

Challenge of finding talent for Sub-Saharan Africa's growing tech demand

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Despite slow global economic growth, the tech sector - in many African countries - is continuing to experience rapid development and investment.



Image by 123RF

The \$120m secured by Afrimax Group to accelerate the rollout of its leading edge LTE (4G) network across multiple African markets; Greenstone Equity Partners and South Africa-based Harith's commitment to investment in energy, telecommunications and transport across the continent; and SkyPower's agreements with Nigeria and Kenya for the development, construction and operation of solar PV projects at an estimated cost of \$5 billion, are just some of the investments in technology that add to the demand.

These large scale investments, along with the technology revolution that has taken the continent by storm, has created a need for skilled tech workers – a demand many companies struggle to realise.

Power of passive recruitment

Often, the candidate who displays the skills and attributes you are looking for, as well as the attitude and personality that best fits your company is the candidate who is not in the job market.

Rather than just advertise top positions, proactively engage with accomplished and talented candidates in the market that meet the organisations specific requirements. This may require a little more effort but it will provide access to a stronger calibre of candidate.

For those who are unsure of how to start or have limited time, work with a specialist who focuses on your industry – they have developed relationships over years and would have quick access through their network.

One of the challenges of recruiting within Africa is that there is a large pool of qualified professionals, but due to historical events, many have very little practical experience. For those facing the same problem, a short-term solution is to head hunt candidates from within South Africa.

In many instances, South Africa has better infrastructure and more advanced technologies – and South Africans travel well, work well and adjust well in the rest of Africa, making them perfect applicants to help up-skill and transfer talent.

Partner with a specialist

The continent is rich and diverse in culture. With that in mind, it's important to understand the dynamics at play in the various regions, as this can make a significant difference in the type of person an organisation may employ.

For instance, don't judge a candidate by their CV alone and risk missing out on great talent. There are different styles utilised when compiling and presenting CVs. For example, candidates from the Ivory Coast and Senegal often summarise their experience and leave out vital information – which can lead to the profile of a good candidate being overlooked.

On the flip side, you can find that candidates from English speaking countries add details that may not be a true reflection of their skills. Specialists understand these subtle differences and will know when to dig deeper and exactly what questions to ask.

There are also variables such as notice periods and negotiation tactics to consider when on-boarding talent.

Depending on the region of your operations, you can expect notice periods of between one and three months. While there are ways to work around this, an unplanned delay in a candidate starting can significantly impact a project. This is why it's best to be prepared for this upfront. As for negotiations, don't use a one size fits all approach, as money isn't always the main driving force.

The increase in online tools to search and advertise for candidates, coupled with Africa's increased access to the internet, has led to a growing trend in the number of companies that are taking the role of recruitment in-house.

While this may have its own set of advantages for a company, consulting with a specialist who recruits in African markets can help mitigate the risks and ensure you have access to the best available pool of talent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Willy Carr is a specialist recruitment consultant at ThornTree Group. He has for the last nine years consulted extensively in Africa and developed his understanding of a wide variety of industries including ICT, aerospace and FMCG.

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