



# Setting the agenda for BPO CX in Africa

By Craig Gibson, Chief Growth Officer at Webhelp



Think Human



# AFRICA: A CONTINENT OF NEAR-LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES

**Africa is a continent of near-limitless opportunity for a range of customer experience outsourcing services – but without an informed market entry and execution strategy, a place where global brands can severely damage their reputation.**

As the pandemic disrupts established offshoring locations in Asia Pacific, global brands are assessing and ramping up alternative offshore sourcing locations within Africa. The C-suite recognize that the continent offers a clear route to maximizing business continuity and minimizing risk, while systematically reducing operational costs, and achieving a more balanced distribution of customer engagements associated with high quality outcomes.

We have understood the opportunities well – having grown from a single market entry position on the continent in Morocco, to the current team of over 25,000 people working across seven African countries, serving both English and French language needs, providing CX management services in multiple industries, including automotive, e-commerce, FMCG, retail, airlines and oil and gas. We also continue to learn from these extensive engagements – using insights to optimise market entry strategies.

Webhelp is now one of the biggest customer experience management firms within Africa, but it has taken us 20 years, and a deep level of understanding of all the specific and different nuances associated with each and every country in which we operate in Africa today.

As the second largest continent in the world, Africa is home to over 1.2 billion people and makes up 20% of the earth's surface. It's home to extreme wealth, obscene poverty, and everything in between – with widely varying levels of political stability and infrastructure availability.

It's vital that brands which are now considering adding Africa to their sourcing portfolio's view the continent as a long-term, integral part of their business strategy. Most multi-nationals recognize that while critical, the actual delivery of customer experience management is not their core business, and they need support with creating and implementing human experiences in a digital world. In our experience, brands must also balance responsible business, leveraged opportunities, and risks, in order to succeed within Africa.



# RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS: TALENT MANAGEMENT AND IMPACT SOURCING

**At Webhelp, we have put in place systems to achieve excellence in environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria systematically across all the business we do anywhere in the world, including the African countries in which we operate.**

Within Africa, young people account for 60% of those who are unemployed, according to the World Bank. Areas hit hardest included Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, and South Africa. As a leading global CX services provider in Africa, with an extensive global footprint, we recognize that we're uniquely placed to offer employment opportunities and to tackle the social divides resulting from these high levels of unemployment. So, we've created a bespoke and scalable Impact Sourcing Model for unemployed youth, to deliver social reform systematically through all our CX outsourcing work in Egypt, the Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Morocco, Senegal, and South Africa.

In South Africa for example, we work in partnership with Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator – a world-renowned not-for-profit social enterprise – as well as multiple governments and customers, using a model for inclusive youth hiring at scale. Through all our contracts, we provide formal work readiness training, including, jobs, and professional call centre qualifications, to young people aged 18-35 who are at risk of long-term unemployment and economic exclusion. In addition, we provide bespoke programmes designed to maximize understanding of the sectors in which our clients operate, such as retail. This approach accelerates time to competence, and we are seeing young people thrive in their careers with Webhelp. We are also seeing remarkable outcomes being delivered for our clients' customers.

So far, in partnership with Harambee, we have supported hundreds of excluded and unemployed young people into career opportunities with Webhelp, either through jobs, or work placements, and we have a firm commitment to increase numbers every year. Having said that, as a business striving to deliver world class customer experience outcomes, we know that we can't enter new countries with a 'cookie cutter' approach. We were one of the first companies to work directly with our customers in customizing and configuring our Impact Sourcing methods to meet the specific needs and objectives of their businesses. In terms of talent management, Webhelp South Africa has also partnered with the University of Stellenbosch Business School to launch a leadership diversity programme. By combining formal education with career experience, we can create an equitable pipeline of skilled and talented future leaders. Social value aside, I cannot overstate that we won't work anywhere in the world without first fulfilling our responsibility to carry out extensive due diligence on countries which we, or our clients, are considering as a place for new business or offshore expansion.

Our expert team rigorously scrutinize each and every country's standards in terms of political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTLE) criteria. We use this insight, alongside guidance from the UN, World Bank, and World Health Organisation to 'score' each country under consideration for new business. We then deploy a team of subject matter experts who spend time in the country surveying the local labour markets, salary levels and recruitment, before getting all our insights validated by teams of people based within the target country. Only when evidence shows that a country meets our high standards on ethics, compliance, and operations, will we consider designing the best way for us and our clients to work there.



# OPPORTUNITIES: MORE MOMENTUM ON INVESTMENT, AND GREATER SOCIAL VALUE

**With 60% of the population aged under 25, Africa is set to have the biggest number of consumers globally – backed by steadily increasing education levels, improving infrastructure, and a dynamic start-up business culture. Soon, brands will have access to an abundance of highly motivated and skilled people, who due to their emerging global status as consumers, have a unique understanding of the importance of CX.**

Not only that, but right now, brands considering investment in Africa can benefit from a myriad of funding opportunities. Many governments across the continent award significant grants to firms which can deliver positive social outcomes – which is one of the reasons why South Africa has been voted the most favoured offshore CX delivery location by Ryan Strategic Advisory. There is also significant funding available through organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation, and the World Trade Organization.

We encourage competition in Africa because it drives performance. We're not only looking to build our own business here – we're looking to develop the whole CX industry in the regions in which we operate. As more and more brands commit to the continent as a key part of their go-to market strategy, we're expecting to see second, third and fourth generation businesses open up opportunities for local suppliers to gain a foothold into the formal economy, driving economic growth. That means even more momentum on investment, and greater social value within African countries.

Companies which thrive in Africa now will gain a huge competitive advantage in the long-term.



# RISK: NOT A GO-TO DESTINATION FOR THE "QUICK-WIN"

**But for every opportunity in Africa, there's also a potential risk.**

While infrastructure is improving, it's generally still behind more established offshoring locations, and standards vary widely between countries, so it's smart to pre-empt potential challenges in terms of telephony and communications. Further, in a continent with historic issues relating to debt, brands may also need to be alert to, and navigate away from, potential corruption issues, as well as the potential mismanagement and misappropriation of African aid.

It all means that Africa is not a go-to destination for any brands seeking a 'quick win.' Firms don't scale here by luck – they succeed by designing and implementing robust operating models, due diligence and governance, appropriate sourcing, investment back into the available capabilities, and nurturing a pipeline of management talent.

The operating model we use in Africa, and across the world, is Webhelp Anywhere – a system which enables clients to standardise excellence at any location in a way that's bespoke to the needs of their business, with a focus on six key pillars - talent, engagement, performance, technology, security, and resilience. We also deploy specialist teams, comprising global and local talent, into new countries to support the set-up and establishment of new services, the combined effect brings assurance to this process.

Finally, I'd urge any firms considering their operating model strategy, entry into new territories, and business operations, to talk to brands like Webhelp, which have already overcome these challenges and established a presence in a number of countries in Africa. Leaders can save a lot of hassle by getting advice on how and where to invest, avoid pitfalls, and fulfil social value in a country with infinite opportunity.

## About the author



Craig Gibson, grew up in South Africa, was educated at Durban Technikon in South Africa and helped to develop the first major contact centre BPO offshore model in South Africa – working across the US, Middle East, UK, Europe and Africa. A business he started in South Africa was later acquired by Webhelp, which accelerated his work to bridge the social divide in communities in which the company makes investments with its clients, alongside delivering world-class outcomes for them. Today Craig leads the Webhelp Group's growth efforts, working with clients to address their customer management needs, he lives in London.



# MAKING BUSINESS MORE HUMAN FOR THE WORLD'S MOST EXCITING BRANDS

We live in an era of fast connectivity and AI. Today, human experiences have even more power to make businesses come to life in customers' hearts and minds.

Webhelp is committed to making business more human. It's through this commitment that Webhelp enriches customer experience, and designs business solutions that create value for the world's most exciting companies. Webhelp is a partner across a range of services including customer experience solutions, social media moderation through to payment services. Hundreds of brands across the world trust Webhelp because of their people, the culture they work in, and the ideas and technology they put to work.

Webhelp believes that Emotional Intelligence creates a lasting impact, and their skill in marrying a differentiating human touch to the right technology is what makes a real difference for their clients.

By choosing Webhelp they access the passion and experience of more than 90,000 game-changers from more than 150 locations in 50 countries. Each one determined to bring their own intelligence, empathy and experience to the table every day.

Webhelp invests in people and the environment they work in, because they know that when people thrive, it has a powerful impact on them, their customers and on their partners' business.

Webhelp believes that making business more human leads to a better customer experience - and a healthier bottom line. Webhelp is the European leader in their industry, with a revenue of €1,5B in 2019, and aims for a global leadership position. Webhelp is currently owned by its management and GBL, a leading global investment holding, as of November 2019.

**More information can be found  
at [www.webhelp.com](http://www.webhelp.com)**

