IT plays integral role in service delivery

'Technological competence can make or break a deal'

IMPORTERS AND exporters are placing increased demands on their service providers, and IT systems play an integral role in delivery of the service they expect from their clearing and forwarding agents.

"Meeting SA Revenue Service requirements is essential – but this is not enough. We have seen business won on the basis of a demonstrated technological competence and put at risk, or even lost, where the agent could not deliver," says Jonathan Sims of Core Freight Systems.

Among the required features that agents have identified, says Sims, are software that is integrated, logical and easy for staff to operate; comprehensive management reporting; on-line, real-time support and problem resolution; and proven interface mechanisms facilitating transfer of data with other applications.

"Equally important is the capacity to provide for future potential requirements, such as electronic document storage and retrieval facilities, flexible statistical and financial profitability analysis and client access to relevant data.

"And this requires an ongoing investment in research and development by the IT service provider involving not only money but, equally importantly, imagination and intellect."

Agents moving down this path are not necessarily large players, says Sims, although there are some in this category. "Rather they are organisations characterised by management who are conscious of the requirement to continually improve efficiencies in internal work processes, enhance management control and institute improved support structures – all with the objective of delivering better service to their clients."

This requirement is not restricted to Gauteng, he adds. "Getting the most from our IT spend is essential," commented Kevin Loudon, managing director of Durban-based Access Freight. "All regions are competitive and we need the best systems to support our staff and operations."