

Microsoft empowers South African SMEs with AI-driven skills training

In a notable surge, the number of SMEs in South Africa has seen a commendable 6% year-on-year increase. Recognising the potential of transformative technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) in the business landscape Microsoft South Africa has launched an AI-driven technology skills training program targeting 2,000 local SMEs.



Source: Microsoft Work Trend Index

The first training sessions were delivered in Durban, in the lead up to GovTech 2023 taking place between 12 & 14 September 2023, and leveraged the low-code capabilities of Microsoft Power Platform to help SMEs build solutions and applications that are fuelled by data and AI.

“Through this initiative, we want to help equip SMEs with the skills and understanding they need to develop and provide AI-driven solutions that empower government to not only modernise processes but also improve decision making and unlock efficiencies and cost savings,” says Lerato Mathabatha, public sector director at Microsoft South Africa.



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According to the [UNCTAD 2023 Economic Development in Africa Report](#), it is essential to integrate digital solutions for enhanced supply chain visibility and efficiency. However, many African SMEs, due to limited digital technology usage and challenges like skills and funding gaps, are yet to become an active part of the global supply chain network.

An important step forward

“Making AI technologies and skills accessible to SMEs is an important step forward if we want to drive a more digitally inclusive, and active business landscape in South Africa,” says Mathabatha.

The GovTech initiative builds on existing Microsoft support initiatives developed to cater to the unique needs of

the country's SMEs. For example, the Microsoft Founders Hub was launched in Africa in 2021 to provide entrepreneurs with access to a self-service hub that delivers a range of resources including tools like Microsoft Azure, GitHub, and Microsoft 365. It also assists SMEs with go-to-market and business support.

Founders Hub currently offers support for 1,000 African startups. Microsoft has accelerated knowledge and mentorship sessions to approximately 250 African startups and is currently supporting more than 40 African startups scale and grow in their local geographies through several go-to-market, access to customers, and access to investors engagements.

Accelerating AI for SMEs

[Microsoft's Work Trend Index](#), a survey across 31 countries and trillions of Microsoft 365 productivity signals along with labour trends from the LinkedIn Economic Graph found that while 49% of individuals fear AI replacing their jobs, a significant 70% would delegate work to AI to lessen their workloads.

This highlights the potential of AI not just as a technological tool but as an enabler of business efficiency and innovation. The research also showed that 82% of leaders believe their employees will need new skills to be prepared for the growth of AI.

Through this AI-focused training, Microsoft South Africa aims to equip SMEs for an AI-powered future, setting them on a trajectory of sustainable growth. As businesses in South Africa and beyond evolve with AI, Microsoft's initiatives pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future, positioning Africa's SMEs at the forefront of global digital transformation.

Support beyond training

"Of course, we also recognise that training is not a once-off activity. Post this training at GovTech, we will continue to provide SMEs with access to resources through the Founders Hub. These platforms will ensure that the businesses have the necessary support to implement, adapt, and grow using the newly acquired AI skills," says Mathabatha.

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