

Building Africa's budding tech ecosystem

Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative (CiTi) has designed and co-developed incubator programmes with Innovator Trust to support, grow and inspire emerging tech entrepreneurs in Cape Town.

The information and communications technology (ICT) sector has gone from strength to strength and is now one of the fastest-growing industries on the African continent. Yet African entrepreneurs are still finding it a challenging business landscape to navigate.



Source: pixabay.com

This is why Innovator Trust and CiTi, through exposure, training and mentorship, aim to equip entrepreneurs and businesses in the sector with tools that will keep them on track, assist them in achieving their goals and create tech leaders of the future.

Celebrating its 20th year of supporting local entrepreneurs, CiTi is Africa's oldest tech incubator. Back in the 1990s, it was also one of South Africa's first co-working spaces, where entrepreneurs had access to dial-up bandwidth (which was very expensive at the time) to help build and grow their ventures.

Over the years, CiTi's offering has developed into two key areas: providing job readiness and skills development; and providing enterprise and entrepreneurial development. Working with government, business and society, CiTi is missioned to promote the inclusive growth of the digital economy through its incubator programmes.

Huge potential in the ICT sector

Innovator Trust was formed to grow small black-owned businesses in the ICT sector and helps develop competent SMEs through training, skills sharing and infrastructure support.

Given CiTi's extensive experience rolling out similar programmes, Innovator Trust approached CiTi to assist with tech entrepreneur incubation and training in Cape Town. Partnering with CiTi was a natural fit, and CiTi and Innovator Trust now run an intensive accelerator programme at CiTi's Woodstock Bandwidth Barn.

Mary Faulks, the entrepreneurial development operations manager at CiTi, says that by tailor-making a programme to a specialised group of entrepreneurs in ICT, CiTi and Innovator Trust are playing an important role in catalysing and supporting Cape Town's technology ecosystem.

Faulks says, "Cape Town is a very productive tech centre of Africa, and there's great opportunity and huge potential in the ICT sector, but it's not necessarily well supported. Along with various other incubators, it's our goal to develop technology entrepreneurship in the Cape."



Mary Faulks, entrepreneurial development operations manager at Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative (CiTi)

CiTi and Innovator Trust's accelerator programme aims to equip ICT SMEs with development support to help increase annual business turnover, provide the necessary accreditation to remove red tape, as well as increase business profitability.

Monthly workshops for entrepreneurs

Once a month, participants attend a workshop led by an industry expert, followed by an individual mentorship session.

Faulks believes that it's this collaboration and communication that make the programme so valuable to its participants.

"If you a single founder, or even a co-founder, you can't always benefit from the intellect and experience of a group of executives; you have to do everything yourself. The opportunity to have a 'sounding board' of industry experts, as well as your own peers, gives you a supportive network, relevant advice and a chance to collaborate with people in the industry. It's a safe space in which you can share both your challenges and your successes. Sometimes you're the one giving advice; at other times you're the one seeking it. I had my own businesses for five years and I would have loved to have had access to a programme like this."

After a successful first cohort of the programme, completed in September 2018, CiTi confirmed a second collaboration with Innovator Trust to support five new Cape Town ICT businesses over the next two years. After a deep dive into learnings from the previous programme, the second programme has been refined and given more specific Key Performance Indicators. With a smaller group, the sessions are now even more interactive and agile in their delivery, presenting an incredible opportunity for the entrepreneurs involved.

Together, CiTi and Innovator Trust are moving towards creating a future-fit, inclusive society through tech and innovation.

Tashline Jooste, CEO of Innovator Trust, says, "I believe strongly that ICT entrepreneurs are going to be critical to South Africa's economic growth, which is why we need to focus on equipping these businesses with the skills they need to grow, create jobs and stimulate our economy."

"At Innovator Trust, we partner with incubators such as CiTi so that participants in our programmes can gain a basket of entrepreneurial support in the form of tailored content aligned to grow and scale their businesses, one-on-one mentorship to further their knowledge, and access to market and networking opportunities through the Bandwidth Barn's collaborative ecosystem. Once the entrepreneurs who take part in our enterprise development programmes become more established, they are able to turn their focus to growth."

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