.

Comztek has been expanding into Africa for years, how are you currently doing in these markets: Comztek is satisfied with its vision of adopting an early Rest of Africa strategy that is now producing dividends above expectation. We are scrambling to keep up with a rapidly evolving market that is hungry for fresh solutions.

What are the specific challenges going into the rest of Africa: Working capital availability, exchange rate fluctuations, satisfying the demands of a market that is still largely in the growing phase ... and enough time to visit everybody.

What future strategies are you putting in place at Comztek: We will continue adding more layers to a solid foundation in the form of new products, skills sets and customer-centred activities, while solidifying and expanding our footprint into the Rest of Africa.

Where do you see Comztek in, say, five years' time: Still here.

Personal likes: People with their default setting on positive.

Personal dislikes: Wilful ignorance. Deliberate viciousness.

How do you relax: Try to keep my pilot's license current.

Your best business advice in the current economic climate: Don't fall until you're pushed!

ACT

ACT has traditionally been focused on the fairly pedestrian business of distributing consumables, but the company has always tried to find new and innovative ways to bring the products to market. Now, recognising the new trend to consumerisation of IT, it has started distributing a full range of digital lifestyle products as well – and is actively seeking new ways to bring these products to market while keeping faith with its resellers.



Gary Pickford, MD of ACT

Number of years in IT: 12

Business philosophy you live by: My business philosophy is probably considered old fashioned in its simplicity – make sure your goals and objectives are clearly communicated to all employees constantly and don't underestimate the power of working as a team. Make sure that every business transaction is done with a win-win principle in mind. Be respectful, be professional, be passionate ... and have some fun.

Please explain briefly how you have changed ACT's strategic direction and business model: Over the past 11 years ACT has delivered a value proposition across southern Africa

>>>

to the small, independent shop. We make sure that we make a difference to each and every one of these customers, delivering product, service and value when needed. It is this type of distributor that will succeed going forward – one who knows who their customer is.

What strategies is Rectron putting in place to address these changes: Create value for resellers, new revenue streams and efficiencies and, overall, improve visibility in our breadth of product by aligning ourselves with partners and suppliers. Our priority will be to continue to reward loyal customers while putting plans in place to actively assist new ones. In our pursuit of excellence and ambition to supply the best of breed brands portfolio to our customers, we will try to research opportunities for new and complementary product solutions for our diverse channel. We will continue to lead the market and diversify ourselves in our after-sales support services and plan to expand in this area. Most importantly, we aim to hire and retain the best staff in order to be able to deliver this service to our customers. We also have an aggressive internal training plan and we review employee progress and sentiment on a regular basis. It is our people at Rectron that make the difference.

What do you see as the biggest problem facing distribution today: There is too much information - how do we get the right information to our customers in the most relevant way, to actually benefit their business.

Where do you see Rectron in, say, five years time: Rectron works. If we can retain our good people and continue to deal with every client in a personal way, the sky is the limit.

Personal likes: I love to travel, meet new people and see new places.

Personal dislikes: Dishonesty and arrogance.

Your best business advice in today's economic environment: If you are not already buying from Rectron, please call me personally so we can see how we can help you.

COVER STORY

>>> built on the back of printer consumables. Our distribution network is one of the most established in our industry and we are now extending this to other product that will benefit from a value chain that is geared to distribute high volume, low value products, quickly and cost effectively.

What were the market forces that informed the change: The explosion of mobile technology gives us an opportunity to take the ACT philosophy of attaching an aftermarket product to a printer and doing the same thing with other technology products. The number of notebooks, iPads, Tablets and Ultrabooks that have been sold over the past year all require an aftermarket product such as USB hubs, power adapters, covers, keyboards, speakers etc. We believe that this presents a big opportunity for ACT.

How are these and other market forces affecting resellers: The explosion of mobile technology has presented a challenge to most traditional I.T. resellers and retailers because the profit margin on the hardware is being squeezed to single digit percentages in a highly competitive market place. The

obvious opportunity for these resellers is to attach aftermarket products to the sale of the technology and increase the profit on the sale.

Your best business advice in the current economic climate: Communicate constantly with your team that they shouldn't waste time focusing on things that are not in their control, such as the global economic crisis, pre-election politicking, strike action etc. Rather get them to focus on things that are in their control – being better than their competition. That's all it takes. Being in front of their customer constantly and looking for opportunities where both parties benefit.

Personal Likes: True friendship, ethical business, perfectly cooked lamb chops, hugs from my children, local music, smiles, sunsets.

Personal Dislikes: Unethical behaviour, negativity, warm beer, Winter mornings, racists, dentists.

What do you do to relax: Plonk down on my couch to watch a movie or go out with a bunch of friends to a good restaurant and drink a lot of wine.



Duxbury

Again, the panel swayed in the direction of one of the few remaining "independent" distributors in the market. While Duxbury maintains a solid, steady presence in the market, it is believed that there are aggressive plans by the company to expand its operations into the rest of Africa. It is also continually looking to boost its product portfolio, although in this regard it is very particular and agencies have to fit snugly with its specialised status. Like some of its other independent counterparts, the panel feels, Duxbury can also expect attention from potential suitors with a view to acquisition.



Graham Duxbury, CEO of Duxbury Networking

Number of years in the channel: 28 years.

Is there still room in the market for specialised distribution: Absolutely. We may never be the biggest in the market, but we are definitely still satisfyingly profitable.

What are the challenges specialised distributors are faced with: We have to go out and really promote our offerings because we traditionally have not had huge brand names.

How have you seen distribution evolve over the past few years: I think the more it changes the more it stays the same. Fundamental values do not change, in my opinion.

What strategies are you putting in place to address this continual evolution: In terms of changing with the rapid technical changes we have one of the best forward-thinking CTO's in the country and so, if anything, we are ahead of the curve. In terms of other changes, as I said, fundamental good value and good service remain, as they always have done, as our ultimate goal.

Do you have a succession plan: We are not there yet, but our culture is to grow from within.

Personal likes: Straight-forward people who say it like it is and therefore have short, to-the-point meetings.

Personal dislikes: Meetings before 10:00am and vendor functions.

How do you relax: Long drives in the country.

Your best business advice in today's economic environment: Do not spend money you do not have.

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MB Technologies
Special Feature



Overview of MB Technologies: SA's leading black owned IT distributor

MB Technologies is southern Africa's leading black-owned IT distribution group boasting a multi-billion turnover level. Its operating companies include A.C.T., Channel Capital, Channel Risk Management, Platinum Micro, Printacom and Tarsus Technologies.

Established more than 27 years ago with Tarsus as the founding company, the MB Technologies group has grown into the leading southern African black-owned distributor of international first tier IT technology brands.

The group's core offerings include value-added IT hardware, consumables and component distribution complemented by innovative financing and insurance solutions offered by Channel Capital and Channel Risk Management respectively.

With Royal Bafokeng Holdings as the group's controlling shareholder, MB Technologies is the largest unlisted Black Empowered IT group in the country and one of the most significant contributors to transformation in the IT market. The group's strong focus on corporate social investment, black empowerment and employment equity has seen all of its companies becoming partners of choice within their specific areas of business.

This has in turn given MB Technologies' customers the ability to maximise their black economic empowerment credentials in technology purchases.

MB Technologies' primary focus is centred on distribution and the group's involvement in numerous areas of IT over close to three decades has seen it garnering a deep understanding of the trends in the local IT market, as well as the challenges faced by technology resellers and their customers.

This knowledge has been integrated into a set of group-wide value-added services that address the needs of both the reseller channel and the larger IT market.

MB Technologies' value-added services are as much focused on overcoming obstacles in the IT market as they are in acting as a catalyst for the market.

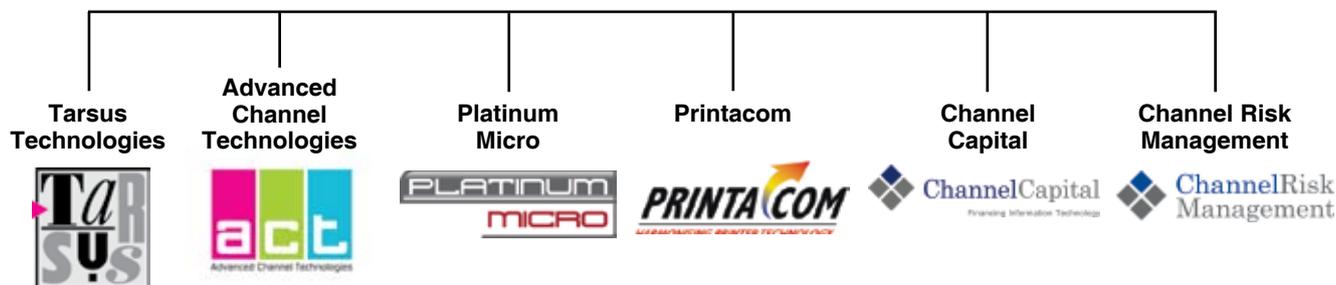
The logistics solutions, incentive schemes, training programmes, financing solutions and extremely focused product management strategies that have been implemented across the group have been recognised as some of the most innovative and forward thinking by market commentators and the local IT channel alike.

RBH owns 55% of MB Technologies, with the balance of the equity held by Investec.



Operations at distributors within the MB Technologies group.

MB Technologies Group Structure:



The shareholders:

Royal Bafokeng Holdings

Royal Bafokeng Holdings (Pty) Limited (RBH) is responsible for the management and development of the commercial assets of the Royal Bafokeng Nation (RBN), with the overall business objective of maximising returns to enable the RBN to deliver sustainable benefits to the community.

RBH was created in 2006 from the merger between Royal Bafokeng Resources (established in 2002) and Royal Bafokeng Finance (established in 2004). RBH functions as a community-based investment company whose investment activities are aimed at generating the income required for the funding of sustainable projects that will benefit the Bafokeng community.

RBH has assets spread across the mining, telecommunications, IT, services, infrastructure, financial and manufacturing sectors with a market value of approximately R30-billion. RBH initially acquired a 26% equity stake in MBT in September 2006 and exercised its option to increase the stake to 55% in February 2007.

RBH's investment philosophy

RBH seeks to acquire interests in well-run businesses that will generate superior returns over time. This is achieved through participating in the growth of the business during the holding period, investing in good quality assets in selected sectors that will produce growth and yield over the long term, encouraging partnerships, supporting management and providing fundamental analysis.

The RBH investment team spends considerable time analysing the fair value of potential targets, as well as their long-term growth prospects.

Because the future is uncertain, the group takes refuge in value; that is, it buys into businesses at prices that do not factor in high future earnings growth rates. It therefore generally avoids buying assets that are trading on high P/E ratios.

Notwithstanding its unwillingness to predict the future, it nonetheless believes in trends

and cycles. RBH recognises the importance of cycles in economic growth, commodities, interest rates and other macro drivers on company profits and share prices.

RBH's investments must position it to maximise the group's access to relevant deal flow so that it can have the greatest possible choice.

An essential element of past success has been RBH's approach of partnership and abundance. All stakeholders have a role to play in RBH's drive to create value and all need to share fairly in that value.

The RBN provides the capital, brand and credentials and the executive provides the experience and skills to generate financial and social returns from RBN's asset base.

In turn, the RBH executive seeks to support and encourage the management teams and co-shareholders of RBH's investments in creating value for all stakeholders, irrespective of the size of their shareholding.

Investec

Investec is a distinctive Specialist Bank and Asset Manager that provides a diverse range of financial products and services to a niche client base in three principal markets, the UK, South Africa and Australia as well as certain other countries.

The group was established in 1974.

Investec focuses on delivering distinctive profitable solutions for its clients in three core areas of activity namely, Asset Management, Wealth and Investment and Specialist Banking.

In July 2002 the Investec group implemented a dual listed company structure with listings on the London and Johannesburg Stock Exchanges. The combined group's current market capitalisation is approximately GBP3,6-billion.

Investec strives to be a distinctive specialist bank and asset manager driven by commitment to its core philosophies and values. Sound corporate governance is embedded in Investec's values, culture, processes, functions and organisational structure.

This distinction lies in its entrepreneurial culture, which is balanced by its strong risk management discipline, client-centric approach and ability to be nimble, flexible and innovative. Investec doesn't try to be all things to all people.

Instead, it aims to build well-defined, value-added businesses that serve the needs of market niches where it can compete effectively.

Investec acquired its 45% equity holding in MB Technologies in July 2010.

The Board of Directors:

Lucas Ndala : Non-executive Chairman

BCom Hons (UCT), BCom Acc (UWC), CA (SA), ELP (UCT: GSB)

Lucas Ndala is a chartered accountant, qualifying at Deloitte & Touche. Prior to this, he honed his skills at Barclays in corporate credit and at Mettle, where he was involved in structured finance. Lucas is responsible for RBH Group finance. He is currently the Royal Bafokeng Holdings Director: Finance. He has served in the MB Technologies Board since 2006 as a non-executive director. He took over as Chairman of the Group in 2009.

Glenn Fullerton : Group Chief Executive Officer

BCompt, BCompt Honours, CTA, CA (SA)

Glenn Fullerton studied his BCompt, BCompt Hons and CTA degrees part-time and simultaneously completed his articles with Deloitte. Since qualifying as a chartered accountant, Glenn has held various senior financial management and directorship positions in large corporations and has been instrumental in significant acquisitions, restructures, disposals, closures of operating companies and divisions as well as the complex unbundling of JSE listed Malbak in 1998.

Glenn joined the MBT Group in 2000 in the capacity as group financial director, a position he held for almost 10 years. He played a significant role in the growth of the Group and took over as group chief executive officer in July 2009.

Pierre Spies : Executive Director

BCom (RAU)

Pierre Spies obtained his BCom Accounting degree, part-time, in 1989 from the University of Johannesburg (previously know as RAU), and in 1987 he joined Coopers and Lybrandt, an accounting firm in order to complete his articles.

His relationship with Tarsus Technologies began in 1992 when he joined the company as an accountant. Pierre was promoted to financial director of Tarsus Technologies in 1994 and is credited with putting in place many of the business systems and controls for Tarsus's operations. In his 20 years with the company, Pierre has been involved in every aspect of its business, from feasibility studies, capital raising and due diligence exercises through to acquisitions, re-engineering and disposals of the company's subsidiaries.

Pierre assumed the position of CEO of Tarsus Technologies in 2007 and has made a significant contribution to the group and the South African IT Industry over many years. His hands-on approach to business has afforded him the opportunity to work with all the major IT vendors and resellers.

Pierre was appointed as an executive director on the MB Technologies Group main board with effect from 1 September 2009.

Non-executive Directors

Khumo Shongwe : Royal Bafokeng Holdings

BSc (MED) Hons (Psych), MSc (Clin Psych), Medunsa, BJourn, Rhodes University

Khumo Shongwe has 12 years' experience in the mining industry, where she has held senior positions at Lonmin, De Beers and Anglo Platinum. Khumo is currently the Royal Bafokeng Holdings executive director: HR and Transformation.

Thabiso Mashugane : Royal Bafokeng Holdings

BCom Economics, University of Port Elizabeth, BCom Finance Honours, Unisa, Certification in Investment Analysis and Portfolio Management, Unisa.

Thabiso Mashugane is the investment manager at Royal Bafokeng Holdings. Before joining RBH, Thabiso spent six years with Citigroup South Africa. During this time, Thabiso was employed as a fixed income and bond trader before joining the fixed income and derivatives structuring sales team, with a specific focus on hedging solutions for SA corporate companies.

He was appointed to the MBT Board in January 2008.

Wilhelm Nauta : Royal Bafokeng Holdings

BCom (Pretoria), BCom Hons (Pretoria), CA (SA)

Wilhelm Nauta is the executive in charge of the Strategic Investments Division at Royal Bafokeng Holdings. He joined the MB Technologies board in September 2012.

Kobus Viljoen : Investec

BCom (Stellenbosch), CTA (UCT), CA (SA)

After qualifying as a chartered account with Deloitte in Cape Town Kobus spent 10 years in the UK with investment banks Hill Samuel and Standard Bank London. He returned to Standard Bank in SA in 1996 as director and global head of Structured and Project Finance. In 1999 he joined the Wiphold group firstly as CEO of Wipcapital and later as CEO of Ezuza the mobile banking JV with Standard Bank and the forerunner to MTN Mobile Banking. Kobus joined Investec in 2008.

He joined the MBT Board in August 2010.

Richard Tunstall : Investec

B.Bus Sci (UCT), PGDA (UCT), CA (SA), CFA (Charter Pending)

Richard joined Investec in 2005, where he completed his articles, gaining experience in private banking, capital markets and investment banking. He subsequently spent two years with Investec Corporate Finance, before taking up his current role as a consultant in the Principal Investments division.

He joined the MBT Board in August 2010.

Message from the chairman, Lucas Ndala: 'Our people are the key to our success'

Over the past 27 years, MB Technologies has entrenched its position as one of the leading IT, consumables and component distributors in South Africa, a position it will continue to maintain as group companies evolve to meet the requirements of a constantly changing channel and the demands of its customers.

Over time, we see ourselves becoming a much more integrated business where we offer a full suite of value-added services to major corporates, the public sector, government and state-owned entities without losing focus on the channel. That is one of our future aspirations, along with being recognised as the leading visionary IT distribution company in the country.

When I talk of value-added services, I'm referring more to the software distribution side of the business. Group companies are already Microsoft providers for some of our clients, for example, and these services would include taking responsibility and managing that for them. It is more around managed services and making sure that when we supply a product, it is the complete product and one with which the client can start working immediately – a one-stop shop being the ideal.

As we move forward, I have little doubt that we will see more consolidation within the distribution sector – as we will in the whole IT environment – as customers look for more efficiencies and better pricing from their distribution partners. I think what might happen is that we will see some of the bigger distributors consolidating with smaller players to become major distributors.

One thing is certain: distribution will be more competitive than it already is and the differentiator will lie in how efficiently one can drop a box or distribute a product. Distributors will have to differentiate

themselves if they want to be leading contenders in this space.

Distributors will also have to consolidate warehouses and extract additional efficiencies from a logistics and handling perspective. We need to cut out inefficiencies and have one handling system to reach the client instead of having multiple trucks doing multiple deliveries, for example. So while we will see consolidation among distributors, we will also see consolidation within these companies in areas like warehousing and logistics as they look to drive more efficiencies in the business.

Of course, none of our future vision – or our past success – could be achieved without the people within MB Technologies.

Our people are by far and away our major differentiator and they are key in driving whatever strategy the group may adopt. We have great respect for our people and how we look after and manage the talent that we have is, and is going to be, a vital aspect in the future of the group. They are a crucial element because, fundamentally, we are a people business.

We will always need the kind of people that we have within our various group companies – innovative and new-ideas people who are self-driven and have that edge to succeed. Our people are critical to us as we look to the future and it is important that we not only attract the best skills available, but also that we retain and carefully maintain them.

Together with our people, our reseller partners and our vendor partners, I am certain that MB Technologies will not only maintain its dominant role in the South African distribution landscape, but will continue to lead, innovate and fulfil its vision in the months and years to come.



Lucas Ndala, chairman of MB Technologies.

Corporate Social Responsibility:

Giving back to the community

Being a responsible corporate citizen is important for MB Technologies, as well as for its shareholders.

To date, the Royal Bafokeng Nation has undertaken and overseen infrastructural development (roads, water reticulation, sanitation, electricity and street lights) valued at more than R2-billion.

In addition, 49 schools have been built, as well as a sports stadium, municipal buildings, and the Bafokeng Plaza shopping mall; and informal settlements have been formalised.

MB Technologies has donated IT equipment and consumables to NGOs working in the RBN. The MB Technologies group also hosts a Christmas party for 110 children from the Godisanang OVC programme.

The MB Technologies group companies all contribute individually to social upliftment. Tarsus Technologies has contributed to various community-driven orphan, AIDS and disability trusts, as well as community upliftment and business development projects. Tarsus has developed strategic initiatives to enable its stakeholders to combine efforts in developing the community. This includes projects run in conjunction with ABSA, Nedbank and the Royal Bafokeng Nation for sustainable housing, access to technology for school pupils and investment in the country's future sports stars.

Tarsus has introduced a learnership program which provides on-the-job training both at Tarsus and with reseller partners, allowing previously disadvantaged individuals to gain valuable experience and assisting in developing skills.

Tarsus has empowered 300 teachers through a programme that gives them access to finance. At the same time, Tarsus is developing a learnership programme for these schools that will provide support for teachers.

The distributor has donated PCs to the Maharishi Institute, an organisation that provides the financial support and academic learning skills to enable students to enter and succeed in post-secondary school studies. The Maharishi Institute runs experiential learning programmes to give young people the work experience they need to make them employable and provide the entrepreneurial background to build successful businesses.

Tarsus has provided PCs and notebooks to the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship, which supports aspiring entrepreneurs by offering practical business skills and access to coaches to offer guidance, mentors to share their experiences and financing opportunities to enable growth. Since it was established in 2006, the Branson Centre has become a launch pad for aspiring entrepreneurs and has funded 15 businesses, of which 11 are still operational, and provided 146 jobs.

ACT is also actively involved in projects that give back to the community.



Children from the Godisanang OVC programme enjoy a Christmas party hosted by MB Technologies.

Some years ago ACT staff members visited an informal settlement in Centurion, where they learned about the lack of support or stimulation given to pre-school children.

This encouraged ACT to get involved and focus on the support of early childhood development centres and the company is now supporting eight early childhood development centres around the country. These ECD centres are mostly in the informal settlements where the biggest need is.

Each ACT branch supports its own ECD centre and the ACT employees get directly involved with the beneficiary, painting, assisting and working at the centres.

ACT is also encouraging its reseller partners to get involved so that more can be achieved. The resellers are encouraged to participate by donating their time, funds or product.

Message from the CEO, Glenn Fullerton:

Diversification through acquisition, innovation and financing capacity

With dynamic and highly competitive markets the order of the day, the strength and depth of the MB Technologies Group executive team over almost three decades has proven the group's ability to operate successfully through varying market conditions.

Focused, highly-skilled and motivated operational executive teams that address defined market segments through established autonomous subsidiaries continue to be a winning formula. The channel continues to benefit from our extensive product range, significant skills base and financing capacity. Deep and lasting relationships built on trust and exemplary service allow the group to ensure its customers are core to each business, while well-entrenched vendor relationships remain critical to our success as we continually strive to ensure operational excellence that delivers consistent value to the channel.

The MB Technologies Group is South Africa's leading and largest black empowered value-added IT distribution group and boasts the largest and strongest shareholders in the SA IT market. Its controlling shareholders, Royal Bafokeng Holdings, add further strength to the group. The group's corporate yet entrepreneurial culture allows a strong partnership with Investec as the holder of the balance of its equity. This culture continues to allow executives to thrive as they operate their respective businesses with entrepreneurial flair. MB Technologies, Tarsus and ACT boast level 3 BEE certification while Channel Capital is extremely proud of its level 1 rating.

The South African IT distribution market remains ripe for further consolidation and the group continues to consider various acquisition opportunities. Its recent acquisition of Digital Channel Solutions, for example, has added a valuable accessories range to ACT's already extensive product offering. Other acquisitions are under

consideration.

With the channel as its main focus, ACT is actively evolving solutions for a changing market and has enjoyed increased opportunities since operating from its custom built distribution facility.

Tarsus continues to play a leading role in its chosen markets with its experienced executives and staff adding significant value to the channel.

Diversification will remain a focus as the group seeks to leverage off its dominant position in several markets. Expansion of value-added services, an extended software and services offering and non-traditional market segments are high on our agenda. Efforts are underway to capitalise on growth prospects in Africa with expansion into new markets. An expanded government-focused team within Tarsus is making inroads and expects to leverage off strong BEE credentials to achieve its aggressive plans in this market. An equally aggressive growth plan in our Channel Capital offering has already been embarked upon as we seek to assist our customer base in creating financing solutions tailor-made for their specific requirements. Increased product offerings continue to receive high priority as the group ensures that it remains a leader in its various markets. Platinum Micro's approach allows specific focus on well-chosen markets with specialised product offerings; Printacom's excellence in the OKI product range continues as it serves its chosen markets; and Channel Risk Management's innovative insurance offerings provide valuable additional products to the channel.

Innovation in logistics, retail solutions, financing and insurance offerings are immediate focus areas. Economies of scale and efficiencies remain key differentiators and the group is proud of its position as the most efficient IT distributor in the SA market. Further improvements in this regard will be achieved through the planned consolidation of various warehousing



Glenn Fullerton, CEO of MB Technologies.
(13 years service)

facilities in the near future.

The MB Technologies Group boasts an extremely well capitalised balance sheet and the largest financing capacity in the SA IT distribution industry, allowing much needed provision of credit to the channel. As banks continue to limit funding available to the SME market, Channel Capital strives to create innovative and relevant financing products to that segment.

The strong combination of our extensive product offerings, a powerful shareholder base, a highly experienced management team and significant financing capacity place the MB Technologies Group in a powerful position. Our people and extensive skills remain our core assets upon which we wish to build and to leverage the "Power of the Group".



Tarsus Technologies:

Tarsus leads in distribution

As the flagship company within the MB Technologies Group, Tarsus Technologies is not only one of South Africa's largest distributors with multi-billion rand revenues, but is amongst the country's oldest, having been established in 1985.

The fact that it has not only survived but actually thrived in one of the toughest distribution markets in the world can be laid down to a succession of thought-leaders in the industry who have headed the company and have been able to speedily adopt new strategies – and tweak existing ones – to keep pace with the continued evolution of the market.

The latest of these renowned leaders is current CEO Pierre Spies, who took over from Guy Whitcroft in 2007, and who maintains that the ability to react quickly to changes in local distribution remains the cornerstone of the company's success.

"In tough times, the tough get tougher," says Spies. "We need to make ongoing bold calls and re-engineer the business on an almost weekly and monthly basis. It is important to remain agile and nimble in this business, and it is key that you keep your best people."

The attrition rate among Tarsus' employees is one of the lowest in the industry and many staff members – from executive level to warehousing – have been with the company since its inception.

While there are a myriad other challenges that distributors have to face – from fluctuating exchange rates and continually squeezed margins, through to proper forecasting and, uniquely South African, truck hijackings – many would question whether in an era of online ordering and instant gratification there is still room for the traditional distributor.

Spies has no doubt that there is and that as long as distributors stick to the basics, there always will be. "You have to be good at the basics and never forget what the fundamentals of the business are," he says.

"A distributor should never get too big, nor become arrogant, and should always keep to the basics, like maintaining relationships, for example.

"Our relationships with resellers in the market are key to a lot of our success," Spies says. "There was never a better truism than 'people buy from people' and we spend an enormous amount of time forging, building and maintaining our customer relationships.

"So is there still space in the market for distribution? Very definitely, yes, and more so in the South African context where the distance from manufacturer is so vast – and especially with many of the top brands moving their factories to facilities in either India or China."

Spies says that this trend has had a definite impact on the local distribution channel and is a prime example of how distributors have to adapt to constantly changing business parameters.

"With manufacturing moving East, a lot of product now comes in by sea," he explains. "This obviously takes a lot longer, so stock forecasts may go a bit awry. It's a vicious circle which sees your working capital become more onerous because you have to carry more stock – from four weeks to six weeks," Spies says.

"You also have to carry more buffer stock to cater for the manufacturing and shipping time. This has been one of the major shifts we've seen in the last 18 months or so."

Another change during this period, Spies says, has been a change in tack by most of the major vendors when it comes to their direct dealings with customers. Again, it is a change that reinforces the important role played by distributors.

"We've seen a big change in the mindset of vendors," he says. "Over the past 18 months there has been a definite move back to the channel from their direct models where they've encountered problems with

accurate planning which has meant delivery delays. This bodes well for distribution and reinforces my opinion that there is definitely still space for the distributor."

Online ordering and e-tail are also two key trends on which Tarsus has kept its finger on the pulse. "We'll back-end e-tail for our customers," Spies says. "And that could slot in nicely with the fact that we are now doing a lot of direct deliveries for our partners. In fact, 90% of what our partners order is delivered direct to their customers which has seen a dramatic improvement in efficiencies and in supply chain management.

"Tarsus, by the way, was the first company in the southern hemisphere – back in 1998 – to have an online trading system," he says. "So we have been gearing up for that move for some time. We're 100% ready for e-tail and online trading and it is only a matter of flipping a switch. This will provide our customer base with additional options."

Partnering with its resellers is at the core of Tarsus's business.

Tarsus' value-added services include financial products and services, pre- and post-sales support, training and certification, services around logistics, staging and stockholding and a partner loyalty programme.

Tarsus offers flexible and fair credit terms to the majority of its resellers, while Channel Capital provides financial products and services.

The company has a dedicated team of product and business managers that is available to assist its sales teams and their customers with proposals, tenders, special bids and product information, as well as to advise end users on the most sound technology choices.

The Channel Business College offers a series of half-day practical business courses from a panel of South Africa's most respected lecturers in their disciplines.

market

Certified and accredited engineers are available to offer resellers telephonic pre-sales and configuration support. Tarsus has full accreditation in all the products distributed and offers its assistance with custom-configuration of hardware and software images, asset-tagging and rollouts of large computer fleets.

Tarsus provides a portfolio of supply chain and logistical services enabling resellers to manage the stock availability, asset-tagging, build, delivery, installation and disposal of all IT hardware products.

The company can also configure products to reseller and customer specifications in its configuration centre before shipping.

Tarsus offers a direct delivery service to end-users on behalf of its resellers.

When it comes to loyalty, Tarsus is probably best known for its popular PartneRewards incentive programme.

PartneRewards was established in 1998 and is one of the IT industry's longest-running and most successful loyalty programmes.

By purchasing from Tarsus regularly, members earn points which can be redeemed for a host of rewards ranging from travel services and lifestyle products to training through the Channel Business College. Partners can also donate their points to charity.



Pierre Spies, CEO of Tarsus Technologies.
(20 years service)

A frame on his office wall bears testimony to the 20 years that Spies has spent at Tarsus, first as an accountant, then as CFO and now as CEO. So doesn't he get bored and sometimes feel the urge to move on?

"After 20 years I still love what I do," he says. "People may think it's boring, but there is nothing boring about distribution. There are changes every day, different challenges every day and remember, every customer's business is different and every vendor's business is different."

"I couldn't wish to be in a more interesting and stimulating position than in distribution," he says.



Advanced Channel Technologies:

ACT: Evolving solutions for

The MB Technologies group formed ACT (Advanced Channel Technologies) in 2002 to focus on the distribution of printer consumables and storage media into the IT channel.

“The MB Technologies culture allowed us to develop into a significant player in our industry,” says Gary Pickford MD at ACT. “The management team at ACT was allowed to run the business as if it was our own and we have developed our own unique character.

“This encouraged us to focus our energy on the customer segment that was aligned with the product offering specific to our industry.

“Over time this focus created a company full of passionate and committed employees who are determined to live the company’s values and deliver a customer service experience that keeps our customers loyal to ACT”.

For the first nine years of its existence, ACT was headed up by Anton Herbst, recognised as one of the visionaries of the IT distribution industry and well-known for his “out of the box” ideas.

In 2011, Herbst retired from the business and Pickford took over the running of ACT.

As it happened, this management changeover came as IT and distribution were also beginning to undergo a number of radical changes that were set to alter the face of the business going forward.

With these changes ACT had the opportunity to re-assess its business strategies and plans for the future and to get an early start on making the changes that Pickford believes are going to be necessary in the IT consumables supply chain.

There is no doubt that hardware is commoditising rapidly – and thus no longer as profitable for most resellers – but

ACT has always understood that it is the products around the core hardware offering that continue to offer value.

“We’ve always had a value proposition behind our consumables business, which we believed in and delivered on, and it was easy for us to see how this could be extended to deliver in other areas” says Pickford.

The ACT consumables business has a value chain that delivers a superior service to our partners across southern Africa.

This value chain specialises in the delivery of product with high volume and high margin opportunities for our resellers.

In the printer market, these value-added opportunities include photo paper and consumables; in the PC environment they include wireless speakers, keyboards, cleaning products and digital storage; in the mobile world of tablets and smart phones the value-added offerings include covers, wireless keyboards, carry cases and similar products.

Once it made the leap to extend its operations from a pure printer consumables player to add distribution of technology accessories, ACT had strengthened its strategic direction, Pickford says.

The consumer is driving the demand for mobility and this will force companies to adopt mobile technology products, he adds.

As a result, the demand for the technology accessories and peripherals will increase in the workplace and availability will come through the reseller channel, not just from retail outlets.

“However, these mobile products are no longer just about technology, they are lifestyle brands,” says Pickford.

“Users want to choose accessories that are cool and functional. This will move demand

away from the boring and cheap, to brands that reflect the user’s personal preferences and identity”.

As a result of this ACT has adjusted the way it thinks about product lines and brands and how it will assist its resellers and retailers to sell them through to their customers.

Says Pickford: “Now we need to look at accessories in terms of their unique customer segmentations – we can’t just focus on a broad product range all under one brand, we will need to carry a range of individual brands that satisfies the customer’s personal preferences and identity.”

The fact of the matter is that when it comes to mobile accessories it is the consumer that will drive the demand for specific brands; the distributors and retailers will have to re-invent their supply chains to cater for this.

It is the same consumer that will also shift their demand from one brand to another as their preferences change.

ACT’s biggest revenue contributor is printer consumables and he believes that this will shift over the next year or two as the mobile technology trends create new user behaviours.

“We initially built our company on the back of attaching one after-market product to a printer,” says Pickford.

“We will grow by building our next phase on the strategy of attaching many after-market products to the ever increasing number of technology products in the PC and mobility space.

“We want to work with our retail and reseller partners in a value chain partnership that will negate the risks from the complexity that this customer segmentation will bring to stock availability and stock obsolescence

a changing market

– we have to look this holistically,” Pickford says.

What ACT brings to this partnership is the tools and expertise to manage this value chain efficiently so that its partners can optimise the profit available from this product segment.

It also brings the ACT brand ambassadors to the party who will help to predict market trends and maximise the appeal of product lines that are specifically suited to a segment.

ACT is able to partner with resellers across the southern African region. It has eight branches in South Africa, as well as a branch in Namibia and Mozambique, which gives it great coverage and increases the value proposition it offers its partners.



Gary Pickford, MD of ACT.
(10 years service)





The future looks bright for Platinum Micro

The future is rosy for Platinum Micro, with components and mobile computing set to dazzle in the months and years ahead.

Platinum Micro has had an exciting history, having started life as a joint venture between MB Technologies and global distribution giant Ingram Micro.

In 2008, MB Technologies bought out Ingram Micro's share of the company.

At launch, the new distributor focused primarily on just components, a business model that it has largely stuck to.

Today, the company distributes products including Seagate, Kingston, Microsoft, Intel, Asus, AOC, OKI and Billion. It also stocks a range of accessories like PC cases, keyboards and monitor stands.

This type of high volume, low margin distribution is a tough business to be in, says MD Neil Rom. "You have to keep your wits about you and watch every cent," he confides.

Platinum Micro moves upwards of 50 000 items every month – and these aren't big-ticket items; they are small components, accessories or mobile devices. "The focus has got to be on agility, flexibility and tight control of all systems and processes."

"I am very proud of the company: a strong business has been built with strong results being delivered".

"We have to continually ensure that we carry exactly the right stock at the right price. You have to be very careful that you've got enough stock to supply your customers, but you certainly can't keep too much. IT components age and become obsolete very quickly.

"You have got to get the balance right and so we spend a lot of time and energy on forward planning."

The key to success in this fast-moving, low-margin business, says Rom, is creative thinking. "You have to be able to think quickly and make instant decisions. And, if you manage your working capital correctly, you should be in a position to take advantage of opportunities as they arise."

Among the advantages Platinum Micro offers to its resellers is a great warranty programme. With both Seagate and Asus test benches in-house, Platinum Micro is able to test these products as they come in, and repair or immediately swap them out if appropriate.

In addition, it has a T-Bay store where resellers can pick up products with shop soiled or opened packaging at bargain prices.

The big opportunity coming up for the components market is the imminent launch of Windows 8, Rom says. "The components market is growing and Windows 8 is going to have a huge impact.

"Customers are going to need to upgrade memory, hard drives and CPUs – even monitors – to take full advantage of the new operating system."

Asus is also planning new products around Windows 8, he adds, with tablets, notebooks and ultrabooks all due to showcase Windows 8 features. A new range of Asus products will be available in the October/November timeframe.

"We are expecting to end this year on a high, and have a good start to 2013," says Rom.

Platinum Micro is also looking to increase its product line-up to fill some gaps that it has identified. For instance, the distributor has recently signed up a new monitor bracket and is looking to add an Internet security product as well.



Neil Rom, MD of Platinum Micro and Printacom.
(15 years service)



Service is key for Printacom

Printacom is one of the oldest companies in the MB Technologies group, with a successful track record spanning 15 years.

Headed up by Neil Rom, Printacom was set up to focus on bringing the OKI brand to the South African and SADEC market.

It differs from the traditional distributor, however, in that it operates as the OKI brand in this market – so it's effectively both the vendor and the distributor.

As the IT and printing market changes, Rom says OKI has modified its product line to reflect customer needs. "For instance, many people still think of OKI as a pure-play dot matrix printer supplier," he says. "But the company carries a line of brilliant laser printers as well – in fact, OKI recently refreshed its monochrome and colour laser line-up with close to 30 new models."

This is not to say that it's forgotten its dot matrix roots: OKI is still either the market leader or a close second supplier of dot matrix printers in just about every market it operates in, including South Africa.

Key to growing and staying relevant, however, are some new and innovative niche products that address specific needs.

"For instance, OKI has recently launched a DICOM range of printers, which plugs directly into X-ray machines and lets you print the X-rays on to regular paper," Rom explains. "With this product we are able to pursue new markets in the medical arena as well as in construction and mining."

Another niche product is a colour laser that replaces black toner with white for printing on T-shirts and other transfer media.

"Coming up on the horizon is a range of high-end photocopiers, which will complement our existing products and give us a full range of both desktop and high-end copiers," says Rom. "There has been a big slowdown in the overall printer market, so we see this kind of specialisation and innovation as a way to survive and thrive."

OKI manufactures printers specifically

for the business environment and so they are available only via the reseller channel and not through retail. "This means OKI may not be the best-selling printers in the market, but it does mean our partners have an opportunity to tailor solutions for their customers' business needs."

To this end, Printacom has a distinct channel partner programme which it believes makes a real and tangible difference in resellers' lives.

"OKI Connected Partners is our way of engaging directly with our channel partners," says Rom. "We will never have more than 50 partners in the programme, which allows us to have an intensely personal and engaged relationship."

"One of the advantages of being an OKI Connected Partner means that you are always connected to us. You can phone literally at any time, on a 24x7 basis and a manager will answer your call. Not only will you get a response immediately, but we guarantee resolution within two days. Anything you need within the borders of South Africa, we will get for you. This programme means that we can offer the selected partners great service."

"There are a lot of partner programmes out there, but they are generally about rebates and volume discounts. This programme is about superior service and giving resellers the support and tools they need to provide their customers with a fantastic service."

In addition to the 50 OKI Connected Partners, Printacom has about 30 office automation partners, offering both managed print services as well as traditional office automation services.

The printer market worldwide has been in some difficulty in the recent past, Rom says. "We've been through a turbulent time during the last two years, with the floods in Thailand having a huge effect on production as many of our component manufacturers were in affected areas. It has taken a long time to recover from that and to build up

stock and spares availability again. We seem to be over the worst of that now."

Vendors and resellers are having to adapt to new market realities as well. As much as OKI is opening up new markets with its innovative niche products, Rom believes resellers need to change their business models in order to thrive in the future.

"Resellers really shouldn't be dropping boxes anymore, but should be looking to move into managed print services. Going forward, the money won't be in the printer, but in the page printed and resellers need to ensure they keep a customer for years."

"We've been talking about making these moves for some time, but I think resellers really have to do it or they won't survive."

Printacom has changed its own business model in response to the new market realities, says Rom. A good example is the dot matrix market: although OKI is a market leader here, and has a healthy installed base, the technology has reached its peak and will probably decline going forward.

"There are a lot of big companies out there that use dot matrix printers – many of them OKI – and our aim is to migrate as many of them as possible to the new technologies that OKI has perfected over the years."

"This means that we have to actively go to their customers – they are not going to come to us – and help them to migrate to new technologies. This shouldn't be a 'rip-and-replace' exercise, so we work closely with end users to ensure the solutions meet their needs."

This means that Printacom has redirected most of its sales staff away from distribution and into end user sales, helping both new and existing customers find the right technology fit. "We are also driving into Africa, where we believe there is a big opportunity for OKI."

The key to success going forward, he says, is the positioning of OKI and Printacom as suppliers of unique printing solutions.

Rentals could rescue industry in recession

Over the past five years, gloomy economic conditions have forced many companies to rethink the way they do business. And this has never been more apparent than in the local channel where shrinking margins, tougher credit terms and a general tightening of belts has seen many resellers teetering on the brink of collapse.

One of many ways of avoiding this situation, however, lies in the financial services offered by Channel Capital and, more specifically says the company's MD, Ron Keschner, in the rental options open to resellers via its portfolio.

Channel Capital was founded as the asset finance and financial services arm of the MB Technologies Group in 2007 when management realised that tough economic times were on the horizon and that local resellers could do with all the help they could find. The company offers financial services ranging from asset finance and rentals to bridging finance and insurance.

But it is in the area of IT equipment rentals that Keschner says resellers can reap huge benefits in a market that is getting tougher by the day. It is time, he says, that IT followed in the footsteps of the office automation industry where up to 80% of equipment is either leased or rented. Estimates for rentals in IT hover around the 30% mark so there is huge potential.

"We work on the premise that if it appreciates, buy it; if it depreciates, then finance it," explains Keschner. "The bottom line is: Why would a company take its hard-earned money and put it in IT equipment that depreciates by the day? Companies should be taking their money and buying stock, possibly buying their buildings, or making acquisitions. That way their money is growing.

"The benefits of rental are clear," says

Keschner. "It's an operational lease, so it is off the balance sheet – why would anyone want to weaken their balance sheet with IT equipment? Also, it becomes an operational expense which means that there are clear tax benefits. That is the key reason that a lot of end user companies are now seriously considering the rental option."

Keschner says that there are also major benefits for resellers in adopting the rental route for their customers.

"For the reseller, it is a way to make sure that the complete solution is installed," Keschner says. "It is also a means for the customer to make a bigger purchase – if they're on rental they can afford to buy a lot more equipment."

Another crucial benefit to resellers lies in payment, arguably the biggest problem in today's channel.

"Typically, a reseller will get payment from a good client within 45 to 60 days," Keschner says. "When a reseller goes with a rental via Channel Capital, however, we pay them within 72 hours of the deal being closed. We pay for the entire deal up front – hardware and services – which means there is a double benefit to the reseller: Firstly, cash flow – the money is in their bank straight away; secondly, they can negotiate early settlement with the distributor. So it is a double benefit.

"Channel Capital collects the purchase fee from the customer over a period, so a third benefit is that there is no risk for the reseller," he adds. "Cash flow is the single biggest problem in the reseller channel today and we can eliminate this."

While many resellers have traditionally been wary of rental options, Keschner is quick to allay these fears.

"What differentiates Channel Capital from



**Ron Keschner, MD of Channel Capital.
(15 years service)**

our competitors is that we are IT people who work in the finance industry as opposed to financial people who work in IT," he says. "We understand the solutions being offered and we only work through reseller partners. We follow a proper distribution model like our big brother Tarsus; we don't deal direct, we go with partners; and when we do, we understand the solution so we can talk to the reseller about any solution."

The company is also up front in terms of its various financial offerings, he says.

"When you deal with Channel Capital the financial structure is completely transparent," Keschner says. "There are no end of term penalties and there is no fine print – our Master Rental Agreement is only two pages. We see ourselves as a sales tool and a value-add for our reseller partners in that we are happy to do all the quoting for partners, as well as accompany them and assist them with closing a sale at a customer," he says. "For us to see a reseller partner succeed means that we're successful."



Insurance that's tailor made for the channel

As the insurance brokering and financial services arm of MB Technologies – and as a fully-fledged Financial Services Provider (FSP) – Channel Risk Management (CRM) was established to provide the widest possible cover at the lowest possible premium specifically for the South African IT channel.

And, being an FSP, the company is also able to develop its own specialised range of products for the channel, underwritten by the world's leading insurance companies.

Channel Risk Management MD, Lars Forssman, says that with its unique insight into the IT distribution channel, MB Technologies realised that many of its partners and resellers weren't adequately covered by the standard insurance products available on the market. With this in mind, it hand-picked an executive team of insurance industry leaders with key relationships in the industry and established Channel Risk Management.

"The group noticed that there was a gap in terms of providing insurance solutions for the channel and group companies," Forssman says. "The basic policies on offer do not provide appropriate cover for the channel, so something that CRM and the group identified was that if we could come up with niche, specialised products – bespoke solutions – they had to be better than the standard policies where you do not have commensurate value."

An example of the kind of specialised product that CRM provides is a policy it is currently developing around the Consumer Protection Act. "We collaborated with leading authority Norton Rose in looking at the Consumer Protection Act, the exposure resellers will have under this, and at coming up with products that will protect small resellers from the various risks associated with the Act," Forssman says.

Along with its existing offerings, the company also provides specialised services

to individual clients where policies can be specifically tailored to meet the customer's requirements.

"Due to our wealth of experience in all aspects of risk management and financial services, as well as our extensive partner network, we are ideally-placed to develop specialised products and facilities for SA's market leaders," says Forssman.

Other offerings include:

Solutions for corporate customers which covers risks in the area of assets, liabilities, self-insurance structures and risk management.

BusinessSure – An effective tool which allows you to compare your existing business insurance policy "cover-for-cover", "limit-for-limit", "benefit-for-benefit", "excess-for-excess" against as many other quotes as possible in the market. Following the interaction with the client, CRM will produce a comprehensive report, giving an "apples-for-apples" comparison plus details of possible high risk concerns going forward.

PersonalSure – A range of products which caters for all possible insurance needs for the business executive. No matter what stage you may find yourself in; whether you need to insure a vehicle on a stand-alone basis or re-assess your personal portfolio, PersonalSure is the product of choice.

The PersonalSure "High Net Worth" scheme is a specialist offering that is not readily available on the market – strict minimum qualifying criteria apply. Once on board, the cover and ease of insurance is simply unmatched in the industry.

The AssetSure facility is a specialised scheme that provides cover for all sorts of brands of electronic equipment. This cover is blanket "All Risk" cover, and CRM has the authority to underwrite the risks on this portfolio by way of delegated authority from its insurance partner at great rates.



**Lars Forssman, MD of Channel Risk Management.
(Three years service)**

Channel Risk Management has also put together a warranty extension programme for Tarsus Technologies customers that is designed to change the way notebooks and desktops are sold in South Africa.

The new warranty extension offering, Tarsus Accident Guard (TAG), is available exclusively with products purchased from Tarsus Technologies.

The TAG is an extension to existing vendor warranties to include accidental damage. It also covers identity theft, with legal expenses of up to R20 000 as well as out-of-pocket expenses up to R2 500.

It offers virus cover for hardware and software that is damaged, corrupted or deleted by malicious code. Cover is up to R20 000 and excludes recovery of data.

Cover for accidental damage is for the full cost to repair or replace hardware due to unforeseen or accidental physical damage anywhere in the world.

Customers can select either a one-year or two-year TAG warranty extension.

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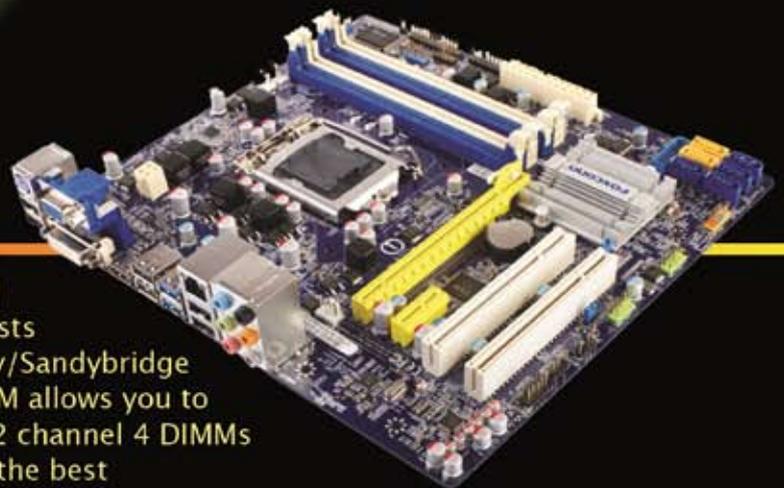
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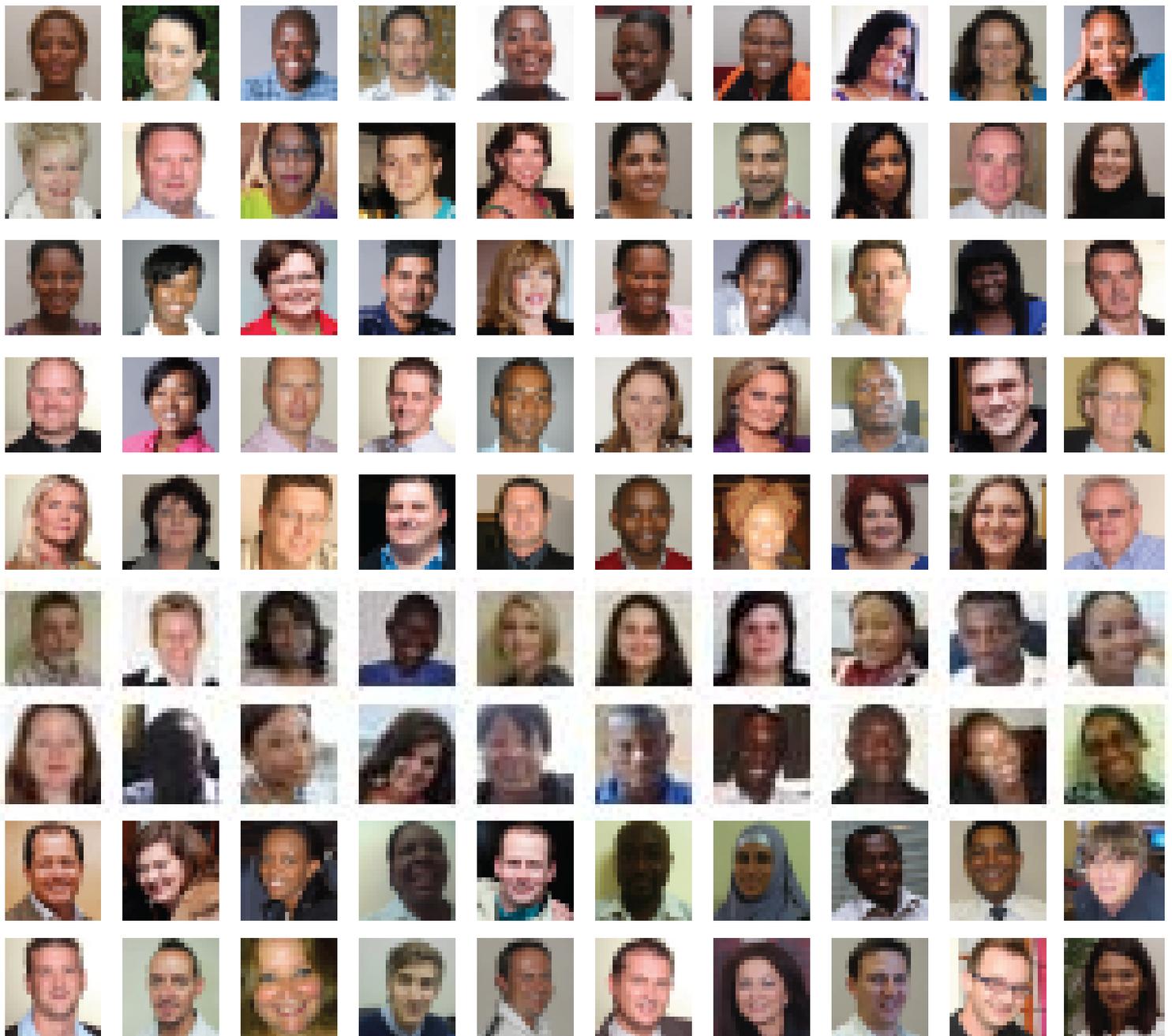
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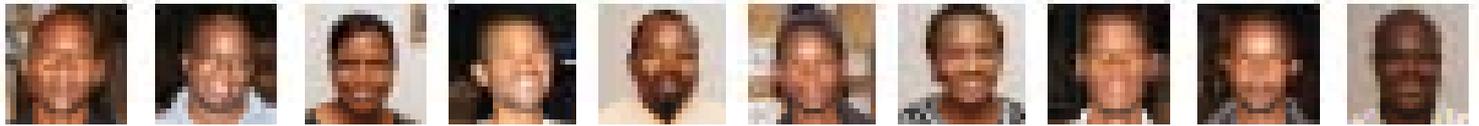
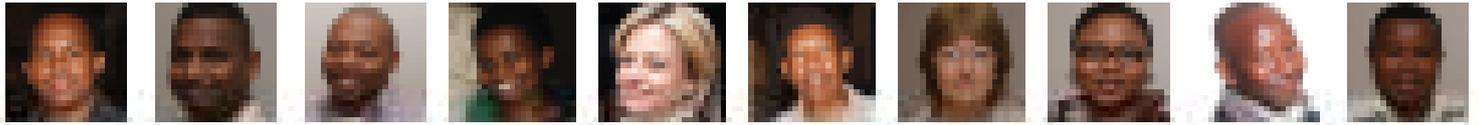
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One vision. One voice. One Distributor.

When buying technology you need a partner that not only shares the same technologies of the ICT race, but one that will stand by your side for your business and is able to manage relationships beyond the box.

It is with this that Comstock developed its business around not only the technology available in communications, but partnership with vendor companies. And we especially place a great emphasis on the people it employs. From the customer to the call center, channel manager to engineer, division to administrator that, together at Comstock is a representation of the business.

With today's world where distribution goes beyond product delivery, system testing and order delivery, Comstock at Comstock works with our customers to ensure that they play a commercial role in the sales process of product, service and project delivery to offer what Comstock does value-added services.

North Bay to Mid West through remote, wireless and mobile. We have believed that they are naturally served as a single distributor in most all of the above technology sub-sectors.

The edge

As part of its value added distribution model, Comstock now provides a number of services beyond simply products. To its customers to assist them with all aspects of their sales, technical, product and inventory

requirements. Layer 2 and 3, Network Testing, Technical Service Support, Service Level Agreements, 24/7 Service Agreements and Support Line.

"The distribution game is far more than the products in our warehouse and the technology we sell. It is centered around the value that your company can bring to its vendor partners, resellers and customers, value that cannot be measured by numbers but rather by the interactions and engagement you have with the company you are doing business with. At Comstock our people are our value, and the value they bring to our business is what we take to market to ensure that we are able to consistently deliver on the quality promise you have become used to getting from our organization."

*Paul Cornado,
Managing Director at Comstock*

Testing

A business is only as good as the people. In a philosophy that Comstock doesn't just believe, but that it also stands through the services it offers to the performance of our

Testing is offered as a service and can be done locally and is delivered either by experts from within Comstock, industry leaders where necessary and where appropriate an international vendor.

Technical Service Support (TSS)

Designing, implementing or upgrading your technology will always bring a number of unique technical challenges. In order to fill this gap Comstock offers its partners access to Comstock Technical Service Support (TSS), an extensive 24-hour Service Center that is able to assist resellers and their customers with access to testing, consult and full technical solutions. dependent on the needs or SLA agreement of each Comstock customer.

Through the TSS, resellers are able to log service calls, submit SLAs and get help through multiple channels, or request testing that can all be delivered within 24-hours. You are assured a faster service. The last technology that offers the product delivery to your systems, product systems, and the availability of features critical to your business before they are tested in your environment.

As a top priority for the Service Center specialists through Comstock value and are able to deliver the highest quality professional services available in distribution today.

Service Level Agreement (SLA)

To business or not, your organization and what better way to ensure that than through the adoption of an SLA or Service Level Agreement. In this world, Customer Service is not only a range of SLA options that will meet different business and customer requirements.

Each SLA is carefully tailored to meet the business and technical requirements and requirements of critical – ensuring that critical services are always available for when you need them. From 24/7/365 support to 9-5 business hours, we can ensure that your business is always able to access it if you need it for the people in the shop.

Multi-Service Agreement (MSA)

Not all of the services you need are available from a single vendor or even a group of vendors. In a multi-vendor environment, it's important to ensure that you have the right mix of services to support your business in the most effective way possible.

It's vital that you have a multi-vendor solution that can support your business. This is why we offer a Multi-Service Agreement (MSA), which allows you to manage all of your services in one place, making it easy to manage and even project management skills in order to support it.

Have your services all in one place, making it easy to manage and even project management skills in order to support it.

Support Plan

When things go wrong, you need to be able to get the support you need. That's why we offer a Support Plan, which allows you to manage all of your services in one place, making it easy to manage and even project management skills in order to support it.

It's important to have a Support Plan that can support your business. This is why we offer a Support Plan, which allows you to manage all of your services in one place, making it easy to manage and even project management skills in order to support it.

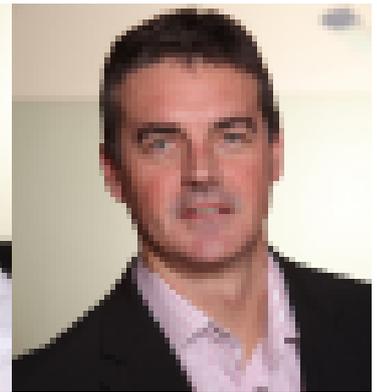
The value

The real value of your business is what you're doing with it. That's why we offer a Support Plan, which allows you to manage all of your services in one place, making it easy to manage and even project management skills in order to support it.

This is why we offer a Support Plan, which allows you to manage all of your services in one place, making it easy to manage and even project management skills in order to support it.



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Commoditisation puts pressure on printing

Printing and copying vendors, distributors and resellers that have not started the process of transforming themselves into document management partners able to help clients better manage costs, workflow and print services will not be able to compete effectively in a fast-changing market.

That's according to Itec chief operating officer, Ryan Miles. He says that the hit-and-run approach of the past no longer matches the needs of a market where organisations are looking at document output in a more strategic manner. The result is that the printing and copying industry must evolve to keep up in a market where the hardware has become completely commoditised.

One of the factors that have caused a major shift in the market is that many organisations have discovered that print costs rank among their top five business expenses, and are now looking for ways to maximise value while containing costs.

Printing and copying costs are spiralling out of control in most organisations, with no sign that the paper deluge will slow down any time soon, says Miles.

"Up until a few years ago, clients were happy to sign a deal every few years that would entail getting new printers through a rental agreement with the bank and a service agreement with a supplier, which provided very little additional value.

"But these days, they are more wary of deals that seem to offer attractive costs today, but lock them into technologies that might not fulfil their needs into the future and which may prove to be expensive down the line. What enterprises want is a partner who can help them maximise the value of their document output infrastructures."

There are three major areas where clients are looking for value-add from their document output partners, adds Miles. These are in cost reduction, workflow optimisation and proactive pre and post-sales support. Each of these areas requires considerable investment from document output service providers and suppliers.

Vendors that have not started making the investments may already be in trouble. Document output solutions providers need to be able to offer their clients the tools and skills they need to audit their printing and copying costs, track them, and then manage them down over time.

They also need relationships with suppliers of electronic document management solutions and the ability to help clients implement these products and integrate them with their print and copy infrastructures to drive more efficient and productive workflow. And solutions providers must offer service infrastructures underpinned by sophisticated tools that allow them to manage their clients' print-and-copy environments in a proactive manner to minimise downtime. The value-add of this model is taken to its logical conclusion in managed print services (MPS), Miles says. In an MPS model, a service provider takes full responsibility for a company's print infrastructure, including financing, services, support, document management, cost control and supplies. The MPS provider should be able to guarantee cost-savings, backed by a predictable per-page cost. Though a full-blown MPS is best suited to larger companies, elements of the model can be applied to the needs of SMEs as well.

"Clearly, the MPS model favours the major industry players who have the money to invest in physical infrastructure and technology," says Miles. "And it is a transformation that no supplier can make overnight. Smaller resellers may need to align with companies that can provide them with access to the tools and reach they need to offer value-added services."

The printer industry is facing a difficult transition, but companies that don't evolve will find it hard to command decent margins or secure deals with leading customers.

"If you're not adding value, your business will be nothing more than warehousing and shipping a commoditised product and you may as well be selling rice," he says.

Better pro

Revenue benefits, not cost reductions, could result from improving document processes such as sales and marketing, customer communications, customer on-boarding, service and support, developing new products, and billing and collection.

As much as 10% could be added to the top line, according to a recent IDC white paper sponsored by Ricoh.

Improved document processes can enhance the overall experience of a customer's interaction with an organisation. Efficient processes, which allow for greater focus on the customer's needs, can have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, which is critical for retention and revenue growth.

On the other hand, customers may flee to competitors if confronted by inefficient and ineffective customer-facing document processes.

These assertions are backed by research reported in a new IDC white paper sponsored by Ricoh called Organisational Blind Spot: the Role of Document-Driven Business Processes Driving Top-Line Growth, published in September 2012.

The white paper is the second major product of Ricoh's new Process Imperative initiative for improved information management and is based on IDC's recent global study of 1 516 document-driven business process owners and information workers.

Deficient document processes may cause customers to defect, the research revealed. As much as 69% of respondents say they would be less likely to do business with companies having inefficient or ineffective document processes and 60% say they would take their business elsewhere, while 57% say they would tell others not to do business with these companies.

The good news is that better document processes have the potential to improve revenue. More than eight out of 10 respondents indicated that optimising customer-facing document driven business processes would increase revenue – on average by 10,1%. This could be achieved by improving customer communications, streamlining the sales and customer on-boarding process, and improving customer support.

"This is great news for executives who are struggling to prioritise business process improvements," says Alan Austin, sales and marketing director at Ricoh SA.

"No longer do they have to wonder if tackling document processes will yield a big enough return to justify the investment. Especially

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Processes up revenue

in this economic climate, any process that can both reduce costs and improve revenue is a win-win and should rise to the top of the priority list.”

Several approaches can be employed to take advantage of the revenue-generation potential of document processes, such as:

- * View the customer satisfaction experience holistically - information flows into an organisation (input), is processed within, and is delivered to the right person at the right time (output). Where does the customer fit? How can they be integrated more deeply into the process to help them obtain the information they need when they need it? How can the same be done for suppliers and distribution partners? Process is paramount.
- * Streamlining document and information processes strengthens relationships – it keeps employees closer to the customer, for example, by empowering the mobile workforce as workers travel to customer sites. Likewise, improving document processes can optimise communication in the supply chain, closing gaps that may cause customers to flee.

- * Although process is paramount, results are what matters most – optimised processes must absolutely deliver the right information to the right people at the right time to prompt the right business decisions. Otherwise, the effort is for naught.

Companies need to be able to understand, improve, transform, govern and optimise their document environments to pinpoint key processes and then align them with services that will help customers achieve measurable and sustainable business outcomes.

Companies need access to partners that can provide insight into the top business concerns that are most prevalent in today's corporate environments including: cost control, environmental sustainability, information security and governance, business process efficiency, organisational change management, information worker productivity, information optimisation and strategic infrastructure.

This valuable insight helps accelerate the first step in the process - understand - so companies can begin the improve phase more quickly and start realising the resulting benefits as soon as possible.

Reduce paper to save the earth

The whole concept of the paperless office may have proven to be unattainable, as so much of daily business documentation still needs to be printed and filed for legal, accounting and regulatory purposes, says Tyrone Malan, Lexmark product specialist at Drive Control Corporation.

However, the concept of reducing the number of documents remains relevant, especially in light of turbulent economic times which necessitate cost-cutting and leaner business practices along with an increasingly eco-conscious world.

The reality is that the less is printed, the more money is saved. However, people are still the biggest barrier in reducing printing consumption. This is where clever technology comes to the fore as a failsafe way of curbing people's wasteful printing habits, helping organisations to save money and save the planet, one less printed page at a time.

In a world where cost is everything and users are bombarded with messages about

recycling, preventing waste and reducing carbon footprint, it seems counterintuitive to be unaware of exactly how much is being spent, and wasted, where.

Yet this is exactly the case in many companies when it comes to printing. Not only are many organisations unaware of how much is spent on printing, the employees are also guilty of printing unnecessarily, forgetting documents that they sent to the printer, and throwing away countless printouts every day.

One simple solution to reducing the number of pages printed and wasted is to enforce automatic duplex, or double sided, printing. Most modern multi-function printers (MFPs) offer this feature, which ensures that both sides of paper are used, effectively halving the number of pages needed to print any given document.

This setting can be easily configured by IT administration and applied to every user account as a default setting, with the option for manual override should single sided

printing be necessary.

Another technology feature that helps to prevent wastage is the secure print function. When a user queues a document for printing, they will have to physically walk up to the machine and either enter a code or swipe a tag in order to release the print job.

If the print job is not released within a specified period of time it will be deleted from the printer system memory. Although this feature was designed to ensure that confidential documents did not fall into the wrong hands, it has the side benefit of also deterring wastage.

It prevents that all too common scenario of people forgetting about their print job or throwing away documents found in the tray that do not belong to them.

While colour printing capability is necessary on occasion, it is also expensive due to the cost of colour toner. Added to this, not every employee needs to be able to print high quality, full colour documents. For this



>>> reason there are two separate settings that can be activated to optimise printing without the need for multiple print devices.

Colour lock capability enables IT admin to set permissions for colour printing, giving users who need it access and only allowing monochrome printing for those who do not.

Proofread functionality also allows for the printing out of low resolution drafts, so that documents that need printing but do not have to be high quality do not waste ink.

Aside from activating these technology features, there are other steps organisations can take to ensure optimal usage. This includes optimising the device architecture with the help of an expert, who will conduct a site visit and ensure print technology matches print volumes.

Today's MFPs also allow for digital versions of documents to be saved on the device and printed on demand. This is particularly useful for standard forms.

Instead of pre-printing stacks of these forms, which may or may not be used and which will have to be destroyed should information change, these forms can be stored on the printer as a digital version that can easily be change, and only printed as and when necessary.

Education is another important aspect of reducing print costs and wastage. Users need to be trained to ensure that they know how to use the different features and print types, such as duplex, draft and high quality resolution and so on. It may not be possible to stop people from printing, but they can use machines more cost effectively by tailoring the quality and method of printing to match various scenarios.

While many organisations remain unaware of the true cost of printing, there are a few simple steps that can be taken to quickly reduce this cost and lessen waste.

By reducing the number of pages printed and ensuring that toner and paper are not wasted, organisations can save money and help save the planet, one page at a time.

Understand the world of workflow

Technological advances are occurring that allow for full integration between communication systems and workflow tools. These advances will engender significant changes in the way companies do business – internally and with all business partners, says Karl Reed, chief marketing and solutions officer at Elingo.

But an organisation's ability to take advantage of these developments rests, as always, on its ability to assess its status quo before it seeks to move forward.

Many workflow solutions and technologies have historically operated in silos, providing tools or processes operating in isolation from the organisation's communication system.

This is a fundamentally flawed approach, and lies at the root of ongoing perceptions that workflow solutions can be more trouble than they're worth. This lack of integration creates the process bottle necks that have frustrated so many decision makers over the years.

When the customer hears the phone being put down on the desk, as the service agent marches to the back office to find out what's going on with a claim, that's the sound of a fundamental system disconnect between workflow and communications.

In this context, the back-office can easily continue marching through item resolution without the slightest idea that the customer has called in five times that day already. Competitive advantage is severely damaged in the process.

The fast emerging alternative to the silo workflow approach is communication based workflow. Here workflow processes are fully integrated into the communication structure, including communication involving external service providers and business partners.

This system doesn't wait for a person to select a task to complete. Rather, because it understands what each entity within the service chain is tasked with at any one moment, it pushes appropriate tasks at individuals. Crucially, priorities can be set for the item from cradle to grave via a very simple user interface.

As an assessor ends their phone call to the panel beater, for example, the workflow process running in the background might be for an SMS to be sent to a customer to notify them about the approval.

If the customer replies to the SMS with a query or complaint, this response is added to the workflow item – a new subroutine is generated and the process continues to the point where the bill is paid. An effective system will see the loop closing slowly, with the final stages of closure including after-sales services such as customer satisfaction checks, including those carried out by partners and providers.

This kind of integration allows decision-makers to assess actions taken by each party across the supply chain – even if they are not direct employees. Such assessments include the ability to listen to call recordings and so on. Unlike in the old days, if the boss wants to understand if a process is working or not, it is a simple matter to isolate the process and identify bottlenecks.

In addition, because new generation systems are inherently open on a structural level, a complete roll out can be achieved in less than six months in some cases.

There is, however, a catch. Users can't implement a workflow solution until they understand their processes as they currently exist – and developing that understanding is no simple matter.

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Mid-Range Mono-Laser Printers



Brother has 2 printers ideal for the SME/SOHO segment where print output is an average of 5,000 pages per month.

While both are duplex printers with standard USB ports, the HL2240D has a print speed of 22ppm and the HL2270DW has a print speed of 26ppm, as well as Ethernet and Wireless connectivity. Yields of the standard TN2280 cartridge and DR2255 drum are 2,600 pages and 12,000 pages respectively.



Mid-Range Mono-Laser MFCs

Also recommended for the SME/SOHO segment, print speeds of the MFC7360 and the MFC7860DW are 24ppm and 26ppm respectively for these 4-in-1 units, and, similar to the mono printers, the MFC7860DW features Ethernet and Wireless connectivity in addition to USB. Toner and drum yields are identical to the mono-laser printers above.



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High-End Colour Laser Printers

These products are ideal for SME/SOHO/Workgroups environments, delivering high quality, high volumes of documents of 12,000 to 15,000 pages per month.



The HL4150CDN and the HL4570CDW duplex printers print 24ppm and 28ppm respectively, and while the HL4150CDN features USB and Ethernet ports, the HL4570CDW also features WiFi connectivity. The BK/C/M/Y Toner cartridges each yield 6,000 pages, and the DR340CL drum yields 25,000 pages.



High-End Colour Laser MFCs

With the same print speeds and yields as the Colour Laser Printers, while the 4-in-1 duplex MFC-9460CDN features USB and Ethernet ports, the 4-in-1 duplex MFC9970CDW also offers WiFi connectivity.



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Re-use more sustainable than recycling

People sometimes have trouble making a clear distinction between the terms “re-use” and “recycling”. It is commonly thought that recycling is to give something a second life, or to reprocess a material to make something else (of a lower quality).

Re-use, however, might have associations with being second-hand, used or outdated. It has connections with the idea of salvaging, or that the object is to be used for the same function as originally intended.

“Fortunately, industry definitions of the two terms do make a clear distinction and, in manufacturing, re-use sits on a higher pedestal than recycling,” says Dave Clark, MD of Océ South Africa, a specialist in document management and printing for professionals.

“Part of our mandate is to demonstrate to customers eco-efficient solutions and eco-effective technologies for document management. The remanufacture of machines, units and parts has significant positive environmental benefit. An Océ study has determined that the CO2 footprint in producing a remanufactured system is just under half of the footprint of producing a new system.”

About 85% of the weight of a machine is re-used during remanufacturing, which means the impact on the environment is considerably less than recycling.

“Even in a highly commoditised world, re-use still has functions and applications, driven by economics and concern for the environment,” says Clark. “Material depletion in the future and the rising cost of energy in all forms will mean that re-use takes on greater significance.”

Policy at Océ is to re-use at the highest possible level. Machinery and equipment returned to the company much earlier than its technical end of life, and those scheduled to be returned at the end of lease contracts, are refurbished or re-manufactured. Similarly, parts exchanged during services that can be re-used are repaired and used again in the field or in product assembly.

“The benefits of asset recovery and remanufacturing (re-use) include sustainability, good business practice, compliance with legislation and knowledge accumulation, while the benefits of buying a remanufactured or refurbished machine relate directly to sustainability, people, the

planet and profit.

“Initially, companies may introduce asset recovery and re-manufactured products for economical reasons, but benefits for people and the earth in general will follow. Re-use creates employment and recycling companies are becoming big businesses.”

A re-manufactured machine requires fewer steps in the production process and these help to avoid unnecessary extraction of materials and reduce the energy required to produce and transport them. End users and educational institutions can benefit from acquiring perfectly maintained printers and copiers. Students and researchers at schools and universities also receive these benefits, albeit indirectly.

“Another advantage of design for re-use is easier and quicker service options that result from easily removable and replaceable parts for upgrades or revisions. The Océ products have a platform design that enables quick time to market alongside high potential for re-use.”

Clark adds that sustainability is designed into the products. For example, many Océ printers and all of their copiers are designed with short paper paths that reduce mis-feeds, saving energy and reducing waste material caused by jamming.

“The systems are designed for low heat, noise, dust and ozone emissions. In many of the systems, developer and fuser oil are not required so that toner residue is minimal.

“Paper usage can also be reduced by half with automatic, single pass duplex printing technology. Because the systems use 100% of the toner, there is no waste, which also translates into no environmental impact.

“Increased sensitivity to environmental concerns is undoubtedly a growing priority among leading companies worldwide.”

Ink that doesn't cost the earth

When it comes to printing, especially for home users, small office home offices (SOHO) and small to medium business users (SMBs), the cost of ink has typically outweighed the cost of the printer itself.

This has resulted in consumers resorting to all sorts of methods in an effort to save money. These include limiting their printing output or using refilled or counterfeit consumables. Users have even resorted to buying new printers when ink cartridges run out.

This model has become out-dated in the wake of increasing awareness of the need for sustainability, and in light of the global crackdown on counterfeit goods, including printer consumables.

HP is leading the way with a new range of Ink Advantage printers and cartridges, available from distributor Drive Control Corporation (DCC).

“Ink Advantage is a new concept in printing, designed to encourage more sustainable and environmentally friendly printing practices. With Ink Advantage, the cost of printing has been reduced by up to 50%, effectively allowing users to print twice as much for the same cost as before. Consumers can therefore afford to keep their printers for longer, replacing the cartridges instead of the whole device. Ink Advantage also incorporates other eco-friendly features, such as recycled plastic, reduced packaging, and recycling initiatives through HP's Planet Partner programme,” says Caron De Fortier, HP Imaging & Printing Group business unit manager at DCC.

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Printing steps out of the box

Printing and output devices have long transcended their one dimensional role as print, copy, fax and scan machines. The focus is now on moving document management out of the back office shadows and managing other repositories through enterprise content management software, like Microsoft SharePoint, according to Andrew Griffith, product manager for office products at Konica Minolta South Africa.

"Furthermore, issues that were pertinent over a decade ago, such as converging printing and IT technology, have long since been conquered, placing document management suppliers on an amazing technology curve where printing and output devices can be used to optimise businesses processes by driving down business costs and improving productivity.

"Businesses should look past the hardware and focus on how the device can be integrated into business. In addition, while document management is still key to cope with today's deluge of data, a combination of offline and online document management can provide companies with a massive boost in productivity."

He highlights "customisation" as being another solid trend in the industry.

No two document management suppliers are alike, and businesses should be aware that there is a discernable difference between managed services and managed print services.

"Besides sophisticated technology, organisations should be aware that they should expect the following from their document management supplier: a good geographic footprint – as although the value lies beyond hardware, the devices still require a highly skilled workforce; and an excellent supply chain and distribution capability."

Hardcopy market still growing

Despite challenging market conditions, the wireless segment of the worldwide hardcopy peripherals market continued to show year-over-year growth in the second quarter of 2012 (2Q12). While overall shipments declined by 8,4% to 26,5-million units, wireless volume increased 5% year over year to 9,1-million units in 2Q12, according to the International Data Corporation (IDC) Worldwide Quarterly Hardcopy Peripherals Tracker.

Moreover, the wireless segment in mature markets outgrew emerging markets by 2 percentage points, showing 5,6% and 3,6% year-over-year growth, respectively.

"IDC expects the opportunity for wireless will continue to expand over the next three years," says Phuong Hang, program manager: Worldwide Hardcopy Peripheral Trackers at IDC. "We also expect SMBs, small offices, and microbusinesses to be early adopters of built-in wireless laser printers and MFPs, while these devices in a large enterprise will continue to rely on existing WANs for wireless capability."

Technology highlights include:

* With close to 20-million units shipped, inkjet technology accounted for 60% share in the overall hardcopy peripherals market. Shipments in this segment declined 12,7% year over year, the steepest drop since 3Q09. In contrast, the wireless inkjet segment in both emerging and mature markets exhibited growth, equating to a 3,5% year-over-year increase in the overall wireless inkjet volume in the second quarter of 2012.

* Laser was the only technology to experience positive year-over-year growth in 2Q12. The segment grew 0,8% to 9,5-million units resulting in 36% share, up 4 points from a year ago. Both emerging and mature markets experienced double-digit growth in the wireless segment, 15% and 24% year over year, respectively.

* Colour laser finished the quarter with 16% market share in the total laser space, resulting in 3,5% year-over-year growth. Monochrome laser devices accounted for more than 7,9-million units and 84% share of the total laser space, flat from a year ago.

HP remained the top hardcopy peripheral vendor with 39,6% market share of worldwide shipments (10,5-million units). Unit shipments declined 12,7%. HP performed better in the emerging markets with -9,2% growth compared to -16,6% in mature markets.

Canon continued as the number two vendor in 2Q12 with worldwide market share of 21,4% and 0,5% year-over-year growth. Unlike HP, Canon grew its shipments 2,9% year over year in mature regions while showing a decline of 1,2% in emerging markets.

Epson maintained its position as the number three vendor worldwide with 13,2% share. The vendor's shipments declined 1,3% year-over-year. Epson enjoyed a better year-over-year trend in mature markets than emerging regions, 9,8% versus -8,9%, respectively.

Brother climbed one spot up to become the top 4 ranked vendor in the total hardcopy market. The vendor posted 6,5% year-over-year growth, the best year-over-year trend among the top 5, and resulting in more than 1,7-million units shipped.

The vendor benefited from double-digit year-over-year growth (20,3%) in emerging markets while experiencing a small decline of 2,8% in mature regions. Brother continues to enjoy growth in the wireless segment, posting a 22,3% year-over-year gain to 37% share.

Samsung ranked 5th in the overall hardcopy market. The vendor suffered a decline of 22% year over year in total shipments and dropped one spot in the latest worldwide ranking.

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Xerox launches ColorQube 8900 Colour MFP

Small businesses and enterprises share a common set of challenges – finding new customers and staying productive. Xerox's new colour multi-function printer (MFP) can help turn these challenges into opportunities by making it affordable to create colourful marketing materials while managing office functions - ranging from printing to scanning - with ease. Compact enough to fit into any office environment, including on a desk, the Xerox ColorQube 8900 Colour MFP uses solid ink technology - a cartridge-free, crayon-like ink stick - to produce high-quality prints such as sales brochures, flyers and presentations.

With the ColorQube, any size business can create professional-looking, colourful marketing materials and other documents on a range of media, including recycled paper. Cost-savings can be gained with Hybrid Colour Pricing Plans, allowing businesses to pay only for the amount of colour printed on a given page. This is an important differentiation when using just a little bit of colour, such as a company logo on letterhead.

But saving money on colour prints doesn't have to come at the expense of sustainability, functionality or security.

Companies can maximise resources and productivity with features that include:

- * Energy-saving methods, like Intelligent Ready, which switches to low-power mode during downtimes. Compared to laser MFPs in the same class, the ColorQube 8900 MFP produces up to 90% less printing waste and uses 17% less life cycle energy.

- * A 7-inch touch screen makes it easy to programme jobs, including printing, scanning, distributing and organising documents.

- * Embedded security features, such as image overwrite and encryption, protect the documents, hard drive and network from vulnerabilities.

"According to Arthur Goldstuck of Worldwide Worx, there are roughly 650 000 active small and mid-size businesses in South Africa focused on growing their business," says Ernest Leong, OPB product manager, Xerox Systems Sales.

"Xerox's ColorQube MFP provides hassle free, fast, quality colour printing – a simple and affordable approach to getting real work done."

The MFP is offered as part of Xerox's managed print services (MPS), which helps companies control print spend.

Major trends evolving in output world

SMBs and corporates alike are moving toward adopting a combination of multi-function printers (MFPs) and solutions to minimise the spend on consumables and hardware for their printing environments.

There has been a streamlining in this respect, with companies realising that investments in solutions and office automation systems are a very effective way to reduce costs and maximise efficiency.

It often requires a more significant outlay of cost at the start, but in the long-term the investment will increase efficiency, reduce consumption of materials and streamline operations - all of which offer a cost saving benefit to the enterprise or SMB.

With the economic climate remaining lean for some time, most organisations are focusing on reducing costs and maximising ROI. There has been an increased inquiry base for a managed print service in South Africa, UAE, Qatar, KSA and other countries. Sharp's advantage in the region is the fact that it has many enterprise customers who have large installed bases of Sharp copiers.

Its market share in 2011 across MEA as per IDC is 19% for copiers/MFPs. The prime reason for this has been the fact that Sharp

has always offered a comparatively better total cost of ownership. Going to a supplier that offers an end-to-end solution is a key way of doing this.

With a company offering a full turnkey solution, it can offer greater economies of scale because everything is developed in-house, and outsourced costs are not passed on to the client. Sharp has developed its Business Solutions Division to offer these kinds of full solutions, as it believes this to be a highly effective way for an organisation to improve its business processes.

Mobile gadgets have a place in today's work environment and many office solutions now have an element of interaction open to consumer mobile gadgets, including smartphones and tablets. Sharp has recognised this trend and also has a solution to offer their customers.

Sharp customers can now print scan and share documents with their mobile device and a supported Sharp MFP. Sharpdesk Mobile is a powerful, cutting edge mobile scanning and printing document application that connects to a supported Sharp MFP via a wireless LAN connection with the suite of popular mobile devices such as iPhone, iPad and Android devices.

With the Sharpdesk Mobile, users can enjoy new level of flexibility in delivering documents without using a PC. This kind of interaction can help employees be more effective at what they do, so there is a positive element to the rise of these gadgets.

Green is the other important trend and is very closely linked to the printing industry, considering that Sharp make devices that print and copy, and therefore, use paper.

The entirely paperless office is an ideal that is not really achievable – a degree of compromise is the way a company can move towards using less paper, but not dispose of it entirely. However, using less paper is crucial. Ways to manage the print environment so users are aware of how much paper they are using and how to reduce their consumption of this material is an important factor for businesses to consider.

Sharp is now incorporating its Eco-Driver in many of its printing solutions, where users are alerted to how much paper they are using and are given the option as to whether they really want to print or not, leading to up to 67% reduction in paper use. This reduction is more eco-friendly and reduces costs for the company.

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- USB port to print , PDF, JPG & Tiff
- Finishing options - Staple , stack and offset

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- optional input trays
- Other models CLP-680ND

CLX-4195FW

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- Wireless network model
- Polymerized toner
- WPS options and using Samsung mobile print
- Dual CPU -533Mhz delivering quality out put effortlessly
- One touch ECO button
- Samsung's unique ReCP (Rendering Engine for Clean Page)
- 4.3" touch screen
- Direct Usb Print



CLX-6260FW

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- Cost conscious model with ECO options and high yield toners
- duplex and wireless standard
- WPS and Samsung Mobile Print ready
- Dual CPU 533Mhz
- Samsung's unique ReCP (Rendering Engine for Clean Page)
- Professional high speed Colour
- optional input trays
- 4.3" touch screen
- Other models in series CLX-6260ND, CLX-6260FD



Oracle lays down cloud building blocks

While parts of the IT industry are moving to specialised solutions focused on targeted areas of the environment, Oracle is tying the whole eco-system together and engineering it to work even better.

Speaking at a recent press briefing in London, Rajan Krishnan, vice-president: applications development & product management at Oracle, says the stack that Oracle offers is an opportunity to deliver value.

“Historically, IT solutions have been a patchwork where customers have been required to assemble the individual components on their own,” he says. “The Oracle strategy is to create, assemble and optimise solutions, which makes it much simpler. Plus, they are engineered to work together, so there is one package for customers.”

At the recent Oracle OpenWorld conference, the company announced that it was making a big play in the cloud world. “Our mission is to bring Oracle’s leading enterprise technology and business applications software to any customer or partner anywhere in the world, through the Internet.”

All of Oracle’s infrastructure services are based on a common platform regardless of the application, Krishnan adds, which makes integration a much simpler prospect. “A lot of the heavy lifting has already been done as a result of this common infrastructure.”

Components of Oracle’s cloud offerings include platform services, application services and social services.

In the application services market, there is a need to look at the two broad categories of enterprise and consumer applications, Krishnan says.

“Within enterprise applications, there are the applications that customers build themselves; and packaged applications in the form of SaaS (software as a service).

The consumer side becomes a bit more complex, with specific consumer applications like Facebook as well as enterprise solutions that touch consumer application to drive a customer’s agenda or respond to their needs.

On the enterprise front, Oracle supplies a broad set of applications, delivered through both organic development as well as strategic innovation.

The Fusion application suite is a case in point, says Krishnan. “Fusion is built on standards, using SOA as backbone,” he says. “Plus, from the get-go, Fusion has been built with the modern user in mind.”

Application services available in the cloud include: Fusion HCM, Taleo, Fusion Talent Management; Fusion Sales and Marketing; RightNow, Endeca ATG, InQuira; Fusion Financials; Fusion Procurement, Sourcing, Inventory; Fusion PPM; and Fusion GRC.

All these solutions operate on a number of different consumption models: on-premise, in the cloud or hybrid.

Not only are Oracle’s cloud solutions integrated, but there are also point solutions that can operate independently, he adds.

“We’ve seen interest in different segments of the market: for instance, sometimes SMEs want to get started quickly but don’t have time energy to acquire and deploy software assets. You also find large customers may look at moving parts of their processes into the cloud, for instance for infrequent transactions. We are also seeing that customers are ready to move processes into the cloud.”

Oracle is able to deliver fairly straightforward CRM opportunities like sales and marketing campaign management through the cloud on a per-user subscription basis.

Increasingly, however, customers are looking to differentiate themselves by managing their customers’ experience throughout their lifecycle.

“There is a direct correlation between customer experience and company value,” says Krishnan. “And it’s not just positive experience that companies need to worry about, but negative experience as well. It is important to have the right set of tools to manage communication with customers across a variety of channels to deliver the optimal cross-channel experience.”

There is also a lot of interest in human capital management services, with some companies having shifted their entire HR process into the cloud, while using internal social networks to identify and maximise relationships within an organisation.

It is in the burgeoning field of mobile computing, that the power of the Oracle platform really comes to the fore, says Krishnan.

“Because the platform is based on open standards, it can adapt to changes in the market more quickly and take advantage of the latest technologies like Apple, Android and Windows. Because we leverage the stack rather than point solutions, and because churn in this market is so fast, the customer is better off building platform solutions that can then be rendered for the particular technology.”

Although Oracle is proud of its Fusion solutions, customers still have the option of either switching or of sticking to their original applications.

“Some customers want to continue on their current path, using applications that historically have made perfect business sense. In these instances, upgrading to the latest release of the existing application makes sense. At the same time, we are seeing the majority of those customers also picking up modules of Fusion to use where they make sense. Co-existence is a big theme for us and for our customers when it comes to Fusion and cloud services.”

Oracle

Oracle plans to make its presence felt in the cloud computing market, having expanded the offerings announced earlier in the year, while planning to deliver its applications based on a common platform via either public, private or hybrid cloud environments, in addition to the traditional IT environment.

Mark Hurd, president of Oracle, breaks down the company’s strategy going forward into four legs.

“The first is to be best of breed in everything we do,” he says. “Today, industry analysts say that if you look at magic quadrant, Oracle is the leader in something like 73 discrete categories. So the first part of the strategy is that we are open, fit in to heterogenous environments, and work with partners. Basically, how people think of Oracle historically.”

The second leg of the strategy, says Hurd, is to integrate these best of breed elements to build engineered systems. “This shows up in things like Exadata, Exalogic and Exalytics. Think of them as systems draped in software, engineered together, tuned and optimised to come up with better outcome.”

Exadata is an engineered system for the Oracle database environment, Exalogic is integration up through middleware and application layer, and Exalytics integrates systems for business intelligence.

“We think these discrete business systems offer very key advantages for customers,” Hurd says. “We provision the server, storage, operating system and database together – and it’s on our R&D, not customers budget. These systems simply run faster, perform better – and therefore cost less and can offer a better or higher level of support.”

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The third strategy is around Fusion cloud applications.

“We have the same code base for all applications, which are all on the same middleware,” says Hurd. “Historically, all applications ran on their own middleware, now everything is built on a common middleware layer.

“And all these applications are available through the Oracle cloud, through a private cloud, or on-premise – using the same code base. So customers can mix and match platform, and can even change their minds and swap platforms.”

Oracle is making its full application suite available on this basis, so customers can either cherry-pick the modules they want to run on various platforms, or choose to run the whole suite.

“We think of these three strategies as all building on each other: best of breed software, with the cloud running on engineered systems,” Hurd says.

The fourth strategy is industry verticals. “Oracle actually invests in the industries, making specific bets on industry segments and building solutions discretely for these industries.”

As part of its strategic direction, Oracle has released three key pieces of technology.

A new version of the database – Oracle 12c – is faster while delivering more privacy, more security, more performance and plenty of capability, says Hurd. “The c in 12c is for cloud,” he adds. “And it is the first cloud-ready database released to the market.”

A new Exadata engineered system has also been announced. “The first versions of Exadata could run Oracle database 100-times faster than other products, and also

run cheaper,” says Hurd. “The new version of Exadata is actually 20x faster than the one it replaces – so it is 2 000-times faster than the previous version of the database.

“The new Exadata is loaded with 26Tb of memory; 4Tb DRAM, 22Tb flash – it is huge, the biggest in-memory computer in the world, and the fastest computer in the world running Oracle database.”

Oracle has also expanded on June’s announcement of SaaS (software as a service) with new PaaS (platform as a service) and IaaS (infrastructure as a service) offerings.

“This is a big deal,” says Hurd. “In June we announced Oracle Cloud was serving up our application suite as SaaS. At OpenWorld we announced the ability to take Oracle cloud and implement it at the customer’s location as private cloud; or implement as IaaS, so customers can get the capability of Oracle Cloud behind the firewall. We also announced PaaS and Java as a service.”

Although sceptics have questioned how Oracle plans to make money out of the cloud model, Hurd says the figures tell a different story.

“The recent quarter is the best evidence,” he says. “This thing about Oracle not liking SaaS is silly – if you look at the numbers, we had record margins and the highest SaaS run-rate ever.

“We like this model and we are pushing cloud, pushing SaaS. We think that today we are in the best position with our suite of cloud capabilities of anyone in the industry. We feel great about our position and are pushing it very hard.”

In the current financial year, Oracle will spend about \$5-billion in R&D. “We feel very confident about our product portfolio,” Hurd says. “Almost all of our portfolio is fresh, released in the last 18 months and much of it in the last year.”

This new, modern software suite is



Mark Hurd, CEO of Oracle.

important, with customers going through many changes now, from mobility to social media and big data.

“Almost all of our customers are going through interesting times and lots of changes. There are issues with mobility, with the power of computers in people’s hands coupled with their desire for instant information, from wherever, whenever. There is the fact that data and social media are growing exponentially.

Hurd points out that data is growing at about 40%. “Most customers spend 10% of their IT budget on storage. They are simultaneously trying to innovate while implementing austerity plans.

“Most are struggling to communicate with customers: only 38% can connect customers via devices of their choice. If they can connect, only 10% can engage in a way the customer is comfortable. And only 3% to 4% can transact with the customer.”

In addition, the generation that is going to replace today’s workers is not tolerant, but expects immediate service and answers.

“Our customers want to innovate, while their budgets are not increasing,” says Hurd. “Oracle has to take its portfolio and strategy to customers and help them to save money.”

Ricoh debuts first duplex digital duplicator

Ricoh SA has made the DX 4640PD digital duplicator available in South Africa, offering customers the opportunity to accelerate print production at reduced costs over other print devices.

It is a network-ready system that prints on both sides of an A4 page at 240 impressions per minute (ipm) and will handle stock up to A3 size at up to 135ipm – both in simplex mode.

“It’s the world’s first high speed digital duplicator with double-sided printing that relieves pressure in high volume environments while simultaneously improving profitability,” says Andile Tunzi, product manager at Ricoh SA.

“It’s the single pass printing of double-sided documents that really sets it apart and network connectivity means operators can transfer longer print runs from other devices direct to the DX 4640.”

Direct desktop printing is supported and the icon-driven Ricoh Universal driver simplifies the printing process and reduces the burden on operators by allowing them to easily choose preferred output formats and send to print with one command.

It features quick start functionality for a first print time in simplex output of 12 seconds and intuitive touch screen with an optional hard drive to serve the document library and store frequently executed jobs, such as expense forms, stationery, and price lists, for instant recall.

It provides true 400 dots per inch (dpi) quality with fine solid fills, smooth half tones and sharp, flawless text. The DX 4640 also combines advanced master and ink technology with Ricoh’s automatic pressure control that balances ink density on every page which assists achieving a

professional, crisp, flawless text and clean, sharp image.

It is available with a number of options including a 3 000-sheet feeder tray that makes for uninterrupted runs. A colour drum can also be added for spot colour that enables a wider range of colour-enhanced documents, such as newsletters, posters, menus, tickets and price lists, and to do so quickly and cost effectively at high volume.

Besides the duplex printing the DX 4640 boasts additional environmental credentials that include manufacture without lead, chromium, PVC or cadmium.



Axis launches new mini camera

Axis Communication has launched the Axis P12.

The camera is designed for covert surveillance in stores, banks and ATMs, architectural buildings, hotels and offices

The Axis P12 series cameras, a series of uniquely designed cameras for exceptionally discreet indoor and outdoor surveillance. The cameras’ form factor and small size enable easy integration into very limited spaces, making them ideal for discreet or covert surveillance. They blend into a variety of environments where space is constricted.

The Axis P1204 and AXIS P1214 are pinhole models, ideal for indoor environments. The Axis P1214-E is an IP66-rated model, suited for both indoor and outdoor applications. Each one of the products consists of a small sensor unit with a lens and image sensor, a main unit with electronics and corresponding mounting accessories.

The cameras can be powered either over Ethernet, or by external power supply. Edge storage is supported and recordings can be saved to an optional microSD/ microSDHC card or a network attached storage (NAS).



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Camera support from Axis

Axis Communication has launched the Axis Camera Companion, targeted at small business owners.

The new release includes features such as audio, support for public view monitoring, Axis' Corridor Format and video authentication. The cameras can be powered either over Ethernet, or by external power supply. Edge storage is supported and recordings can be saved to an optional microSD/microSDHC card or a network attached storage (NAS).

The cameras provide powerful event management capabilities with Axis Camera Application Platform and embedded intelligent video features such as motion detection, tampering alarm and I/O ports for connecting external devices.



The New GeForce GTX 650 Ti

The new Nvidia GeForce GTX 650 Ti video card is now available from Omega Africa. The card boasts fast performance, exceptional power efficiency, and a range of software features that help gamers get the best from their systems and the games they play.

Compared to the 9600 GT, a card among the top 10 most used on Steam, the GTX 650 Ti runs at over 30 frames per second (fps) in each title using DirectX 11 when available (the 9600 GT supports DirectX 9 and 10 only).

At maximum settings, the GTX 650 Ti pushes past 90fps in both Diablo III and Mass Effect 3, and in World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria the GTX 650 Ti hits 80fps using high settings and 4xAA, nearly twice as fast as the GTX 650.

ECS release A970M-A Deluxe motherboard

Elitegroup Computer Systems (ECS) has announced the newest member of its high-performance Black Series of PC motherboards. The ECS A970M-A Deluxe supports AMD AM3 and AM3+ APUs, and gets the most from them with the latest ECS innovations for power, ease-of-use and reliability.

The motherboard boasts features like full Windows 8 support, an upgraded user friendly BIOS (EZ BIOS), anti-dust technology (ADS) and eight channel HD audio.

The A970M-A Deluxe is built around the AMD 970 chipset, to squeeze the maximum performance out of the most powerful cutting edge CPUs while still maintaining compatibility with older technology.

The motherboard features the new user-friendly graphical uEFI BIOS – EZ BIOS, with ECS MIB X for easy overclocking and tweaking, a multi-language interface and full Windows 8 support.

Users can easily select and change settings in the BIOS with mouse and keyboard.

For the ultimate in stability and reliability, the A970M-A Deluxe introduces new features like ECS ADS. The ultimate in dust defence technology, ADS prevents dust build up on the motherboard - a common, but little-understood, cause of instability, intermittent faults and poor performance.

Long-term dust build up can cripple even the most powerful PCs by causing tough-to-diagnose issues like overheating, short-circuits and unreliable memory or graphics card connections.

The motherboard is also certified by ECS Nonstop Technology. This brings the user a hassle-free computing experience by solving many common PC hardware problems before they can even occur.

ECS Nonstop features include enhanced gold plating on critical contacts, solid capacitors with a six times greater lifespan, and electrostatic discharge (ESD) protection for USB3.0, USB2.0, eSATA and LAN.

These hardware enhancements and a strict series of specially-designed tests work together to protect PCs and increase reliability.

The ATX format A970M-A Deluxe features two PCIe Gen2 x16 slots for high-speed graphics card upgrades and CrossFireX support, as well as two PCIe Gen2 x1 slots and two PCI slots for other cards.

Up to 32Gb of dual channel DDR3 memory can be installed in four DIMMs, with a maximum standard speed of 1866MHz, or up to 2133MHz for overclockers. There are five SATA 6Gbps connectors for high speed disk drives and other storage devices.



Huawei releases eSpace EGW15xx gateway family

The Huawei eSpace EGW15xx series gateway family, which includes the EGW1500E and EGW1520, are new-generation enterprise gateways that provide a complete access solution, implementing data, voice, broadband connections, wireless access and security-related features.

Either model proves to be an optimal choice for small office home office (SOHO) users and small-sized enterprises to establish an integrated office network.

The eSpace EGW1500 provides various uplink ports for different networking scenarios. It supports ADSL, 3G or Wireless uplinks, one FXO port and four FXS ports. Each EGW1500 supports eight 10/100 Ethernet ports for direct connection to users or shared devices.

The eSpace EGW1520 provides various uplink ports for different networking scenarios. It supports ADSL, 3G or Wireless uplinks, four FXO port and four FXS ports. Each EGW1520 supports four 10/100 Ethernet ports for direct connection to users or shared devices.

As the EGW15xx family support a maximum of 20 users, a switch may be connected to support additional users.

The EGW15xx family is part of the newly launched Huawei unified communications promotions packages which are being run by Mustek.

Microsoft Sculpt Touch Mouse from Comztek

The new Microsoft Sculpt Touch Mouse, available from Comztek, is designed to get things done on the go.

The touch strip makes scrolling through long and wide documents quick and easy. The mouse is a powerful complement to Windows 8, with fluid navigation of the Start Screen.

With wireless Bluetooth connectivity and BlueTrack Technology, the mouse works almost anywhere without a dongle or transceiver.

It boasts impressive features:

- * Four-way touch scrolling for navigating up, down, left and right;
- * It has been designed for comfort and portability;
- * It works on virtually any surface with BlueTrack Technology;
- * It has wireless Bluetooth connectivity and doesn't require a transceiver;
- * It works with many Android tablets; and
- * The device has three customisable buttons for more control.



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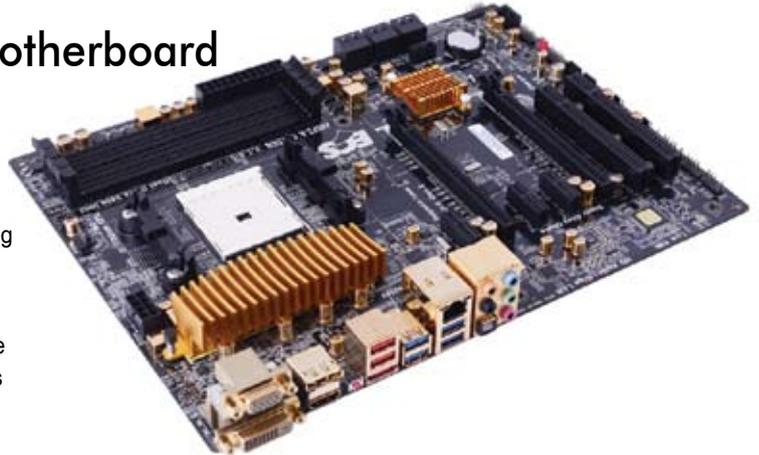
ECS announces the A85F2-A motherboard

Elitegroup Computer Systems (ECS) has revealed the A85F2-A Golden motherboard. The board builds on the already strong range of FM2 motherboards by adding a host of powerful new features on the Trinity technology platform. It uses exclusive gold plating technology for the strictest quality and a higher outstanding performance.

The individually-numbered, handcrafted motherboards are outfitted in cool black with gold-plated key components, giving the A85F2-A GOLDEN a sophisticated and classy appearance that is unprecedented in the PC motherboard industry.

Key features include:

- * World first AMP Technology support;
- * Newest graphical uEFI BIOS - EZ BIOS, with its user-friendly interface and easy-to-use functionality takes full advantage of the performance, high-end gaming, multi-tasking and Windows 8 support;
- * ATI CrossFireX graphics support with next generation PCI Express 2.0 to achieve the ultimate in 3D gaming performance;
- * Separate four-display output design;
- * HDMI Deep Color to accurately display billions of colours,



providing a new level of realism and colour accuracy;

- * AMD Turbo Core 3 extends the Turbo Core performance boost to the GPU;
- * Support for industry standards has been upgraded, with Open GL 4.2, DisplayPort Version 1.2, and Open CL 1.1 or later; and
- * Enhanced features are standard, like AMD Universal Video Decoder (UVD) and Video Codec Engine (VCE) for ultra-fast video encoding and decoding.

The A85F2-A GOLDEN is bundled with THX TruStudio PRO which delivers a full audio experience for music, movies and games.

Nexus 7 tablet now available from select retailers

The Nexus 7 16Gb tablet is now available in South Africa, priced at R2999.00. Nexus 7 is the first tablet in Google's Nexus line of devices and the lead device for Android 4.1 Jelly Bean.

The Nexus 7 combines premium hardware, designed by Asus, with the latest version of Android and a choice of more than 600 000 apps and games from Google Play.

Jointly developed between Asus and Google, Nexus 7 is the world's first 7-inch quad-core tablet, built to bring consumers the best of Google and Asus in a slim and portable package that fits perfectly in the hand.

Nexus 7 brings together Asus' world-class "design thinking" philosophy and the latest version of Google's innovative Android platform to deliver the ultimate portable computing experience at a low price point.

With a vibrant, 1 280 x 800 high-resolution display, Nexus 7 brings users' favourite apps and games to life. With over one million pixels, Nexus 7's IPS panel ensures that text is sharper, HD video is more vivid and gameplay is smooth and dynamic. All of this is protected under scratch-resistant Corning glass.

Nexus 7 is designed to deliver the best possible gaming experience. An Nvidia Tegra 3 processor delivers heart-pounding quad-core performance and immersive graphics.

Games are enhanced by Nexus 7's sensors, which include a gyroscope, accelerometer and NFC, as well as a responsive 10-finger multi-touch screen.

At 10,5mm thin and 340g, it has the portability of a paperback but is connected to a world of entertainment.

Android 4.1 Jelly Bean has smarter notifications that enable quick, on-the-fly responses, new widgets that put important information front and centre, and homescreen customisation that's as easy as drag-and-drop, making Android faster and more intuitive than ever.

Google's services work best on Android, as all users' data is instantly available and synced with the cloud after signing in with their Google account, but it also seamlessly syncs content across users' tablets, phones and PCs for a truly integrated experience.

Nexus 7 comes with all the top Google Apps, such as Gmail, Chrome, Google+ and YouTube, putting the best of Google in consumers' hands.

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Konica Minolta SA introduces EveryonePrint

Konica Minolta South Africa has made EveryonePrint (EOP) available to companies wanting to establish a private hosted cloud printing environment.

Mobile technology is quickly advancing to the point where users can accomplish tasks on a smartphone or tablet that once required a laptop or PC. This computing power, combined with anywhere, anytime connectivity, means mobile devices are becoming powerful and pervasive business tools.

According to Mohammed Vachiat, product manager at Konica Minolta South Africa, despite the rapidly increasing use of smartphones and tablets in enterprises and other sectors, printing infrastructure has not kept pace with mobile technology.

Follow-me printing "inside the cloud" does not require users to determine a certain output device in advance – they can choose as they go along. Using the authentication functionality, EOP can be adapted and configured for employees and/or external users.

Vachiat explains that EOP is a way to easily establish a private

cloud print solution in corporate environments and that the product's enhanced security features avoid unattended printouts in the printer output tray.

Key features of EOP include:

- * Convenient driverless mobile printing;
- * Flexible print job submission via e-mail, landing page or EOP printer driver;
- * Easy modification of basic job settings during print job release;
- * Office file format support for mobile printing – Word, Excel, PowerPoint, PDF, Web sites, TXT and more;
- * EOP printer driver support for unlimited applications, such as Windows, Macintosh and Linux;
- * Access limitation, for example to known users in the corporate network by authentication; and
- * Print job release via PIN ID for anonymous users.

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IT distribution: a haven for accountants heading for comfortable retirement

“Influencers” (this month’s cover story) is probably best described as a polite, politically-correct term used by my esteemed editor in an attempt to describe personalities in the IT distribution channel who he, and his inner-circle of sage advisors, consider capable of exerting control or authority over the industry, or who lead or shape the IT distribution sector by inspiring significant change or of having some great impact on how business is conducted.

Looking back over the past decade or so, there seems little to suggest that there are any real “influencers” left in an industry that was once characterised and driven by a handful of dynamic entrepreneurs who could more aptly be described as “movers and shakers”.

In most cases, it seems the organisations themselves have some sort of influence in the industry – not due to any dynamism displayed by the top executives concerned, but rather by their sheer size.

To an overwhelming degree it seems that the IT distribution sector in this country has vastly matured. Most major players appear to have reached a point in the enterprise life cycle where they are content to do no more than hold their own in a market that has, to all intents and purposes, been allocated according to requirements set by vendors.

The maturity that seems to have set in is probably something of a tribute to the executives who are featured elsewhere in this month’s cover story - a tribute to their responsible leadership and their conservative approach to doing business in what has been an extremely difficult economic cycle dating back to the global financial meltdown towards the end of 2008.

Besides the economic reality of the current recessionary cycle, the temptation not to do anything to disrupt the status quo that seems to exist in the market among distributors is also due in no small measure to the focus on risk management that seems to be a critical aspect of doing business that is hugely dependent on high

volume and low-margin, commoditised products and services.

It’s common knowledge in the IT distribution industry that “best-practice” management should be focused on credit insurance, foreign exchange management and cost containment in areas such as logistics (shipping and deliveries) and stock holding optimisation.

The problem with “best-practice” methodology is that it tends to stifle innovation with all companies in the same sector content to defend their position by retreating into a comfort zone of co-existence with their competitors.

Without the benefit of credible research and in-depth market analysis, it’s probably fairly safe to assume that these “comfort zones” of co-existence among various competitors in the IT distribution sector are based on market shares that are relatively stable and have been for several years – both in terms of reseller customers and products.

Gone are the days when market shares could be seriously disrupted by aggressive tactics such as price wars, extended credit terms or (dare we say it) grey market.

An indication of how mature, settled and relatively comfortable the market has become can be found in the personalities that feature in this issue and that continue to head up the country’s leading IT distribution organisations.

They have been around for some time with very few having been associated with any earth-shattering initiatives in the sector. It’s also interesting to note that there are no obvious succession plans in place for many of these individuals - and also very little evidence of sweeping transformation.

Unlike the cellular network sector that has seen a former Vodacom CEO initiate changes of tsunami proportions this year, the IT distribution sector seems a peaceful haven for chartered accountants heading for comfortable retirement.

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