

Africa ripe with opportunity, innovation to transform lives

Africa has all the resources, talent and technology to be a global leader in digital innovation and transformation, according to Hilton Romanski, Cisco's chief strategy officer.



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“Technology is an enabler of freedom and presents unimaginable opportunities for Africa,” said Romanski. He was speaking at [Cisco Connect South Africa](#) event sponsored by Intel, to some of the top leaders in Africa’s ICT industry.

“Technology presents many opportunities and challenges for Africa as the fastest urbanising region in the world,” said Romanski. “Cisco recognises the pipeline of African talent and we are deeply involved in enabling the widespread emergence of tech ecosystems across the continent.”

Centre of the world

According to the United Nations, within the next 20 years Africa’s working age population is expected to be over one billion, larger than China’s or India’s. While only 2% of the African economy is currently composed of internet-related services, this figure is expected to grow to 7% or \$315 billion by 2025.

With the [Cisco Networking Academy](#) — an IT skills and career building programme for learning institutions and individuals worldwide — Cisco is enabling African workers to be valued contributors to the digital economy. The company is also equipping and advising companies, cities, provinces and nations to build, secure and improve digital technologies to drive economic growth and efficiencies.

“Africa is geographically in the centre of the world, between the East and West, and an emerging powerhouse of the Global South,” added Romanski. “Technology holds the chance for Africa to build more open societies and for some countries to leapfrog others.”

Shared opportunities

It is expected that as globalisation continues, more ideas will be exchanged, collaboration will increase, and open development will flourish. Romanski highlighted [Cisco Spark Board](#), recently launched in South Africa, as an example of how global collaboration is becoming easier, increasing the freedom to share, learn, teach and work in more places.

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“Technology plays a key role in powering openness and collaboration so that ideas traverse not just countries, but continents. Digitalisation is revamping the delivery of education, health and other public services, and transforming lives in the process,” observed Romanski.

“We are living in an age in which unprecedented digital transformation is occurring in business, economies and political systems. The significance of this is that the policies a country chooses to pursue in the next decade will determine the extent to which their economies will develop, compete and integrate within the global economy.”

Supporting ICT

Romanski said South Africa’s ICT sector has a responsibility to support young entrepreneurs and SMMEs in general. One element of Cisco’s focus on innovation in the country has been through co-development. For example, the Tshimologong Precinct at the University of Witwatersrand — a vibrant start-up incubator in Johannesburg’s inner-city — last year saw the company invest R12 million as one of the technology partners aiming to turn Braamfontein into a digital hub.

Apart from enabling entrepreneurs to build businesses that will shape the world, Cisco sees continued digitalisation as opportunities to:

- Improve the country’s competitiveness on the global stage.
- Allow governments to extend the reach and impact of public services.
- Provide more accessibility and opportunities for education and technology-based careers.

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