

Harnessing Africa's dynamic potential

Africa is an entire continent crammed with potential and possibilities. This is the view of the Switch Group – one that it is already acting on, with a new branch office in Kenya and another planned for Nigeria.

S'bu Manqele, the company's group business director, says that this expansion is based on the belief that if Africa does business with itself exceptional value can be both added and extracted from the partnership.

With cost considerations a concern for all businesses, the company's decision to look north of the border is a strategic one, “Doing business in Africa allows us to both expand our base and manage the cost of doing this effectively. While distance is a factor, it is not an inhibitor. We can fly to Kenya for example and still do business that same day.” Manqele adds that now is the ideal time to go into Africa in terms of building the business, “We're finding more and more that Africans want to do business with other Africans. We share a spirit of being from the same place – an understanding of the people and the continent that is valued and respected. Clients are looking for this understanding in both business partners and service providers.”

Find local partners

The company's approach to entering other countries has been to do its research and find a local partner with the same values and business ethics as the group. Together they form a new branch office employing local staff. “Our prospective clients are attracted by our brand and what it stands for. It is therefore crucial that we deliver against this expectation consistently whether we are doing business in Johannesburg, Cape Town, London or Nairobi. Our approach to guaranteeing this has thus been to ensure that the people who work with and for us are skilled. If that means bringing them out to South Africa and skilling them up or exchanging personnel, then that is what we do. We are committed to developing local capacity to ensure these can become fully-fledged branches, offering all services in-house.”

Manqele explains that the company chose to target Kenya first and foremost based on its “friendly” business environment. It is also the hub of business for East Africa: a gateway to these countries. “Kenya mirrored the South African environment in a number of ways – it's English-speaking, their legal system is similar to ours, and there are a number of South African companies already operating there. Overall, it's the ideal business landscape, especially as branding is extremely front-of-mind in the country at the moment.”

Nigeria also made business sense as a target for expansion. While the company is still in the process of setting up offices there, it is already doing business through a local partner. Manqele says that Nigeria is especially attractive from a West African perspective. It is also geographically well positioned with respect to Europe and the UK.

Lack of awareness

While remote offices like these do pose challenges such as not being able to physically see what is happening on a day-to-day basis, Manqele is confident that they are learning opportunities for the team, “We’re all committed to offering the premium business solution that has come to be associated with our company. It’s a very exciting time for staff at all our offices.” He also mentions a lack of awareness as to the design and advertising process, and the time required for this as things they also have to address in these countries, “We’re finding ourselves having to take many clients through our actual process so that there’s an understanding of how we work and what exactly is involved.”

“Our expansion into Africa is an extension of our becoming a truly international business, where our staff members know there are incredible work and learning opportunities available to them in other countries. It has also added incredible value to our service offering. We now have insights and understanding that we didn’t have before. We’re working on brands and other categories in these other countries that don’t exist in South Africa. This has enabled us to not only add a fantastic dimension to our staff’s work experience, but also added value to our clients,” says Manqele.

Recognised as a company with its finger firmly on the pulse of our local advertising, branding and design industry, Switch’s move up Africa promises to give it an exciting new edge to its work. With its Kenyan and soon Nigerian offices, the company aiming to slowly but surely make its mark on the continent, proving the value of local partnerships and creative collaboration. These moves, the company believes, place it in a position from which it can launch itself to become an international African company of world-class calibre.

S’bu Manqele was born and raised on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. He graduated from the University of Fort Hare and started his career in the textile industry with Tongaat Textiles as a divisional marketing trainee. He then joined Unilever in brand management and subsequently a product management arena where he spent a few years with Adcock Self-Medication. His marketing career spans across blue chip companies including Unilever, Adcock Ingram, SAB and The Coca-Cola Company. Manqele has also worked outside the borders of South Africa with M-Net Africa and African Broadcast Network. While working for the SABC as head of marketing, he was once more invited back into the world of creativity and joined The Switch Group as a partner, where he is also responsible for the development of the Switch business on the African continent.

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