

Could digital marketing services become South Africa's next major export opportunity?

 By [Grant Lapping](#)

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With a youth unemployment rate exceeding 40%, there is an urgent requirement for South Africa to create substantial employment prospects for its young population. The ideal solution is to create decent jobs that pay well, do not necessitate full-time tertiary education, and leverage our national strengths. One promising avenue for job creation is to offer offshore digital marketing services to countries globally, where South Africa can excel.



Source: www.unsplash.com

This is an area which some companies in South Africa are starting to explore, including our own business. It's an opportunity that can build on South Africa's exceptional reputation as an offshore global business services hub — with sources such as McKinsey naming the country as one of the most attractive business process outsourcing (BPO) destination in the world across multiple years.

This sector continues to grow fast and already employs around 65,000 people to serve international clients. According to industry body Business Process Enabling South Africa (BPESA), the youth account for around nine in ten new jobs created in this sector. Add that to our small but highly regarded offshore software development sector, and South Africa punches above its weight in business services.

South Africa's Youth: The key to unlocking global digital marketing demand

Focusing on the digital marketing sphere makes enormous sense because of the global skills and labour shortage in this sector. According to one study, more than 81% of UK managing directors say a lack of digital skills is negatively affecting their company. With our large pool of university graduates and competitive currency, South Africa is ideally positioned to step into the gap. We also have the benefit of strong English proficiency and being in a similar time zone as Europe.

Digital marketing campaign management, like BPO, is a great fit for offshoring because the service can be delivered completely remotely. And, because most businesses outside of China use the same platforms like TikTok, Google, Facebook and Instagram, the certifications and skills required to run a digital campaign are universal.



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Best of all, a motivated and intelligent young person can learn these skills on the job within a matter of months. This is different to software development or accountancy, for example, where it is difficult for a smaller country like South Africa to achieve global scale because of the time it takes to train resources or source people with the right qualifications.

We first started exploring providing digital campaign management skills to companies in the UK during 2020, when the pandemic made companies more receptive to remote working models. The people we hired to serve offshore clients had no experience — we simply looked for people with the motivation, energy levels and social skills to thrive in a digital environment.

We also backed them up with an experienced team to support them. They are not left to their own devices, but can look to their peers and mentors for advice about any optimisation, strategy or technical integration challenges. This model enables us to deliver high-quality outcomes at a competitive price point. That said, it has taken us 10 years to learn how to do this well.

The benefits of on-the-job training for digital marketing

There is a science and an art to recruiting and retaining the right people. We hire for aptitude rather than qualifications — and we have found that people who learn on-the-job often outperform those with a formal digital marketing qualification. We also focus on retaining our high-performers, even though the industry is one where high churn is seen as a fact of life.

Our approach enables our people to rapidly grow from entry level to embracing the challenges of running large-budget digital campaigns. They are monitored and mentored until we are confident that they can run a campaign on their own. Even the most experienced campaign managers, however, are part of a team and still get the benefits of advice from smart colleagues with deep knowledge and experience.

In fact, the challenge we have lies more in getting clients to trust our newer and younger team members to deliver. When short-staffed global agencies entrust us with campaign work, however, we get hugely positive feedback from them. These agencies report that our team's analytical capabilities, interpersonal skills and platform knowledge will be difficult to find in their home markets for the same cost.

Providing offshore digital marketing campaign management services could well be South Africa's next big export success story. With our young population, we could potentially build a large workforce to service global demand. This market is still underserved, and we have a window of opportunity to become a leader in this sector.

ABOUT GRANT LAPPING

Lapping joined the +OneX team in May 2021 after the company he founded in 2012, DataCore Media, was acquired by +OneX, a new-age solutions and systems integrator. He manages the digital media and marketing team within +OneX. Grant has worked in digital media and strategy since 2005, and has a holistic perspective on the market due to the roles he has held across the agency, client and publisher spectrum

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