


AM Mahomed, Printing SA

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From 26 to 28 July 2022 I had the pleasure to attend the Southern Africa Postal Operations Association (SAPOA) annual conference in which I delivered a paper entitled “Amazon – and its impact on the print and publishing sector”. SAPOA is a gathering of senior executives of all the Postal Services across the southern Africa region, who share their best practices and success stories. It was truly illuminating and refreshing to hear of the strides made by across the region, and how they trying to work together to improve a whole range of new services to their existing offerings. They have added more value to their customers, through joint collaboration, and getting IT systems to be integrated seamlessly to allow for cross border transactions.

The SAPO CEO, Ms Nomkitha Mona, also presented an interesting perspective of where SAPO as an organisation is, and where it is aspiring to be, given the help of both government and the private sector. There are amazing plans in the pipeline, and her team are working hard at actualizing these. Across the region, there has been a decline of the traditional postal services (use of stamps, transactional mail, and postal orders to transfer money or small packages) with the advent of newer technologies to communicate faster, courier services that offer an efficient and prompt service, as well as online banking and money transfer capabilities that are now in vogue. Post offices in the region have re-invented themselves to offer related full-house services to the hitherto unbanked sector, especially in deep rural areas, where they have the advantage of having the best footprint and are using their prime locations and infrastructure very strategically. They have integrated self-service kiosks located at each of their post offices with on-line banking terminals alongside these, allowing for full banking service transactions.

They not only issue social service grant money, they have also embarked on being a service point for pension money to be obtained, creating a facility to do all utility bill payments, the printing of car license disks, and going a step further by having the infrastructure to print high security driver license cards. Some have also entered the insurance sector, offering personal and business insurance either through an underwriter, or registering as a financial service organization and offering it in competition with other established vendors.



They have also engaged with strategic partners to offer collaborative services or special add on services. These include relations with:

- **Africa Wide** who builds industrial solutions for Africa, merging technology with efficiencies to the scale required, with Africa Cloud services, SmartMation and Banking solutions across borders
- **Mail Americas** who have over 20 years of experience in managing publishing and cross border eCommerce in emerging countries, delivering over 3 million international packages per month across Latin America.
- **TradeRoot Africa** who have a broad range of products throughout the payments and issuing spectrum. They work together with card associations and payment regulators and have a well-established footprint of clients throughout Africa. They license solutions across the entire value chain, from payments to core banking and issuing, both on a traditional licensing model and by offering a managed services platform as a service to clients.
- **Mastercard** is a global pioneer in payment innovation and technology, connecting billions of consumers, issuers, merchants, governments & businesses
- **DHL** is a global leader in the logistics industry, specializing in international shipping, courier services and transportation.
- **Escher** who delivers e-commerce solutions from the first mile to last mile of delivery, helping postal service providers connect globally with 1 billion consumers through their innovative software platform
- **Merpak Envelopes** is a specialised envelope manufacturing and printing company that manufactures, prints, and converts the widest range of envelopes with a complete selection of windows, flap gums and paper stocks. They also offer a range of
- **PostSafe** products that include recyclable polythene envelopes that are manufactured to the highest specification and offer outstanding security, tamperproof, sealing ability and weatherproof solutions for high value mailings.
- **ProJunction** does procurement, warehousing, processing, picking, packing and distribution across Africa

These developments across the African continent bode well for the growth and development through the networks forged. With more and better engagement, it will usher in a new era for postal service operators, capitalizing on synergies, and becoming self-sustainable, making essential and diversified services available to all citizens.

Naturally what is happening at SAPO is of concern. As a state-owned entity, it is struggling with huge debt, and the promised bail out from government has not occurred.

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The SAPO CEO and her team have delivered a strategy document to Parliament where they outline the challenges presented by the SASSA grant payment system. This grant payment process is costing SAPO financial resources which it can ill afford. SAPO has suggested that since this is a social welfare programme, it should be subsidized by the government. Their strategy further outlines that with more support from both government and the private sector it can become self-funded and carry out its core postal business functions once again. **ENDS**

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