

Govtech 2017: Join the information technology race if you want to win

4-5 minutes

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Join the information technology race if you want to win.

If you snooze you lose – that was the tough message from Microsoft managing director in South Africa, Zoab Hoosen, a keynote speaker at the opening of the Govtech 2017 conference which opened in Durban. The conference is being co hosted by the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) and the Department of Higher Education and Training.

“We are looking at an industry that is growing exponentially at a break-neck speed, doubling globally every two years,” he said.

“If you think of a tiny domino piece 30 years ago, it’s now grown into the size of the Tower of Piza. In two years’ time, there will be another doubling. We have no time to lose.” He said that if the ordinary people of South Africa were going to benefit from this digital revolution, efforts would have to be intensified.

“We cannot afford to be left behind.”

While the race to find meaningful digitally-based solutions for many of the country’s social challenges was never more intense, Hoosen said that progress was being made on several fronts.

Among those outcomes was:

- A digital solution along with teacher training to help with the education of special needs learners so that they are no left behind in the school curriculum.
- The further development of the telemedicine sector which uses digital technology to interface with patients in far-flung rural areas where basic medical care is limited and where costs per patient can be reduced by more than a quarter.
- Making Microsoft office software available to learners without charge.

“We are talking about trust and collaboration being the cornerstones of going forward. It’s a matter of looking for solutions in a very different way. We have digital cloud platforms that could revolutionise the way we operate. I don’t think there is any excuse not to succeed.”

Delivering his conference opening address, Dr Siyabonga Cwele, Minister of Telecommunications and Postal Services, said that radical digital transformation was an imperative.

“We are no longer involved in talk shows at these events but finding the solutions that really matter.”

It was critical, he said, to create platforms for ordinary people to speak to government about things that matter in their lives.

He said that SITA’s role in the evolving of a knowledge economy was more profound than at any other time and that SMMEs were pivotal in the search for innovation and meaningful digital solutions.

“This is a clarion call for action,” said the minister. It is important that SITA’s work is accelerated and supported.

Dr Setumo Mohapi, CEO of SITA, said that there was a need to ramp up and that people need to experience the impact of ICT’s and ICT spend in the daily reality of their lives. He also confirmed that this GovTech would ensure digital planning road maps; that have been collaboratively designed by SITA; government leaders and private sector captains of industry.

“What we are doing is abandoning ideas of a five-year plan, but rather looking at a year-to-year plan looking at how problems and issues have been addressed and solved over the preceding period of 12 months.”

The conference ends on the 1st of November, 2017.

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