

## **Bonjour Africa: How language can make for a more popular ERP solution**

Expanding into Africa? Many growing South African companies are and when they do so, the first real tests of their enterprise resource planning solutions start to take place. Among those tests is the ability for the system to work in multiple currencies, across different time zones and in areas where connectivity just isn't all that great. And there is one more major test, too – language. That's because an ERP system which is able to 'speak' to the user in their preferred tongue is bound to be more popular.

That's according to Taryn Cromie, HansaWorld sales & channel manager for Sub-Saharan Africa.

“With any enterprise system, the ease with which it can be understood is a major factor in user acceptance. When your company expands to the DRC, Angola or Mozambique, you'll need new staff who will be working with your system – but is your system capable of operating in Portuguese and French, as well as English?” she asks.

Those systems which can deliver multilingual support, including those used in former French and Portuguese colonies, are at a distinct advantage, Cromie says. “Certainly, we're seeing a large number of clients growing their operations into the natural markets of neighbouring and even more distant countries – and when they know their system isn't 'English-only', the benefit is clear.”

There is more to it, too. While South Africa enjoys good connectivity and the ready availability of redundant internet connections, such luxuries aren't always present in underserved and developing areas.

“Many of the legacy software systems presume a level of underlying infrastructure which can work against their success. When there are power outages and when connectivity isn't available, the question is 'can you still trade'? The fanciest ERP in the world is of absolutely no use whatsoever if it depends on connectivity which itself can't be depended upon,” she explains.

Instead, Cromie says it is solutions which are capable of working online or offline, and which require only the barest minimum of bandwidth, will deliver a consistently better experience for users in Africa. “If your system slows down because the connectivity is limited to GPRS speeds or it is intermittent, your people will slow down too.”

While many African countries have increasingly capable infrastructure, problems persist in interiors and even where copper internet cables exist, they may not always be available either due to theft or simply due to lack of infrastructure. “Your system should be light enough on bandwidth that it can still operate just as well on mobile internet if necessary,” she adds.

The necessity for a system built to work well in developing nations goes even

further – right to the front door, as a matter of fact. Cromie explains: “Most systems are designed to work with addresses in specific structure – street number, name, postcode – and won’t work if these details aren’t available. Those who work in the developed world know that something as simple as a ‘standard’ address often just isn’t possible.”

Instead, you may need to deliver a product by turning left and finding the big tree at the bottom of the hill. “It may seem crazy, but these are realities on the ground and the ERP system has to be able to cope or it becomes an inhibitor, rather than an enabler of business.”

Your ERP should work on smart mobile devices giving employees access and allowing them to work from anywhere. But it should also be able to communicate with customers using older technology such SMS, as the smartphone revolution has not extended into much of Africa. “You’ll need your ERP system to work equally well with the latest technology as it does with older equipment and handsets. It has to be flexible enough to remain functional even if you lose your connection, especially in a retail Point of Sale environment, and at the very least you should be able to switch to mobile internet to prevent your business coming to a standstill. And if it works in English and the other lingua francas of Africa you’ll have a winner,” she concludes.