IT making a difference in Africa

Information technology is playing a key role in the local freight forwarding industry's march into Africa.

This as the rise of the 'middle-class African consumer' creates huge opportunity.

And while the historic export of resources remains a core focus, the new optimism for the continent's prospects is perhaps driven by investors looking for higher returns in the emerging markets as traditional economies stagnate, says Jonathan Sims of Core Freight, which specialises in freight forwarding and customs clearing software for South African operations.

In a market that is not without its challenges, IT is clearly making a difference.

"We have a freight forwarding client using the CoreFreight application to control his business in a number of East African countries," says Sims. "Via the internet their users are able to utilise first-world applications in a reliable, cost-effective manner, with centralised data accessible to management and clients in real-time."

And as South African retailers expand operations across the continent, they require systems that allow them to optimise the forwarding and clearing process from South Africa, says Sims. "This includes managing bonded goods held for onward transport to foreign retail outlets, generating the duty drawback claim in respect of imported goods subsequently exported, meeting the Sars Automated Cargo Management (ACM) reporting requirements, and producing files for efficient data interface into the Asycuda system used by the Customs Authorities in the countries of destination.

"The Sars Customs Modernisation initiative also involves consultation with our neighbours for the establishment of single border posts where all the formalities of border crossing will be completed with one stop, reducing bureaucratic delay and facilitating trade," says Sims.

Jonathan Sims … 'Some focus on Africa makes good business sense.'