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BRINGING OUT THE BEST

Tracy Bolton, who heads Microsoft South Africa's Information Worker division, talks to Jayne Alverca about the group's mission to optimise the user experience



Microsoft



Bill Gates

The name of Microsoft is synonymous with groundbreaking solutions to business problems, innovative ideas and an extensive range of products and services which enable real-time collaboration and data visualisation in a manner undreamt of just a decade ago. Founded by the legendary Bill Gates in 1975, Microsoft has achieved global prominence by providing solutions that cut across every level of business and consumer needs.

The corporation is broadly managed on divisional lines according to the area of technology focus. For the Information Worker division of Microsoft, which houses the corporation’s renowned Office suite of productivity products, the future is one where technology can infinitely extend beyond human productive capabilities and our capacity for interaction, collaboration and communication.

The team is managed by Tracy Bolton, and is responsible for all aspects of bringing the Microsoft suite of productivity products and services to market, including Office, Exchange, SharePoint, Lync, Project, Visio and Office 365. It is one of 14 offices on the African continent which serve 49 countries: Microsoft believes Africa has enormous untapped potential and has prioritised inward investment, initially focusing on South Africa, but now radiating out across the continent.

Enhanced productivity is fundamental to corporate and economic growth and the Microsoft productivity platform is at the leading edge of the new wave of technologies that unify communication and collaboration across the PC, phone and browser, giving employees the tools they need to be productive and save money. Whether the workforce is in one location or distributed globally, Microsoft’s range of productivity tools allows all employees to work as members of a cohesive team who can seamlessly interact with each other.

Bolton believes that demand for productivity is driven by a simple premise. “You could say that we enable the people using our products to be the best they can. To put it as plainly as possible, our aim is to ensure that anyone using our products is able to do

their job better and more cost-effectively.” Microsoft Office is one of the flagship products of the Microsoft productivity portfolio. It dominates the South African and global markets, with sales that have consistently outstripped the growth of the market over the past 10 years.

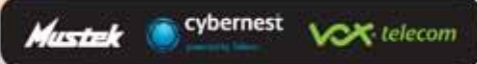


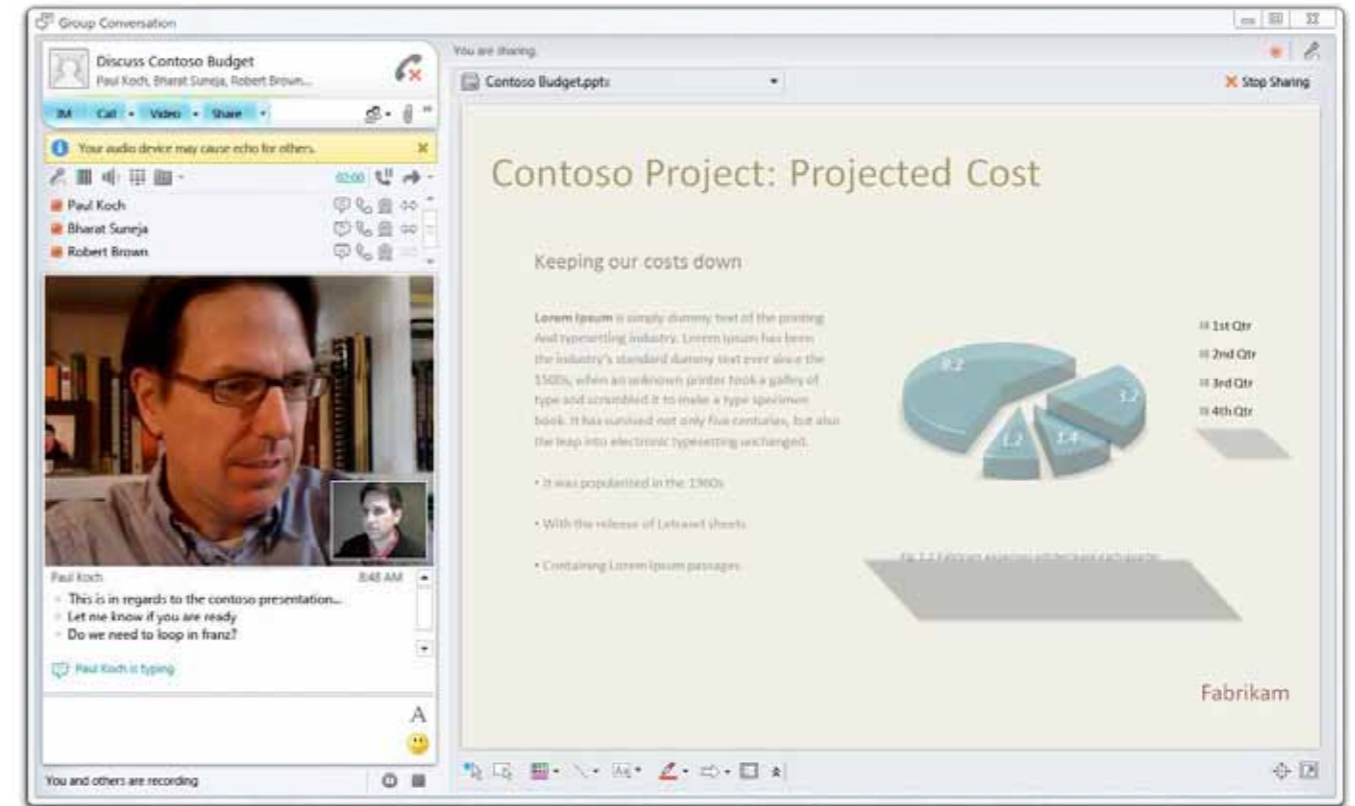
Bolton explains the unfailing appeal of Office: “It has the great benefit of a very high level of user familiarity and is so intuitive in the way it helps people using the product to enhance their work, whether they are designing a PowerPoint presentation or assisting with the extraction of meaningful data from an Excel spreadsheet.”



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Application sharing on Lync

The South African economy still has great scope for further expansion and in turn, Bolton expects market penetration to grow exponentially over the coming years. The introduction of Microsoft Lync in 2010, which brings together voice communications, IM and audio, video and web conferencing into a single interface, is another powerful and emerging revenue stream.

Microsoft believes that Lync heralds a new era in the connected user experience. "This newest addition to our productivity suite enables many formerly discrete communication technologies to be combined

into a single unified communications system that can readily be integrated into existing systems," Bolton explains. "This allows companies to significantly reduce the traditional cost of internal and external communications. It is extremely easy to adapt and use, with virtually no training.

With Lync, it takes just one click to access a conference, make a call, share a video, a message, or a document."

Office 365 is another recent addition to the portfolio. "With Office 365, we can offer users access to the full Office suite, and associated technologies, in such a way that they can either be consumed

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R500 MILLION

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Sum to be invested under Equity Equivalence initiative over the next seven years



The name of Microsoft is synonymous with ground-breaking solutions and innovative ideas

“WE FEEL THAT OUR TECHNOLOGY ENABLES SMALL BUSINESSES TO PLAY ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD WITH MUCH LARGER ENTERPRISES”

in the cloud or in a conventional business environment. Users have the flexibility to move in and out of the cloud as they choose, and they benefit from lower capital and management costs. Small businesses can also ‘pay as they use’, which has a positive impact on their cash flow,” she explains.

Microsoft believes strongly that small business is where the future growth engine of South Africa lies. “If we are to

create jobs for the future, that is the sector of industry which we need to succeed. We feel that our technology enables small businesses to play on a level playing field with much larger enterprises because it means they can exchange information and leverage each other’s skills in exactly the same way,” says Bolton.

To support South Africa’s broader economic and development goals, and as

part of its own broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) programme, Microsoft South Africa last year started an Equity Equivalence initiative that will see it invest R500 million in growing several sustainable, independent and majority black-owned software companies in South Africa over the next seven years.

The size of the investment makes it the biggest deal of its kind by an IT company in South Africa. To date, six small black-owned software development companies have been brought into the programme. To qualify, they had to have no more than 30 employees, and turn over less than R10 million a year. Microsoft believes they have the potential to become global leaders in their respective fields and is pouring significant time, energy

and resources into realising this goal.

The programme is a key facet of the company’s BBBEE strategy, and has helped raise its BBBEE rating to Level 2. “We want to demonstrate our commitment to making a positive contribution towards a progressive and inclusive economic model that will drive South Africa’s future economic growth. Through this programme, we hope that the market will come to associate BBBEE with real entrepreneurship, job creation, enterprise development and skills enhancement,” she concludes. **BE**

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