

Thinking about innovation in a sustainable way

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The role of any CFO is to oversee a company's financial planning and risk management. However, for Derek Kahts, CFO at TNS South Africa, part of his role is also to consider technological and intellectual innovation to keep the company at the forefront of decision technology.

Kahts explains that at the heart of TNS's business are its people, its clients and sustainability. The combination of clients and sustainability sees the need to be lead by what the clients want and need, by devoting a large portion of the company's budget to new technologies, while ensuring that these technologies really add value to both the client and TNS. This speaks to TNS's focus on developing a real understanding of its clients and being able to make proactive recommendations, as opposed to simply reacting based on want or impulse.



Derek Kahts

With this in mind, Kahts shares that it is important to find the balance between leading edge and what he calls 'bleeding edge' - at the very forefront of technology where one must be willing to pay the 'school fees' for what is learned in the process. He clarifies that on a global scale, TNS invests in a lot of technological advancement, which it tests and rolls out, and which TNS South Africa and its clients can benefit from. However, there are certain areas in which South Africa differs significantly to the rest of the world and in this case, as Kahts puts it, TNS South Africa will 'lead and bleed'. This means identifying a real need among its clients and innovating in this space to provide for this need.

A significant example of this is the use of mobile research in South Africa and Africa. Kahts points out that mobile is the primary method of accessing the internet in Africa and therefore, unlike in the developed world where surveys moved from pen and paper to online via desktop and laptop, Africa has gone directly from pen and paper to mobile. As a result, TNS South Africa has innovated in this space to become a global leader. Other areas in which TNS South Africa leads include in-the-moment research, as well as automation and questionnaire design.

Of course, the inclusion of technology in TNS South Africa's offering also means the need to employ the right people and invest in them appropriately. Kahts shares that TNS South Africa is committed not only to hiring the right people at the relevant level in terms of qualifications and experience, but also to training them to meet the needs of the company and its clients. The company's investment in a dedicated Innovation department will ensure TNS stays at the forefront of development in a rapidly changing global environment.

By ensuring that innovation is top of mind at all levels of TNS South Africa's business, and that adequate resources are poured into this area in a considered manner, Kahts adds to the research company's goal to remain focused on the real needs of its clients in a sustainable way.

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