

Building credibility in a fast-moving ICT sector

 By [Steve Briggs](#)

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Attending one of the many, many ICT industry events that pack the sector's collective calendar every year, I was taken aback by a sudden realisation. The event had been pitched as a digital networking event for ICT providers to show off their wares, but it resembled more of a medieval marketplace as well.

Banks, educational institutes, and many other disparate businesses were all represented – people from all industries and a wide variety of services, all touting their unique ability to help us do better business through technology. And though some of the country's biggest service providers were in attendance, the overall effect was a cacophony of confusion which left me wondering: in this sea of opinions, where does the credibility lie? Do any of these vendors really know what's going on?

South Africa's ICT and digital services sector is poised to take off and drive the country into the fruitful future of Industry 4.0 – if the buzz is to be believed – with long-established multinationals as well as innovative start-ups all grappling for their slice of what could be an extremely profitable pie. All are experts at making promises, but few are quite as good at adding value, whether at the wholesale or enterprise level. What is needed is a return to basics: a focus on tangible needs and measurable results, rather than gimmicks and buzzwords.

In today's ICT business landscape, credibility is hard to achieve and even harder to maintain in the long run. To be truly trusted in an increasingly competitive space, actions speak louder than words, and those who seem to be pulling ahead have a few priorities in common.

Merging products with services

When it comes to digital transformation, speed is crucial. At the same time as large, global ICT players are establishing satellite offices around the world, the cloud has enabled the seamless delivery of digital products to any business, at any time. But why stop there? With all the time and money saved by making products more accessible, true added value now often comes in the form of complimentary services, support and maintenance agreements.



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Responding to the rising preference for a single, all-encompassing and fully-integrated service provider has long been a priority in the sector, and customisability has become a key selling point for many. Today's most credible software and services vendors know that packaged solutions reduce risk, increase transparency, and help to align both provider and client around specific goals and outcomes. This more modular approach also means better affordability and easier manageability, so it's little wonder it is rapidly gaining favour over more traditional delivery methods.

A rock-solid cybersecurity strategy

Just a few years ago, the idea of hackers manipulating the results of a presidential election would have been confined to the realm of pure fantasy. However, it's clear how much our view of cybersecurity has changed lately.



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Cybercrime is a \$6 trillion industry, and nothing shakes the reputation of an IT-related business more severely these days than a public data breach, as the many notable examples splashed across the news in recent years have already shown. The nature of today's cybercrime is such that any vulnerability in an ICT service provider's product is automatically passed down to their customers, too, so maintaining a good reputation among customers hinges on well-strategised cybersecurity measures being in place – whether cybersecurity is central to your product offerings or not.

Championing localisation

In South Africa, as in so much of the developing world, we are not simply passive consumers of content and data. We generate increasing amounts of these resources on our own – and finding a faster, more secure, and more efficient way to access them is at the heart of localisation.



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The convenience of cloud, it seems, is no longer sufficient. Through localisation, processing power is brought closer to the

place where it's needed most. Accessing data and services quickly and cheaply is key to making them work to the level that today's digital businesses expect.

With greater data localisation, South Africa is well on its way to becoming a fully-fledged part of the global cloud economy, with more contextual relevance, more efficient delivery, and improved security as a result. Localisation helps keep the entire operational ecosystem under a single entity's control for the affordability, transparency and accountability that is so central to building credibility in this fast-changing sector.

These three trends point to a simple but powerful shift in the ICT game – every vendor, no matter how niche their product, is increasingly expected to become a competent and integrated Jack-of-all-trades who responds immediately to their customers' shifting needs. Don't simply talk a big game. Show your clients the value you can provide through a stellar track record. Do this, and the credibility you're after will naturally follow.

ABOUT STEVE BRIGGS

As Chief Commercial Officer at Seacom, Steve Briggs oversees sales performance, helps to optimise the product portfolio and drives superior customer experiences across the company's commercial portfolio.

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