

IT infrastructure: the lifeblood of Africa's business innovation

By [Maurice Blackwood](#)

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'Innovation' is a word I hear a lot in business these days. Many organisations owe their success to it, while others have realised the importance of inventive thinking and are just getting started with their own forward-thinking projects.



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In the true spirit of innovation, every organisation approaches the process in its own unique way. But despite such a willingness to stand apart, there is one thing that many firms do have in common – they use cloud for innovation. This is true across the MEA region, and in Africa in particular, the trend has emerged at a time when mobile adoption is also flourishing. This is not just a coincidence, because the two are inextricably linked.

With smartphone usage almost doubling in two years, more brands are in the pockets of more people on the continent. Meanwhile, between 2015 and 2020, monthly mobile data usage is expected to increase from 0.3 GB to 4.3 GB. This is a golden opportunity for Africa's innovators to capitalise on an expanding, mobile-first audience, but the one thing standing in their way is a challenging IT environment.

Empowerment through IT

Having the ambition to be a disruptor or a creative force in the industry isn't enough, you need an IT environment that empowers your business to become one. Organisations do realise this, but many are feeling the squeeze of a global economic slowdown. As revenue forecasts are cut, IT budgets inevitably suffer, which makes it much harder for IT leaders to invest in new infrastructure and therefore fund innovation. Yet despite this financial constraint, the demand for 'third platform' technologies of big data, analytics, social and mobile doesn't go away.

Therefore, the question is: how can you deliver on the new IT demands of the business while sticking to a tighter budget? The answer lies in the IT environment itself. When you need to reduce energy costs, spearhead innovation, or do whatever else is demanded, you need to look at transforming the platforms at the heart of your operations. And today, these platforms are most often Linux-based and open source. The first step towards transforming them is to understand exactly what your IT infrastructure is capable of, starting with the hardware.

Given that the IT department is now considered crucial to creating better value for customers, the priorities for your IT infrastructure should be agility, scalability, and availability. Agility gives you the speed to create and launch applications faster than your competitors, while also making you a disruptive force in the market. Scalability enables your infrastructure to grow exponentially, and without causing the inefficiencies that cut into profit. Finally, availability guarantees virtually no downtime, so customers are always connected to your products or services.

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