High-speed connectivity will boost adoption of wearable tech

Wearable technologies offer enormous potential to a wide range of industries - provided they make use of fast, high-quality connectivity.

Vino Govender

When wearable technologies first began to enter the mainstream, the professional view was that they were mere novelties or consumer gadgets with little real potential for value at that stage.

However, this is changing rapidly, with many of the large technology enterprises specifically designing products with business applications in mind. This, they promise, will offer organisations new ways to improve workplace productivity and efficiency, retain the right talent, and increase the overall efficiency of employees.

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Vino Govender, acting chief strategy officer for Dark Fibre Africa says a number of vertical markets have already begun to see the benefits of this approach.

He gives the example of businesses operating in the field-service industry who can now have their technicians don smart glasses while on the job, enabling them to see solutions to issues on a heads-up display while looking at the problem; they can solve issues faster, saving the company significant amounts of money.

“Such glasses also boost productivity: just think about a mechanic who may need both hands to fix a machine, while at the same time reading information from a manual. The glasses would enable such a worker to perform their job freely and more quickly,” he says.

Real promise of wearable tech built on high-speed connectivity

Govender believes that the real promise of wearable technologies is built on pervasive, high-speed connectivity, since content-heavy wearable technologies need to be connected at all times, as they require a constant flow of live data.

“Although many wearable technologies can potentially use mobile networks, wireless networks and other wireless IoT technologies, the backend still needs reliable, high-speed connectivity that only fibre can give,” he says.

He adds that it is the new fibre networks that will ultimately enable us to connect a growing number of intelligent and internet-enabled objects and devices together. “This kind of ubiquitous connectedness will enable the blending of the physical world with the digital world into a single entity that is going to thoroughly change the way we work and do business,” he says.

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The good news is that South Africa is on an upward trajectory in respect of its fibre to the business (FTTB) deployment. This means that the network stability and high-speed connectivity, which is critical to the success of such solutions, is better than at any time in the country’s history.

South Africa and Kenya remain flagship countries

Phathizwe Malinga, acting chief executive officer for SqwidNet, a DFA subsidiary operating in the IoT space, says that, from an African perspective, South Africa and Kenya remain flagship countries in terms of connectivity, although wide-scale adoption of wearables is yet to be seen.

“The biggest early adopters that we see are personal insurance companies who use them to lower the risk profile of their populations through healthy lifestyles that include exercise,” he says.

He points out however that much of the constraints to adopting new technology for commercial entities are usually current technology investments that have not yet reached their ROI.

> ***“Where the technology investment is lower, such as it is in Africa relative to its western counterparts, we anticipate a leapfrog in adoption as the technology becomes more accessible and more affordable,” explains Malinga.***

Govender agrees: “We are heading towards a future where large collections of wearable devices will be able to connect with one another and share information.

"Think of the increased benefits of being able to share data with, or obtain information from, other employees or even external experts. The effect this would have on the business world is far greater than what we could probably imagine today," he says.