

Broadband link opens a world of opportunities for local firms

Towards the end of last week, a local bank launched an electronic commerce platform that will enable consumers to make online payments after making purchases from merchants with online shops.

The authentication of the transactions will be conducted locally and as a result, consumers will not lose money as a result of foreign currency conversions facilitated by card transactions processed abroad. This bank made a bold step into the future and must be applauded for the strategic investment that they have made.

With the introduction of affordable broadband internet in the country due to the landing and connection of undersea cables to the national terrestrial fibre network, some businesses like this bank are moving swiftly to capitalise on emerging opportunities and launching innovative products and services.

Despite all the coverage that has been made on the availability of broadband internet, many companies are



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still operating like they are in the external business environment that existed twenty years ago.

Most are still restricting staff from accessing the internet at their workstations in the guise of maintaining network security. CEOs of these companies have somehow been convinced by their technology heads that their office networks will be attacked by dangerous viruses if staff are allowed unlimited access to the internet. As far as they are concerned, the risks of providing internet access far outweigh the benefits.

Other companies are still heav-

ily reliant on hiring security guards with "fimbos" to protect their valuable assets such as offices, factories and installations like telecommunications towers. It is not surprising to find a small office with up to five security guards lumbering around looking bored and sleeping on the job most of the time.

Business leaders of these companies should be aware that there are broadband technologies available that enable IP cameras to be installed at strategic locations to enable continuous surveillance from a central point. By embracing these technologies, companies can

cut down their costs of hired security by a significant amount.

One of the biggest costs that companies face is facilitating meetings for their staff. This is particularly characteristic of companies that have a geographically dispersed salesforce. Think of the numerous trips and expenses incurred when sales people have to travel from all over the country to their headquarters in Nairobi for a one day briefing. Would it not make sense for these sales people to dial into a virtual environment from their laptops and be able to participate in a sales conference from wherever they are?

There are softwares such as "Live Meeting" that are being used by progressive companies to hold meetings with geographically dispersed staff at minimal costs and inconvenience. It would be interesting to find out the number of companies that have actually invested in video conferencing facilities in their premises.

Every level thinking business executive knows that one of the best investments that they can make is training staff to increase motivation and enhance productivity. Unfortunately, most companies are still fixated to instructor-led training or ILT for short which requires a teacher to engage students in a classroom environment to

disseminate knowledge. Although this learning approach has its advantages, companies usually incur high costs and go through great inconvenience to get staff through capacity building programmes.

Most of the time, it is difficult to get employees together in a classroom for any duration of time due to pressure from meeting work obligations. If the training is offsite, our traffic situation makes a training destined to take two hours a whole day affair.

With the availability of broadband technologies and content, progressive companies that want to enhance the productivity of their staff are now embracing the concept of web-based e-learning. Employees are able to log onto the web and access preselected courses from wherever they are, whether they are seated in the office, or out in the field making customer calls.

E-learning training modules can be self-paced meaning that employees can acquire the knowledge required when they have free time and in the most convenience. It may interest some to note that the US military enables troops stationed overseas to access e-learning facilities to progress with acquiring knowledge even when in active duty.