Cisco prepares SMMEs for digital economy

Cisco South Africa announced the launch of a R10m incubation hub to help develop SMMEs in the digital age and speed up their entry to market.

This is in keeping with the priorities of the National Development Plan in terms of job creation, poverty alleviation and driving economic growth. The objective of the 'Cisco Edge Incubation Centre,' which is located in Pretoria, is to provide SMMEs state-of-the-art Cisco technology, alongside with training and enablement programs.

The hub is a smart building that offers complete business facilities including workspaces with high-speed broadband connectivity, video conferencing and collaboration platforms, as well as boardroom and training facilities. In addition, SMMEs will be able to connect with global Cisco experts, who can help them develop business ideas and concepts in a digital world.

"The hub is designed to impart business knowledge and technology skills along with collaborative opportunities. Our goal is to help prepare SMMEs for the digital economy and ultimately lead to job creation," says Cisco's general manager for sub-Saharan Africa, Clayton Naidoo.

"As a global company, we want to enable SMME's to have access to our resources no matter where these resources sit in the world."

The centre will be run in conjunction with the Innovation Hub in Pretoria and the State Information Technology Agency (SITA). At least 30 SMMEs will be trained annually and given the necessary skills to enable them to compete in the market. In the coming months, Cisco plans to establish similar centres in Gauteng (Tshimologong), Eastern Cape (East London Industrial Development Zone) and KwaZulu-Natal (Dube Trade Port).

Job creation efforts

"From a local point of view, Cisco is conscious of the National Development Plan, and as such, we want to contribute to the country's job creation efforts," says Naidoo.

For more than 20 years, Cisco has invested in educating and upskilling students and graduates, among them unemployed youth, through its Networking Academy (NetAcad). NetAcad gives students hands-on digital skills training to prepare them for in-demand careers and the digital economy. With more than 7 million graduates to date, NetAcad is the world's largest classroom. In South Africa alone, NetAcad trained 8,500 students last year with 92% of them completing their goals and landing new work opportunities.

Naidoo added this centre will provide the opportunity for SMMEs to employ graduates from the NetAcad program and give them workplace experience, and in turn the SMMEs will leverage the graduates' skills.

Advocate Pieter Holl, acting CEO for the Innovation Hub in Pretoria said this was an incredible opportunity that would change many lives for the better: "This centre allows young people and entrepreneurs to equip themselves with vital and specialised capabilities that will give them a head-start in the fast-paced digital world. With Cisco's guidance, this will ultimately help drive South Africa's economic growth."

The name of the centre stands for the competitiveness that most of these small businesses lack to establish and sustain successful enterprises. It is this resilience that we are determined to arm them: Experience, Design, GTM (Go to Market) and Earn.

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