

3 digital tools to futureproof your SME

Issued by [Business Partners Limited](#)

7 Mar 2023

Technological advancement has, within a very short period of time, opened up new windows of opportunity for small businesses to improve several key metrics including productivity, operational costs, efficiency, and time management.

Some of the biggest opportunities that digitisation offers small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) are the ability to operate cashless businesses, the power to use data as a powerful decision-making tool and the opportunity to automate basic business functions, which enables entrepreneurs to save time, money, and resources. Technology is – as experts have argued – a tool that will level the playing field, giving SMEs an edge in the broader arena of competition alongside their larger counterparts.



Ben Bierran

“ ... great strides are being made by several tech innovators to provide entrepreneurs with free or cost-effective tools to enhance and grow their businesses. ”

Roadblocks to success for local SMEs

The harsh reality, however, is that a number of factors stand in the way of greater digitalisation amongst local entrepreneurs. Research conducted by Citrix found that business owners across a multitude of industries agree that digital adoption is directly linked to business profitability. However, 54% of these business owners still feel unprepared for the future.

And according to a recent white paper published by SME South Africa in partnership with Telkom, the biggest challenges facing South African small businesses are the high costs of mobile data, lack of advanced infrastructure for fibre optic connectivity as well as a lack of digital skills and training.

Steady progress on the path to transformation

Industry stakeholders, as well as several key individuals and corporate entities within the public and private sectors, are rallying around the call for better collaboration to help South African entrepreneurs overcome these systemic hurdles.

Examples of these efforts include Absa's digital partnerships ecosystem, which has seen the banking group collaborate with several intercontinental educational institutions to push local digital upskilling. Wits University has also joined the collective behind driving digital transformation in Africa by becoming a member of the African Engineering and Technology Network (Afretec).

Creating and fostering an entrepreneurial culture and climate that is conducive to digitally driven business progress will take time, but great strides are being made by several tech innovators to provide entrepreneurs with free or cost-effective tools to enhance and grow their businesses.



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These are three of the free or low-cost digital tools you can use right now to optimise your SME's operations, some of which offer obligation-free trial periods:

For everything creative: [Canva](#)

You don't have to be an expert graphic designer or videographer to create digital pieces of content that will engage your audience online and on social media. All you need is a non-technical, intuitively designed, reliable and creative tool like Canva. This site provides you with pre-formatted templates for almost every visual asset, from social media banners and video posts to traditional brochures and gift certificates.

For all the number-crunching: [Xero](#)

Xero is a multi-award-winning accounting software tool that allows you to run your business anytime, from anywhere. With Xero, you can automate your admin and easily sync the tool with your bank and financial records. You can also use it to store important documents, capture bills, receipts and scan files from your mobile. As a tool that's optimal for small businesses, Xero is easy to use, understand and it's a great introduction to the basic accounting and financial management procedures you need to get to grips with as you continue to grow your business.

For better time management: [Calendly](#)

If your small business relies on the efficient and accurate recording and administration of appointments, Calendly will be a game-changer. Using this free app, your employees, suppliers and business associates can book meetings and appointments according to your weekly schedule. The app also sends reminder emails and allows for rescheduling. With Calendly, you can avoid the back-and-forth process of synchronising your time with the schedules of others. Currently, the app is used by millions of SME owners around the world to conduct interviews, expand their business network, schedule high-profile meetings and calls to close those important deals.

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