

# Africa is all about relationships

For years, Africa has been the next big thing. While the continent continues to attract the hype, many businesses have found entry into African marketplaces challenging.

This, says Carlo Regueiras, Africa Sales Manager at Altech ISIS, is because companies continue to approach Africa from a service provider mindset, rather than with an understanding of the partnerships that business in Africa requires.

"Despite the fact that doing business in Africa has changed significantly over the past few years with the continent's business environment maturing, there are still many continent- and country-specific adaptations that are required for a company to be successful. The only way to achieve an effective business presence in an African country is through local knowledge."

While many companies profess to have this local knowledge, few have an established network of local partners that allows them to overcome the challenges that even home-grown businesses have to overcome in these emerging markets, and even fewer have presence in multiple African countries.

"Each market is unique. It is not easy to access and it takes a while for companies to begin to recognise the opportunities it offers. Partnerships with local businesses to guide a company through the intricacies of business in each country are essential," Regueiras explains.

However, a lack of skilled workers in the IT sector continues to be the biggest challenge - and opportunity - for technology companies looking to do business in Africa. This is a hurdle that local partnerships can't overcome because of the scarcity of skills, and yet provides the opening with which to enter a particular market. As a result, most businesses entering an African country import the skills, losing the value that local experience can provide.

A South African company with experience in a number of African countries, Altech ISIS has overcome this situation through its long-established presence on the continent. In addition to having extensive local knowledge and understanding of each of the markets it works in, the company has continued its relationships with local partners, and continues to add to these.

"Africa is all about relationships. As more foreign companies enter African markets, those businesses that have an understanding of local needs and requirements and those that have true local presence are the ones that African companies will turn to for their technology solutions. Our success in Africa is a direct result of having made the investment into local knowledge, skills and partners," says Regueiras.

Altech ISIS's reference clients across the continent are testament to the value of this approach. "Our credibility as an African company, combined with the skills we offer and our partnerships with local businesses have been key to the growth of our business on the continent. We will continue to pursue this strategy as we focus on the growth of our African business," Regueiras concludes.