

Visa flexibility would boost SA outsource potential

South Africa's hopes of serving as a global outsource destination to drive foreign investment are achievable according to DigiOutsource, a global enterprise based in Cape Town and serving international gaming clients.



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DigiOutsource CEO David Stevenson says South Africa has highly skilled and talented resources at a cost to company more competitive than in many countries elsewhere in the world. South Africans also have excellent work ethic and tend to be flexible on shifts and working hours, which is necessary when servicing clients across time zones.

Stringent visa requirements

The company recruits between 300–400 new foreign employees each year, a task which can prove challenging in the face of stringent visa requirements.

“It can take up to six months for a visa application to be approved, during which time our new recruit must be based at our office and transit centre in London,” says Stevenson. “Running this London office increases our cost of doing business and means we must allocate resources there which we could deploy more effectively in South Africa.”

He says that while the customer-facing language specialists are crucial to their ability to service its international clients, it should be noted that each language specialist is backed by scores of local professionals in admin, support, risk and fraud

management, technical and software development roles.

“In addition to hundreds of local jobs created, our monthly wage bill is around R40 million, and this goes back into this economy. Add our bonus month at the end of the year and you’re looking at over half a billion rand in wages that we are ploughing back into the economy. The harder it becomes for us to bring in foreign language skills, the harder it would be to service our clients effectively and the greater the risk of this money moving to Eastern Europe or wherever else a client might decide to move its back offices,” Stevenson says.

A more flexible approach to work visas

While DigiOutsource recognises the need to drive South African employment, it believes the government could take a more flexible approach to work visas to support international firms generating local revenue. “The government could look more closely at businesses bringing in foreign skills and ask ‘what are you doing?’ If you looked at our business and saw what we contribute to employment and the fiscus in terms of salaries, you would recognise that even though we are global-facing, we aren’t taking jobs away from local people,” Stevenson notes.

“In our case, we have a certain number of foreign-language frontline staff, but many more local support staff behind the scenes.

“The moment you start driving the language skills away, you also start shifting the support jobs away.”

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