

Gen Z employees will future-proof South Africa's travel and tourism businesses

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8 Jul 2019

Travel agents. Tour operators. Chefs. Game rangers. These are typically the careers that are associated with the travel and tourism industry. However, as the industry increasingly embraces technological innovation and data analytics, many exciting high-tech jobs have emerged, which are a perfect fit for Generation Z, set to become the biggest consumer market by 2020 and our future workforce.



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What do we know about Generation Z? A term to describe individuals born after 1996, far from just a younger version of the Millennials, Gen Z is even more tech-savvy, and a lot more demanding than their predecessors. Companies who want to attract top Gen Z talent need to realise this generation's unique relationship with technology.

Although millennials are often considered the first generation to stay 'always connected', many of them were raised when modern technology was in its infancy, with landlines and dial-up Internet connections. Meanwhile, the oldest Gen Z was just 10 years old when the iPhone was launched (2007) and has never known life without the Internet and mobile phones. In this sense, Gen Zers are the first true "digital natives".

Bringers of new technology

Gen Z is expected to bring a new understanding of technology and its potential role in our world, claims a report by Dell Technologies. The report surveyed more than 12,000 high school and college students in 17 countries to gain insight into how younger generations view technology and future jobs.

Among those surveyed, 98% have used technology during their formal education. Some 80% of respondents want to work with cutting-edge technology, and the same percentage believe tech and automation will forge a more equitable work environment. The majority of Gen Zers are confident in their knowledge of technology, with 73% rating their technology literacy as 'good' or 'excellent'.

South Africa's travel and tourism industry could benefit significantly from Gen Z's technology literacy to create and maintain a digital presence. Equally, the travel and tourism industry offers young professionals exciting opportunities, from data analytics to virtual reality and, even, robotics.

Leading data and analytics company, GlobalData's latest report, *Technology Trends in Travel & Tourism*, found that travel companies use various technologies to engage with customers at every stage of their journey.

The report found that, although travel still revolves around meaningful human interactions, companies need to create a balance between technological innovations and the human element to be successful.

Embracing intrinsic knowledge

The past few years have seen an increase in Virtual Reality (VR) popularity among travel and tourism companies, and that trend is set to continue. This technology is used for content marketing and to enhance customer experiences. For example, airlines have started using VR technology to show travellers the cabins in advance, to increase ticket and ancillary service sales.

Although the tourism industry is adopting new systems at a rapid pace around the world, South African businesses tend to take a reactive approach to technology. It is time to embrace the intrinsic knowledge of our younger Generation Z population. We need to respond proactively to the fourth industrial revolution and bring the South African travel and tourism industry firmly into the digital era.

It is vital to develop technology that allows travellers of all ages to search, view and share their travel experiences in South Africa seamlessly online. That technology needs to provide a platform for all tourism experiences, whether it is the popular attractions or lesser-known authentic experiences. And it needs to be available to the smaller SMEs, to market their experience to the international traveller alongside the 'big guys', large hotel chains and luxury lodges.

Generation Z can help the travel industry in South Africa, from the high-tech travel company in Johannesburg to the small rural B&B in Mpumalanga, leap into the digital realm.

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