

The digital age offers hope for South Africa's youth

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“ There are no boundaries or borders in the digital age. - Karim Rashid, award-winning industrial designer ”

Despite South Africa's dire youth unemployment rates, the digital age may offer opportunities when it comes to learning new skills, creating new jobs, and enabling young people to reach their full potential.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating on an economic and a personal level, but it has also shown us the possibilities of remote work and highlighted the need to stay digitally relevant in an increasingly competitive market. Across industries, businesses are going digital, making it easier for the youth to access the benefits this unveils - assuming they have the right skills and training to do so.



Source: RODNAE Productions via [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

Although the move to digital may seem intimidating – something our parents never would have dreamt of seeing in their lifetimes – we should focus on the opportunities that are now available, which didn't exist just a few years ago. It may seem like an obvious example, but even something we take for granted such as the internet is a game-changer for youth opportunities.

With universal access, young people would be able to interact with businesses across borders, learn online, attend job interviews and virtual training sessions, and access an international job market. From virtual reality to AI, we are finding ways to apply innovative technologies to solve problems and increase productivity, and there's no reason why the youth shouldn't contribute to this too.

Embracing opportunities

With continuous improvements, technology is changing what is possible. Combine this with the ambitious nature of young people and you have a recipe for success.

Many young people feel like the pandemic has robbed them of opportunities. We encourage them to also think about what opportunities it has enabled. With self-discipline and access to the right tech and online resources, this is the ideal situation to be in to learn about and enter the digital age. All you need is a stable internet connection and a safe space to discover new skills and ways to be successful in a digital-first world.

For instance, the introduction of the President's new Youth Mobi Site where youth can get access to learning and work opportunities in their area. It is 100% free and offers an opportunity for unemployed youth to help them connect to employment possibilities and work readiness training programmes.

Although automation will make some jobs obsolete, a study on the future of work in South Africa by McKinsey & Company shows that digitalisation may result in a net gain of 1.2 million jobs by 2030. These jobs will come from productivity increases enabled by tech, step-up actions such as infrastructure development, and new occupations. But many of these new technology-driven jobs will need different skills levels – so what do we do next?

Preparing for the digital age

One of the challenges we face is exposing young people to 4IR technologies, such as machine learning, AI, Data Science, and advanced robotics, to show them what's possible. Government, schools, universities, and parents have a responsibility to ensure that our youth have the chance to experience future-facing tech.

Businesses should embrace new ways of working and consider how they can upskill the youth and benefit from a digital-first generation. Whilst digital skills are on the rise, human skills still take the fore and we must not neglect to support our youth in both areas. Luckily, there are organisations that can help businesses and young people benefit from these opportunities. For example, Sivuka Youth offers youth development that helps businesses and young people close the skills gap and accelerate their learning exponentially.

But there is also room for young people to empower themselves. According to the McKinsey report, individuals who want to thrive in the digital age should be embracing lifelong learning, focusing on acquiring relevant skills, and targeting high-growth sectors and roles.

Online learning and micro-courses make this much more accessible. It's now possible to join online discussions, sit in on seminars, learn from world-class courses, and read e-books and other online resources to enable meaningful participation in the digital economy.

This has the potential to not only make our youth more 'hireable' but to also raise productivity and operational efficiency in businesses across sectors – a win for both business leaders and young people looking to enter the market. We shouldn't see the digital age as a threat to the way things are but as an opportunity to implement meaningful change.

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