

Skills in demand: IT opportunities in tourism



By [Enver Duminy](#)

14 Jul 2017

15 years ago, the roles now held by professionals didn't exist in the same way at all - now they're ideally suited to the younger workforce segment, the generation rapidly dominating business. It's time to acknowledge that this is the age of technology, and that's what we're doing in tourism. The benefits of this are that as the tourism sector grows, more opportunities are presented to young people across a wider range of disciplines.



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A misconception exists that tourism is about tour operators and guides, hotel employees and shuttle services and travel agents – while these remain the horsepower that takes us forward, increasingly tourism is driven by roles immersed in technology: we see careers based around data analytics, design, advertising and social media, all dedicated to taking travel experiences one step further. Yes, the objective remains the same – to ensure that visitor experiences are always excellent – and technology is providing us with the tools to make that happen.

Tapping into the immense pool of data

Data analytics may sound like something that belongs in a tech-heavy industry, but it's what bigger companies and organisations are using to develop marketing strategies. Data provided on and by travellers makes it easier to create what they want, need and expect. You can tap into the immense pool of data to find out when people like to travel, how they like to book and pay for holidays, what's trending and where. Seemingly impersonal data actually allows for a degree of personalisation in marketing never seen before. You can reach potential visitors or actual ones on their mobile devices, in their homes or on the road, and show them what they want to see. You're acting on their preferences.

Data analytics can assist with many complex processes, from organising business conferences to sorting out feedback from visitors so that services can be improved.

Design and advertising are central to marketing, ensuring that destinations are putting their best on display, contributing to the continued growth of tourism.

Opportunities for tech-savvy youngsters

The point is that the sector is one showing growth, and for young people, that's worth exploring, especially since

unemployment figures across SA are appallingly high. Tourism is full of opportunities for tech-savvy youngsters, from those who love IT and want to work in that field, specifically to those who combine IT with the desire to develop businesses and startups: brave entrepreneurs. Apps have revolutionised how we do business, for example, and the demand is there for slick, user-friendly apps that can be used to facilitate travel.

Yoco, which secured top tier venture capital funding earlier this year, is a great example of the impact that technological innovation can have on providing a better visitor experience. CEO and co-founder, Katlego Maphai, created the hardware and software necessary for small businesses to accept card payments on a per transaction basis, making it possible for many small tourism businesses to attract more business from tourists who increasingly prefer using card payment systems rather than cash.

Social media remains a space dominated by young people, both as users and developers. It's become a space where visitors can research, plan and record holidays, and tourism businesses don't always have the time themselves (especially over the high season) to update their platforms for their communities. A young person with a love for social media can find some great work in the market by leveraging their skills.

The great thing about technology is that many courses can be found online for free, and the skills they provide are universal. Not only can the youth of SA develop skills, but they can then make themselves more marketable to a global marketplace, perhaps even tapping into the desire to travel while working that many people have. Some tech roles can be performed remotely, too, so all you need is a laptop and Wi-Fi.

Everyone needs tech support of some sort

There are very few businesses that can survive offline – so almost everyone needs tech support of some sort. In addition, they may use accounting packages or financial management programmes to ensure that they're running efficiently. Basic computer skills can help you get your foot in the door to more than a room – to an entire career.

What's exhilarating about all these developments in technology is that they're evolving at speed. If you're studying or even at school, you can obtain skills and a qualification in IT or design and then get in on the action. As you gain experience, you'll be ideally suited for more senior roles, helping to implement newer technology as it gets developed. You'll be in demand.

There's no free ride, though, hard work is what will take our young people forward. It takes dedication, application, and consistency to be successful.

As the country faces what could be described as tough economic prospects for the near future, it makes sense to back a sector like tourism that is showing growth. If I was a young person heading for a daunting job market, I would seek out a role in an environment where there's growth for the industry and room for personal growth, too.

Who knows where we could be in 15 years' time? There are bound to be many exciting ways in which technology

continues to delight and inspire us, and a new generation will be leading the charge.

ABOUT ENVER DUMINY

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