

LOCAL IS MORE THAN LEKKER, IT'S THE **KEY** TO **AGILITY &** **INNOVATION**



Of all the lessons businesses have learned over the past two years, perhaps the most important – and all too often, the most ignored – is that South African companies should be investing in local software. Unfortunately, the mindset that gave us “no-one got fired for implementing IBM” is still very much in place, leading to companies spending hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Rands on software solutions that have cheaper, and often better, local competitors.

The Rand-Dollar exchange rate has made the cost of software one of the biggest expenses a business has, and yet companies still pay for software solutions that require a great deal of “tweaking” to meet their needs. Not only do local developers offer solutions at a better cost, in many cases, they provide tailored, customised software that has been designed to fill the specific requirements of companies operating in the unique African business environment.

Most importantly, local developers have local people doing implementations, providing much-needed understanding, insight and support. While the large international vendors charge mainly to recoup their development costs, integrating a wide range of business systems and technologies like accounting, CRM, website, workflow management, and inventory management, to name a few, can be one of the most complex tasks in any project. In fact, many out-of-the-box solutions can be even more difficult to implement and integrate to ensure the solution performs that way it needs to, requiring specialist skills that drive up costs even further.

LOOKING FOR THE LOCAL TOUCH

This places local development houses ahead of international competitors just by virtue of having “feet on the ground”. Especially in the new world of automation and integration! No organisation can afford to buy a new system that is not automated and integrated into the core systems and processes run by the business. Despite the fact that organisations have gained a measure of comfort with remote operations, they still need someone to talk to if they have issues, if they are looking for advice on how to get the most out of their existing solutions, or even if they just want to activate a feature in what they already have.

This human touch is virtually impossible to find among the large international vendors. Most have automated their processes to the extent that it is a challenge just to find a way to log a query outside of automated helpdesks that are generally not programmed to deal with unusual requests. Local developers, on the other hand, are much more easily accessible.

A local partner will have a team on the ground to do implementations. This is particularly important when implementations become complex, or if the customer needs to have changes made. While many international vendors have local implementation partners, the local representatives still have to consult with the vendor’s specialists if something unusual or particularly challenging comes up, and making changes outside of the norm can be close to impossible.

```
4 # Prevent database truncation of the...
5 abort("The Rails environment is missing!")
6 require 'spec_helper'
7 require 'rspec/rails'
8
9 require 'capybara/rspec'
10 require 'capybara/rails'
11
12 Capybara.javascript_driver = :selenium
13 Category.delete_all; Category.create
14 Shoulda::Matchers.configure do |config|
15   config.integrate do |with|
16     with.test_framework :rspec
17     with.library :rails
18   end
19 end
20
21 # Add additional requires below
22
23 # Requires supporting ruby files
24 # spec/support/ and its subdirectories
25 # run as spec files by default.
26 # in _spec.rb will both be required
27 # run twice. It is recommended
28 # end with _spec.rb. You can
29 # option on the command line
30
31 No results found for 'mongoid'
```

A GROWING BASE

Businesses have been talking about the importance of customer relationships for years, and yet the first – and most important – touchpoint in any relationship is missing with international software vendors. The ability to access specialists who can assist a company in all of the areas they need support with will start becoming more even more valuable as emerging technologies are increasingly incorporated into software solutions and local developers continue to outshine large organisations that are focused primarily on license renewals rather than innovation.

The past few years have highlighted this trend, as Covid-19 restrictions forced South African companies to start relying more on local resources. MIP, for example, grew its staff complement by an average of 100 software engineers between 2020 and 2021 in order to ensure our growing customer base had access to the digital solutions they needed, when they needed them.

Those businesses that still believe the international behemoths are the way to go will start finding themselves not only increasingly out of pocket, but will also have to work much harder to compete with companies that have easier access to the speedy innovation local software solutions offer. It's time for South African organisations to accept that not only is local lekker, it is the key to the agility and innovation they need to stay ahead in today's digitally competitive business environment.



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