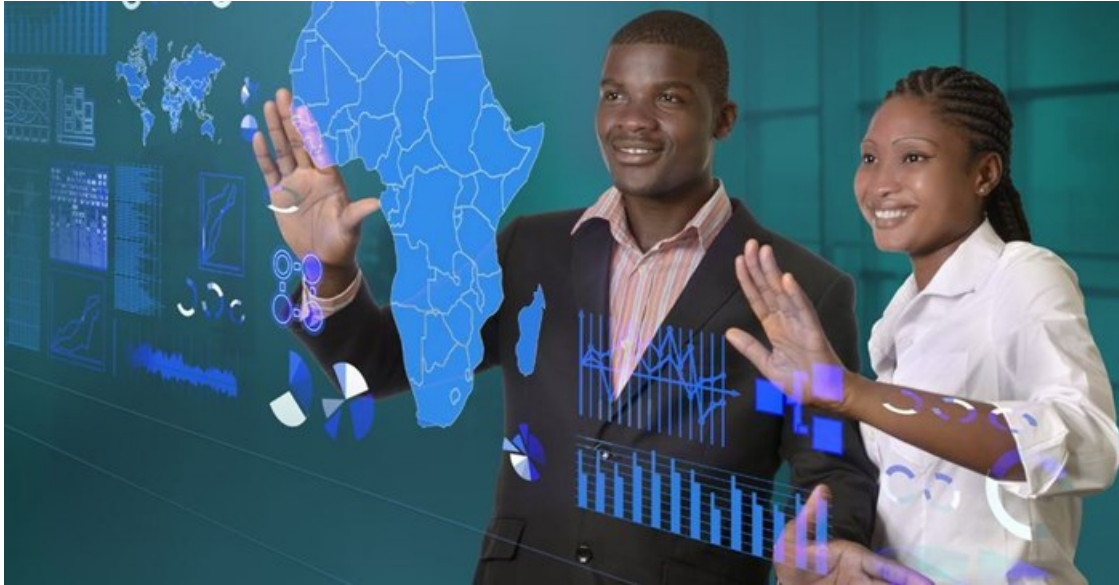


Sharpening African manufacturers' competitive edge with technology

By [Matthew Kibby](#)

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African countries from South Africa to Ethiopia to Nigeria are pinning some of their hope for economic growth and job creation on industrialisation. With its young population, dynamic growth and rapidly improving infrastructure, sub-Saharan Africa has the potential to become a manufacturing powerhouse in the years to come.



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But first, African manufacturers must boost efficiency, productivity and quality if they are to compete with low-cost producers in Asia as well as with the high-tech, tightly integrated supply chains in North America and Europe. A new industrial revolution is rapidly transforming how and where goods are made, and the African industry needs to keep up.

For example, advanced robotics and a range of innovative materials are making it cheaper and faster to produce even complex technical goods in factories across the world. Leading manufacturers are using tools such as the Internet of Things, big data, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve productivity, reduce energy and resource consumption - and African companies stand a chance of getting left behind.

To stand out in a globalised market, African manufacturers need to be able to compete with low cost overseas competitors. Taking control of data for better customer insight is key – it will enable manufacturers to anticipate customer demands and become more agile.

Delivering the right product, at the right time and at the right price requires manufacturers to take total control of their product development process, from initial design to final production. By using specialist technology will help shorten the time-to-market for products, improve product quality, and increase customer satisfaction.

Better business management – better business

Before jumping into advanced robotics or AI, sub-Saharan Africa's manufacturers should be looking at their business management systems to ensure they are fit for purpose. Many of them are using legacy systems or even heavily manual processes, rather than integrated, enterprise applications. A robust business management solution can be a real game changer, helping manufacturers meet the evolving challenges of today's business world.

According to a recent [Forrester report](#), manufacturers can realise up to 218% return on investment (ROI) within four months by implementing effective business management solutions. The report also found that, as well as receiving significant ROI within a short amount of time, manufacturing organisations reported strong improvements in: financial management; purchasing; sale management; inventory management; and customer service.

Business management solutions enable manufacturers to meet the challenges of today's business world, helping them to accelerate collaboration and reporting, providing real-time insight into costs and operational performance, and providing information for smarter and faster business decisions. This, in turn, allows them to enhance efficiency, diminish costs, and increase sales and profitability.

Next generation business management systems enable a company to optimise the end-to-end manufacturing process – including production planning, project management, process scheduling, compliance, and mobile supply chain management, while reducing overall total manufacturing costs.

Removing the heavy-lifting and mundane tasks that slow down productivity, stifle flexibility and inhibit growth can transform an organisation into a world-class player. Improved visibility between the front- and the back-office will lead to better insight and improved decision making across key company operations.

An investment worth making

Next-generation business management solutions take the complexity out of running a manufacturing business, simplifying operations to allow enterprises to grow faster and stay agile. With minimal IT investment and resources, companies can enjoy rich, integrated functionality to support all core business processes. And they're easy to adapt to fit unique processes, roles and preferences.

Automated solutions and consistent processes lead to time and cost savings, easier collaboration and faster outcomes. Integrated reporting allows regular and real-time operational insights, enabling better, quicker business decisions. The right solution will allow African manufacturing companies to consistently deliver and take advantage of new commercial opportunities.

The efficient, streamlined processes that stem from the right business management solutions enable improved productivity and profitability – and accelerated growth.

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