

Five ways the Smart City will change how Africa lives

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IMAGINE WAKING UP IN A HOUSE THAT PRACTICALLY RUNS ITSELF, A LOW-CARBON CITY WHERE TRAFFIC CONGESTION IS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT, NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE SAFER, AND YOU CAN JUST USE A SINGLE CARD OR TAG TO DO ALMOST EVERYTHING FROM BUYING GROCERIES TO PAYING YOUR BUS FARE. SOUNDS TOO FAR-FETCHED FOR AFRICA? IT'S ACTUALLY NOT. MATEBELLO MOTLOUNG LOOKS AT HOW SMART CITIES WILL CHANGE HOW AFRICA LIVES IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

1. Intelligent Transport Systems

A HIGHLY EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IS A KEY COMPONENT OF A SMART CITY. Building new roads and lanes to deal with rising traffic volumes and traffic congestion is not enough anymore. Cars are getting more intelligent and therefore the roads have to follow suit. And they are. Globally, countries are building intelligence into the roads and the cars - with roadside sensors, radio frequency tags, and global positioning systems. South Africa is on par.

2. Smart Government

IN MANY WAYS, SOUTH AFRICA HAS BEEN AHEAD OF THE GAME in trying to create a smart government through the implementation of the e-Government strategy, which was meant to improve its interaction with its citizens and enable them to access services and information by a mere click of a button from a single portal. This would have been convenient, lessened the need for hard copy forms, eliminated the necessity for physical travel to government departments, and hopefully improved record keeping through computerisation.

3. Smarter Buildings

THE NUMBER OF GREEN BUILDINGS IN SOUTH AFRICA, many of them commercial, is on the increase, says the Green Building Council of South Africa. According to the 2010 National Association of Realtors Home Buyer and Seller Survey, 88 percent of home buyers looked for houses that had energy efficient characteristics like central heating and cooling systems when purchasing homes, 71 percent highlighted the desire for energy efficient appliances, and 69 percent wanted energy efficient lighting. Propelling this change in lifestyle is newly introduced energy efficiency building regulations that now make it compulsory for the construction industry to adopt environmentally considerate methods.

4. Savvy Consumers

ACCORDING TO IBM, SA IS MORE READY FOR THE SMART GRID THAN MOST COUNTRIES. Eskom has already piloted some 20,000 basic smart meters in its residential demand response programme in Fourways, Johannesburg. Combined with smart appliances, these energy load-limiting meters can also turn appliances on and off according to signals from the grid. You could set your washing machine to operate only when the price of electricity is below a certain amount for instance. With the smart grid, consumers can also have a two-way conversation with the electricity provider.

5. Smarter People

WHAT REALLY MAKES A CITY? ITS PEOPLE. The changes in shape, size, engineering and governance aside, cities of

the future will not be any different. So it is the quality of people that is going to increasingly begin to matter. Soon, competition will be intense among cities to attract and retain the best brains in the word that (hopefully) also bring smart ideas and solutions.

We need people who uniquely understand the African experience, and develop solutions that speak to its nuances. The quality of services particularly in education will matter more. Last year only 7,000 schools across the country had Internet connectivity - an astonishing 21,000 yet to be catered for. However, government has given the Universal Service and Access Agency of SA a target to establish 400 ICT access centres in under-served areas by 2015, that is no less than 100 a year.

Some topics at the Smart Cities Summit include:

Buildings: Aesthetically pleasing as well as functional and environmentally-friendly, retrofitting, building, regeneration, housing, civic and recreational buildings.

Energy: Smart grids, alternative energy sources (what's available, what works best in the South African context and gives the best ROI).

Mobility and Transport: Harbours, airports, rail, road, logistics, the creation and introduction of smart cars, public transport, supply chain, cycle paths, pedestrian access and total smart traffic management.

Water: Supply and demand, filtration, recycling, smart water usage, collection and conservation and desalination.

Health and Safety: Hospitals, clinics, access to medical resources and specialists (including HIV/Aids and TB), disaster management, mining, construction, health and safety education campaigns.

For Smart Cities Summit bookings please contact **Deirdre O'Neill**
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