SA SMEs still don't know what IT can do for them

Too many South African small and mid-sized enterprises are battling with outdated systems and labour-intensive processes, even though free and low-cost solutions exist, says IT outsourcing innovator Dashblack IT Solutions.

Dashblack, which has specialised in IT outsourcing, monitoring and automation for small and mid-sized business since 2016, says local SMEs are often completely unaware of the advanced solutions available to them to make business more efficient and grow their bottom line.

Says Dashblack CEO Morne Barnard: "From game lodges to law firms, we find that typical small and mid-sized businesses in South Africa simply don't know what IT can do for them. They still run most processes manually, lose productive time when out of the office, and spend money on costly hardware instead of using virtually free cloud-based services."

Barnard cites examples such as large companies manually generating quotes, taking 45 minutes per quote – all day, every day. In some firms, sales reps and executives download the entire database to their devices in order to answer questions during a client visit, then go back to the office and upload the updated database. "When they discover what a simple VPN or Office 365 can do to improve their operations, they are instantly won over. And when we automate processes that have taken too much time and effort for years, they practically think we walk on water," he says.

Barnard believes this lack of insight is due to the fact that many SMEs do not have in-house IT support, and have traditionally seen IT outsourcing firms as

little more than a service partner to call on only when systems need repairs or maintenance.

"Too many companies don't understand what's out there and can be done for them, so they stay in the 'Dark Ages' wasting time and valuable resources," says Barnard. "At the same time, most SMEs are feeling the economic pinch and trying to do more with less, so they need to start exploring what free and low-cost solutions can do to improve their productivity and reduce costs."

Barnard says Dashblack's mission is to go beyond traditional break-fix approaches to proactively improve customers' efficiencies and maximise their IT budgets. "We go in and assess their operations and business needs, then we recommend areas worth automating, and solutions that offer more for lower spend," says Barnard. "For example, we automated one client's quote generation process, taking time per quote from 45 minutes down to 2. This saves a huge amount of time and effort, allows staff to be more productive, and even boosts staff morale. Once a client sees how dramatically automation can improve one process, they start looking at automation across all their processes."

"When we implement a VPN, clients are blown away at the benefits it offers in terms of remote work, collaboration and flexibility. People think they don't want a VPN until you show them how many benefits they offer – practically for free."

Dashblack sees the same sort of response to Office 365: "Instead of spending R80,000 on a server, we recommend they consider Office 365, which is already in the cloud, compliant, and ticks a lot of boxes right off the bat. Clients will call in asking what it will cost them to add email accounts or shared workflow solutions, and they are amazed to find these are free as part of their 365 subscription."

Aiming to take IT outsourcing to the next level, Dashblack takes the reins for clients and leads them into the next generation IT era, delivering service and

support, automation, proactive systems monitoring, security services and consulting.

For more information about Dashblack, go to www.dashblack.com