

Biting a piece of the outsourcing pie

DAILY NATION

By Sam Wambugu

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In Summary

- With landing of optic cable and capable manpower, sector is the next big thing

Many businesses in Kenya are angling themselves to take advantage of the bandwidth surge owing to the fibre optic cable, and lay claim to a slice of Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) market.

The success of countries such as India, China and the Philippines in outsourcing has forced Kenya to pay more attention to this sector.

Major corporations in the US and Europe are outsourcing their back office operations from India to save costs. Although these jobs are usually not directly IT-related, their data-based orientation often means that they require IT departmental support to be successfully outsourced.

With the rapid expansion of the BPO industry and the extent of its reach, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define what a BPO exactly means. It encompasses a wide variety of activities such as human resource, accounting, financial research, marketing, sales, legal work, logistics and so on.

Software services are also regarded as a part of the BPO market by many firms. Kenya has good and long standing ties with United States of America and Europe where majority of these jobs come from.

Many multinationals and NGOs have their hub in Nairobi and the country is endowed with good weather, political stability and an annual steady flow of 30,000 strong English speaking graduates, with easily understood accent.

The government is marshalling resources to boost this sector. The last few budgets allocated substantial resources to the IT sector and much more is expected in June when the Finance minister reads the next estimates.

With the landing of the fibre optic cable heralding an era of better internet communication, Kenya has every reason to star in this lucrative business, eventually being recognised as a BPO destination, same way it is known for

its wildlife, tea, coffee and athletes.

To ensure the country meets international standards in the BPO, Kenya ICT Board has also signed an agreement with the BPO Certification Institute (BCI), the world's largest standards and certification body, giving the country a thumbs up to play in this business.

In its Vision 2030 strategy, the country's blue print to achieve middle-income status within two decades, BPO has a big place. The plan is to create at least 7,500 direct jobs and grow the industry's GDP contribution to Sh10 billion by 2012. It is estimated that the sector can generate Sh45 billion and 20,000 direct jobs in the next four years.

Indirectly, BPO has the potential to fire up demand for training in IT especially for the lower end computer skills, with the aim of taking up jobs created in this sector, particularly among Form Four leavers.

In Kenya, the call centre business leads among businesses outsourced from Europe and United States.

Setting up a good BPO centre requires careful implementation.

It is imperative that you have the required infrastructure, the core team to propel the business and call agents fully trained and capable of taking up the project. In terms of technical resources, a voice switch/EPABX, multiplexers for data and voice transport, modems, routers and servers, headsets, desktop computers, circuits for the connectivity and Automatic Call Distributor are needed.

With the traffic choked Nairobi, some entrepreneurs may opt for an office in the house to handle outsourced business. To set up a call centre at home, you will need to consider installing multiple phone lines.

Most individuals in the work-at-home call centre business work with at least three companies. It is best to have a separate phone line for each client account. You will also need to keep your personal phone line separate. A head-set to go with your phone is also recommended.

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Most positions

It is advised in most positions that you do not share the computer you will be working on. Many of the call centre jobs require you to work with confidential information.

What's more, you will also need some peaceful and quiet working area. You must have a room in your house that is not affected by outside noise. Kids playing or other noise in the background while you are working are strictly a no-no.

An emergency generator can keep your centre running independently of the main power grid.

At the very least, in the event of a power failure, a generator can allow the centre to power down gradually and safely or keep you serving customers until normal power resumes.

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