Amazon Small Business
Digital Adoption Report



world wide worx

amazon.co.za

Contents

Foreword by Robert Koen:
Managing Director of Amazon Sub-Saharan Africa 03

Methodology and Demographics ..... 04 – 06

Research Overview by Arthur Goldstuck:
CEO of World Wide Worx 07

Research Findings by Theme: 08
- Digital Presence, Tools & Adoption 09
- Marketplaces Gap & Onlinesales Breakdown ..... 10 – 13
- AI Adoption, Skills & Mentorship ..... 14 – 16

Driving Marketplace Success by Mpho Modise:
Head of Seller Success at Amazon 17

Amazon Case Studies ..... 18 – 21

In Closing by Suzelle Abe: Head of Marketplace 22

Expert Profiles: ..... 23 – 25

Foreword Robert Koen: Managing Director of Amazon Sub-Saharan Africa



Behind every thriving community in South Africa, you will find small businesses hard at work. They create jobs in communities across the country, bring innovation to industries of every kind, and provide livelihoods for millions of families. At Amazon, we believe that when small businesses succeed, South Africa succeeds - and that conviction is what led us to commission this research.

The Amazon Digital Adoption Survey 2026, conducted independently by World Wide Worx, paints a detailed picture of how South African entrepreneurs are building, selling, and growing in a digital world.

The findings tell a story that should make us proud and sharpen our resolve. An extraordinary 86% of the businesses surveyed now generate online sales, and nearly two-thirds of online sellers have been trading digitally for six years or more. This is not a tentative experiment. South African entrepreneurs have made a decisive commitment to digital commerce.

But the data tells us something else too: where the next big opportunity lies. Only 32% of active online sellers currently use a major online marketplace to reach customers – a significant gap between digital readiness and the tools that can help businesses scale beyond their own network and resources. Logistics and delivery remain the number-one challenge for 62% of online sellers, followed by returns management at 46%. The hard part is no longer getting online; it is marketing your products to the right customers and managing what happens after they click 'buy.'

What stands out to me personally is the ambition and resilience of women entrepreneurs in this study. Female-owned businesses are twice as likely as male-owned businesses to be online-first, and more likely to sell through structured digital channels such as an established marketplace. They are leading the way in digital-first strategy and the findings suggests this may be because they have less access to mentorship and face greater cost pressures. That tells us exactly where to focus our support.

At Amazon, we take these findings as a direct mandate. Every investment we make – in fulfilment infrastructure, AI-powered seller tools, features that amplify discoverability, simplified onboarding, and in targeted support for underserved entrepreneurs – is guided by what small businesses tell us they need. We are building for the long term in South Africa because we see the potential: a generation of digitally capable entrepreneurs who are ready to scale.

Looking ahead, I am optimistic. I want to see a South Africa where no entrepreneur believes their business is 'too small' to reach millions of customers. Where logistics is an enabler rather than a barrier. Where women-owned businesses receive the mentorship and financial support they deserve. And where affordable technology helps every business owner spend less time on administration and more time on the work that inspired them to start in the first place.

This report is a contribution to that future. I hope its insights will be useful not only to Amazon but to policymakers, industry stakeholders, and, most importantly, to the entrepreneurs whose experiences fill these pages.

Thank you for reading, and thank you to the 1,400 business owners who shared their time and their stories.

Methodology & Sample Demographics

The Amazon Digital Adoption Survey 2026 comprised 1,400 completed telephonic interviews with South African small-, micro- and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs). Fieldwork took place between April and July 2026.

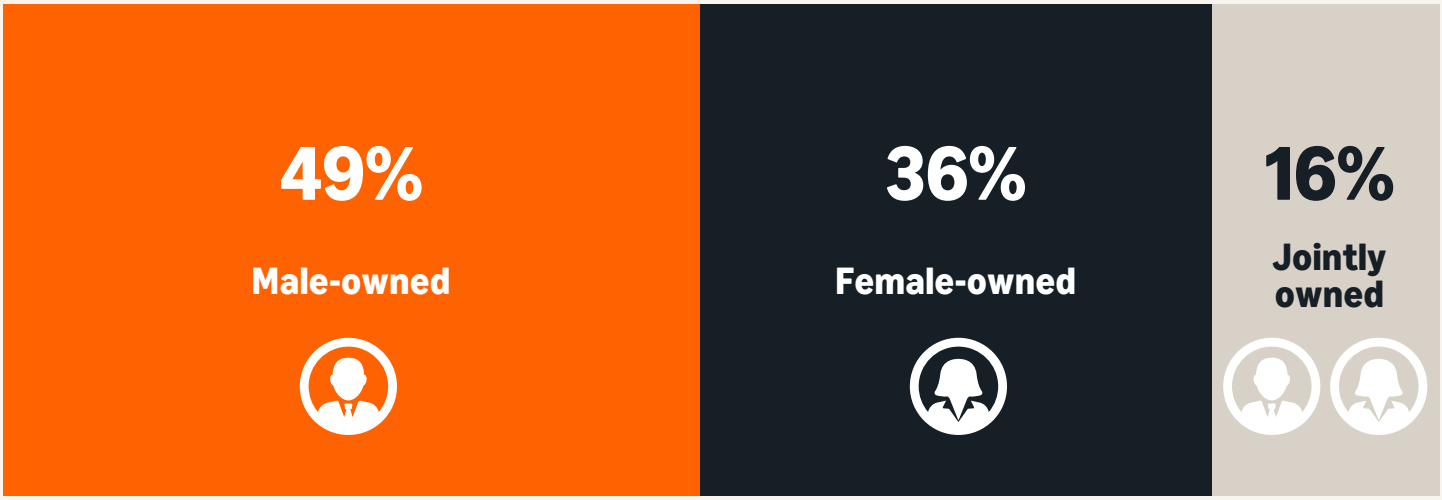
The survey examined how SMMEs use digital technologies to operate, reach customers and sell online. Topics included internet and technology use, online-sales activity, marketplace participation, operational challenges, artificial intelligence, digital skills, training and business support.

Responses were analysed across business size, business age, owner age, ownership structure, sector and location to identify patterns in digital adoption and commercial activity.

The survey covered a broad range of established South African SMMEs. Retail, e-commerce and wholesale accounted for 68% of respondents, manufacturing for 26%, Gauteng and the Western Cape for 78%, and city-based businesses for 70%. Some 86% of respondents sold online.

Disclaimer: The research in this report was conducted by World Wide Worx, an independent technology research organisation, on behalf of Amazon. The findings are based on a survey of 1,400 South African small and medium retailers. The data and analysis are those of World Wide Worx and do not necessarily reflect the views of Amazon. Any use of the data should credit World Wide Worx.

Gender of Business Owner



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT **The ownership profile is concentrated in middle age, with 62% of owners aged 45 or older.**

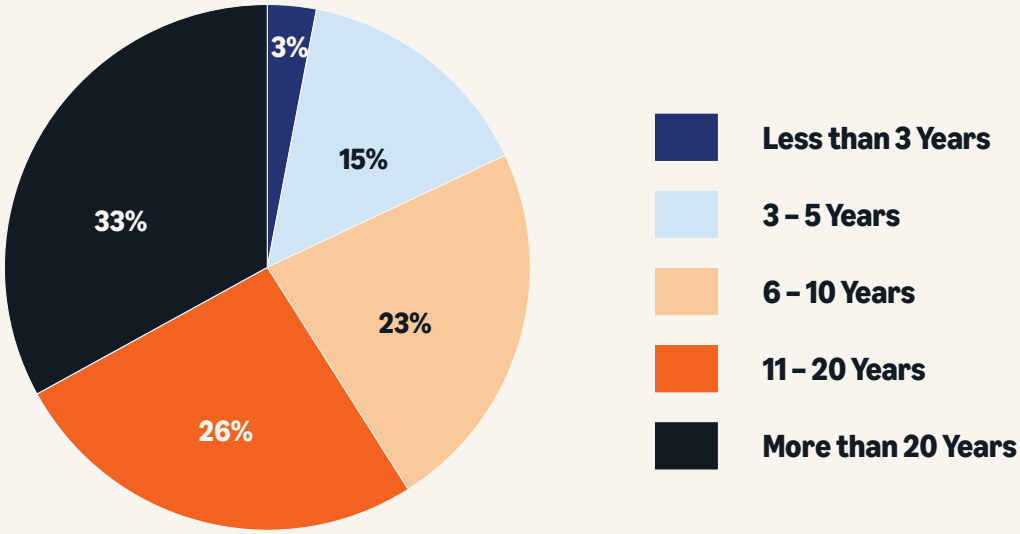
Number of Employees



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT **74% of businesses have 20 or fewer employees.**

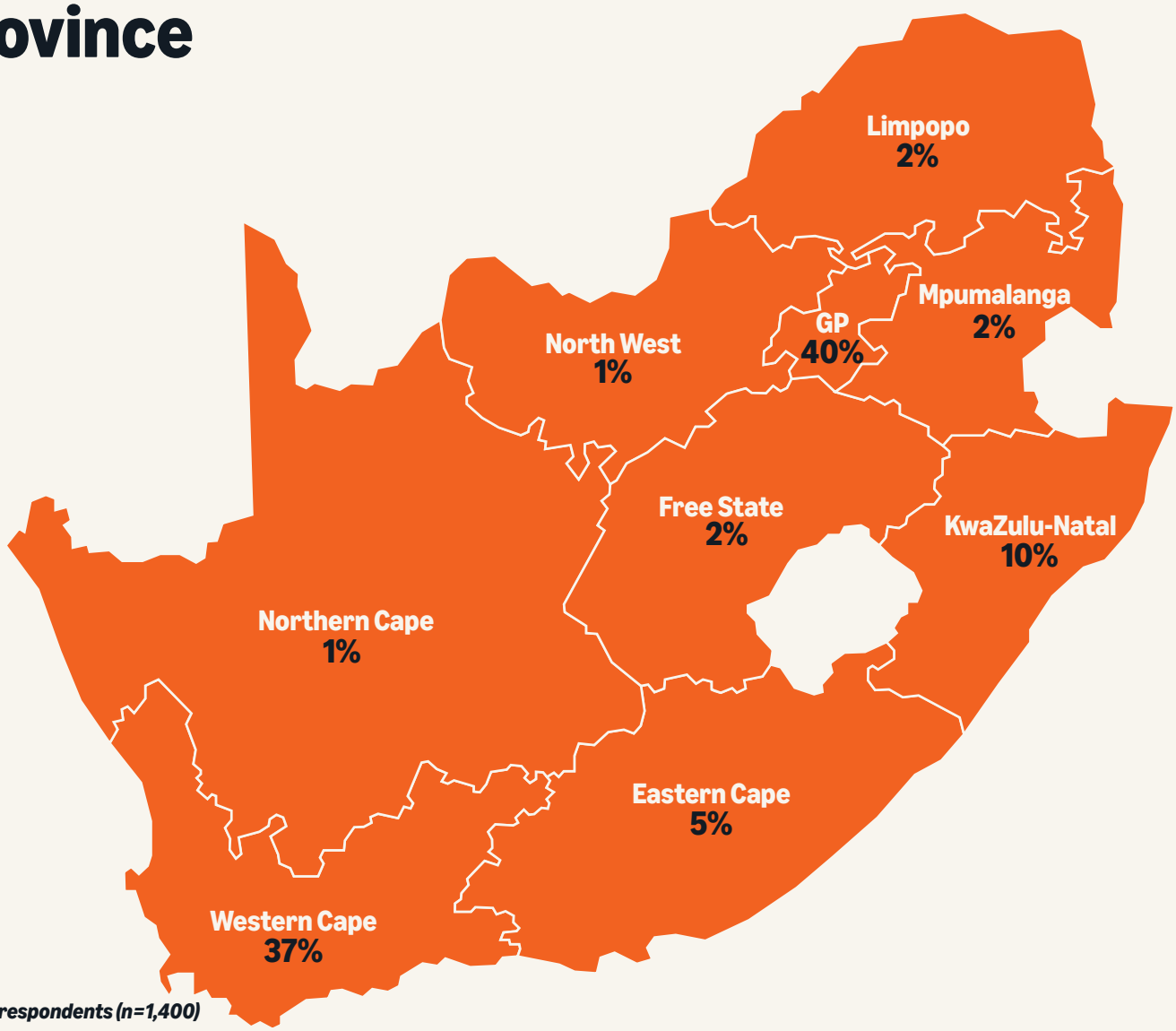
Years Operating



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT **A strong majority of businesses (59%) are well-established, operating for more than 11 years.**

Province



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT **The respondent profile provides a detailed view of established, urban and digitally active SMMEs, particularly trading and manufacturing businesses in Gauteng and the Western Cape.**

Research Overview by Arthur Goldstuck: CEO of World Wide Worx



When we set out to survey 1,400 South African small and medium businesses for the inaugural Amazon Digital Adoption Report, we expected to find a market still wrestling with the basics of getting online. What we found instead was a market that has decisively moved past that chapter and is now confronting an entirely different set of challenges.

Perhaps the single most striking finding is how comprehensively the connectivity barrier has fallen. Only 5% of active online sellers cite data costs or connectivity as a challenge. Internet use across our sample reaches 99.6%. Payment systems difficulties affect just 12% of businesses. For a country where unreliable connectivity was, for years, the reflexive explanation for slow technology adoption, this represents a fundamental turning point: the infrastructure debate, for this segment at least, has largely been won.

A fulfilment crisis has taken its place. Sixty-two percent of online sellers now cite logistics and delivery as their primary operational challenge, while 46% point to returns management. The friction has migrated from the front end of the digital journey – getting online, accepting payments, reaching customers – to the back end: moving products, processing returns, and absorbing the cumulative costs of each transaction. The enabling layer of e-commerce is solved; the fulfilment layer is not.

The financial picture reinforces this shift. The barriers that weigh most heavily on SMMEs are not once-off setup costs, cited by only 14%, but recurring operational charges. Ongoing subscription and administration fees affect 48% of businesses, while digital transaction fees burden 41%. This has a direct bearing on the sustainability and creditworthiness of small enterprises: a business that appears profitable on paper may be steadily eroded by the compounding cost of marketplace fees, logistics charges, and returns processing. A once-off subsidy may help a business begin, but it does little for a seller facing these ongoing charges. The cost problem is built into daily trading.

The online sales data tells an equally compelling story. 86% percent of businesses now generate online revenue, with the largest group, at 34%, earning between a quarter and half of their total revenue digitally. This is a mature hybrid market, not a tentative experiment. Nearly two-thirds of online sellers have traded digitally for at least six years. Smaller businesses are more digitally active than larger ones: 30% of firms with one to five employees earn more than three-quarters of their revenue online, compared to just 6% of firms with 51 to 200 employees.

The AI story, however, surprised me most. Fifty-nine percent of SMMEs already use artificial intelligence for marketing and social media – a remarkable penetration rate. Yet deeper applications remain strikingly limited: only 15% use AI for sales insights, 13% for customer service, and a mere 4% for inventory management. The technology has entered through the front door of content creation, but it has barely crossed the threshold into operations. The appetite is there – 76% of businesses rate their interest in affordable AI solutions at four or five out of five – but cost, cited by 54%, and technical skills, cited by 37%, remain formidable barriers. The opportunity for marketplaces that can deliver practical, low-cost AI tools extending beyond marketing into the operational core of small business is both clear and urgent.

This report captures a market at an inflection point. South African SMMEs are no longer digital laggards needing basic access. They are experienced, hybrid operators seeking clearer pathways into structured marketplace selling, affordable fulfilment solutions, and practical technology tools that make online trade not just possible, but sustainable.

Research Findings
By Theme

Digital Presence, Tools & Adoption

Customer-Facing Digital Footprint



Social Media Accounts



Website



Google Business Profile or Map Listing



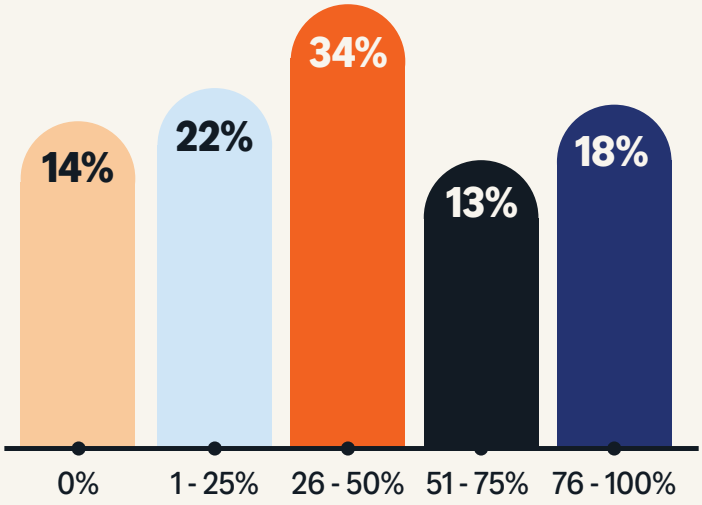
*Online Marketplace Listing

(* 28% of all survey respondents have a marketplace listing, but do not necessarily sell online)

Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT **Visibility and transactions are different stages of adoption. A business can be easy to find online without joining a marketplace.**

Share of Total Sales Made Online



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

Online Selling is Established:

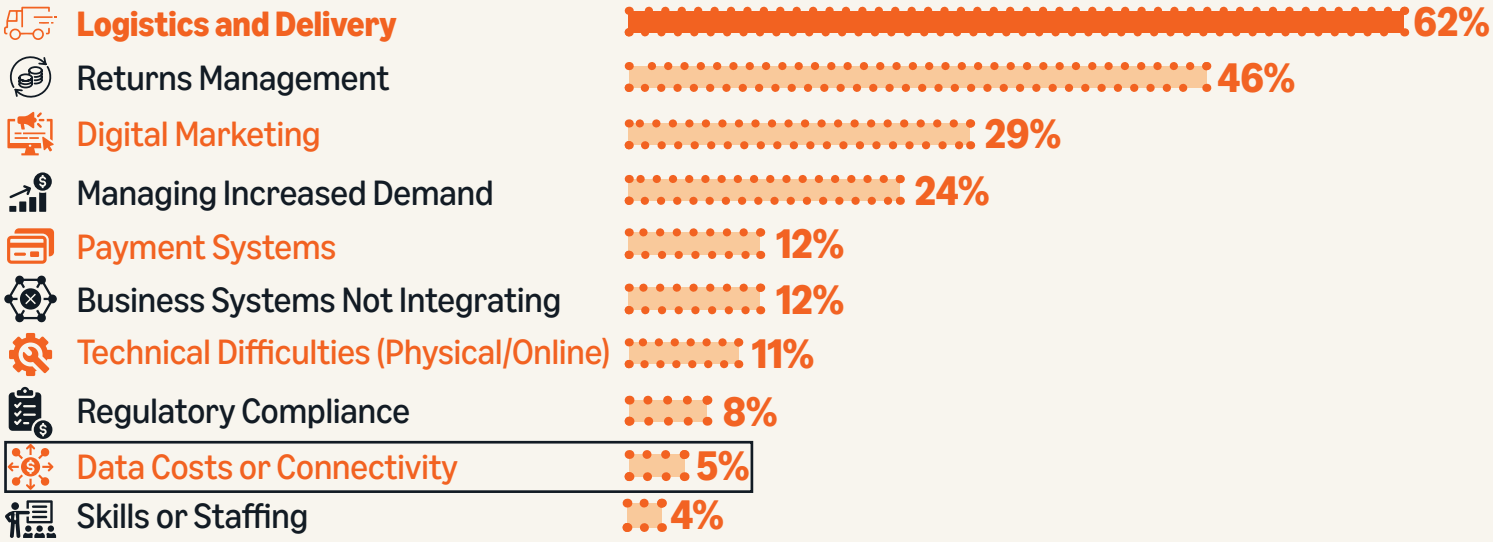
64% of online sellers have sold online for at least six years.
25% have sold online for more than ten years.
9% began less than three years ago.

Physical Store Presence



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

Biggest Challenges When Selling Online



Base: Active Online Sellers Answering The Question (n=1,199)

KEY INSIGHT **Digital growth has not displaced physical retail. It has added websites, social selling, payments and online fulfilment to businesses that still operate stores. This hybrid centre is where some of the greatest logistics and returns pressure appears.**

The Marketplace Gap

Online Sales Channels Used

Own Websites
96%

Informally Through Social Media
67%

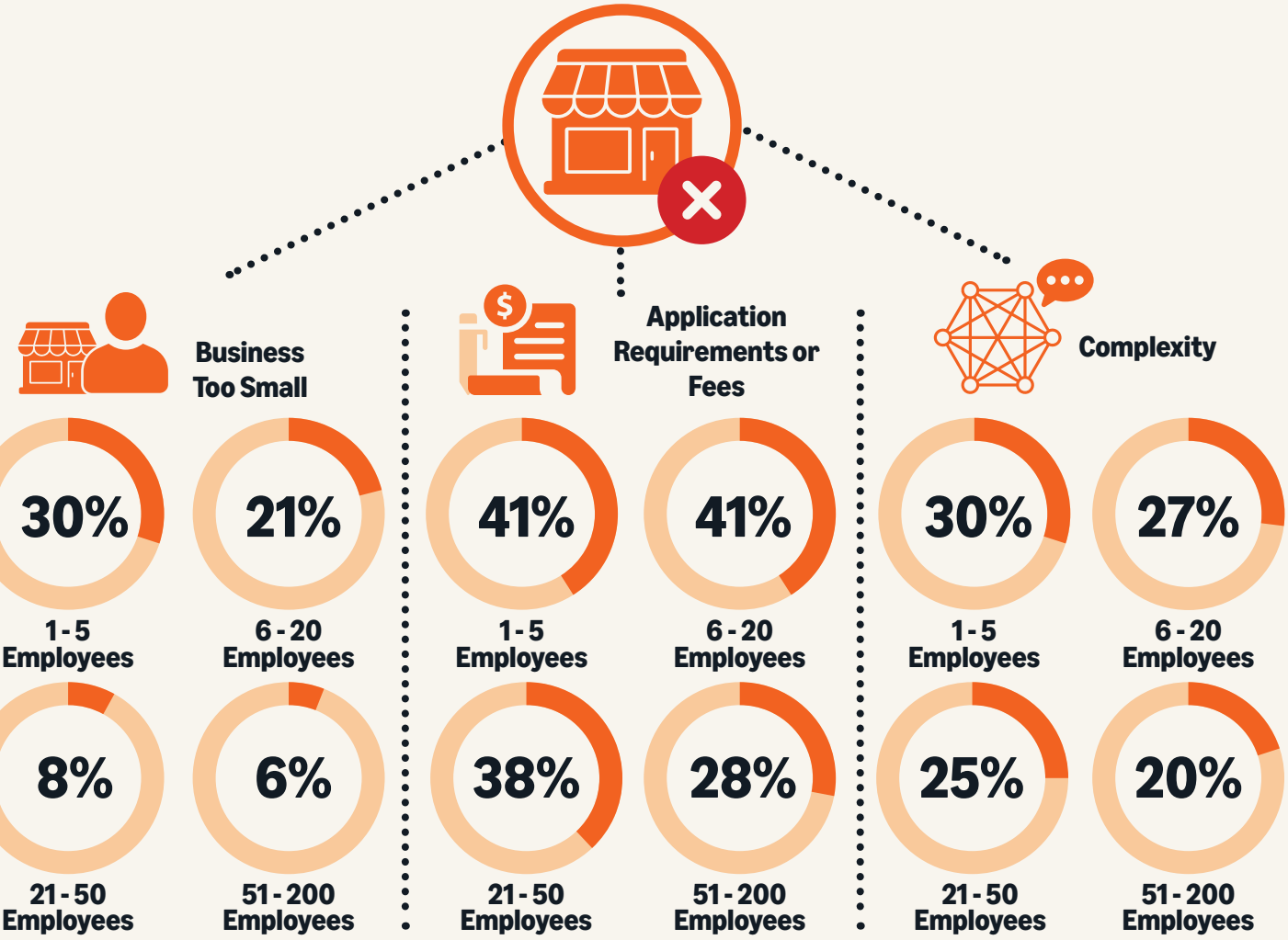
WhatsApp
51%

***Major e-commerce Marketplace**
32%

(32% of active online sellers use a major marketplace)*
Base: Active Online Sellers (n=1,206)

Online Sales Breakdown

Marketplace Barriers by Business Size

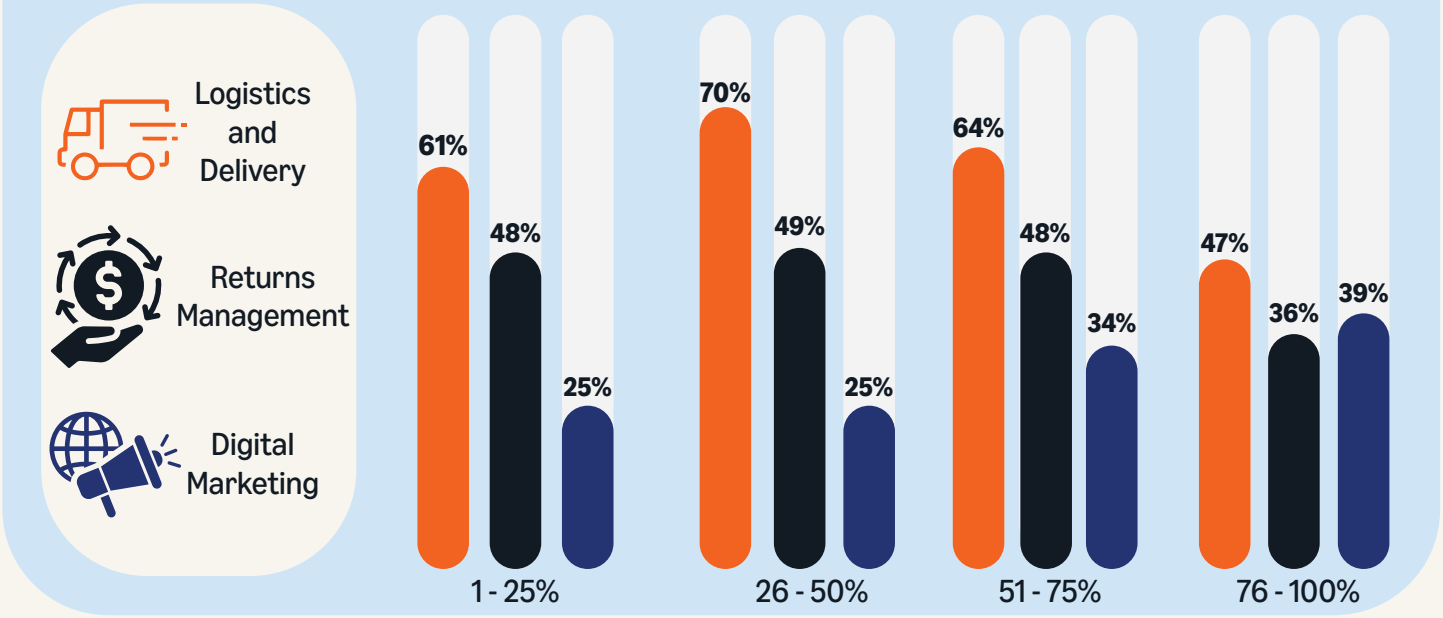


Base: All Respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT

Businesses can reach customers and collect payments. Their greatest pressure comes from moving products, managing returns and absorbing the costs around each transaction. For this digitally mature market segment, the enabling layer of e-commerce is solved; the fulfilment layer is not.

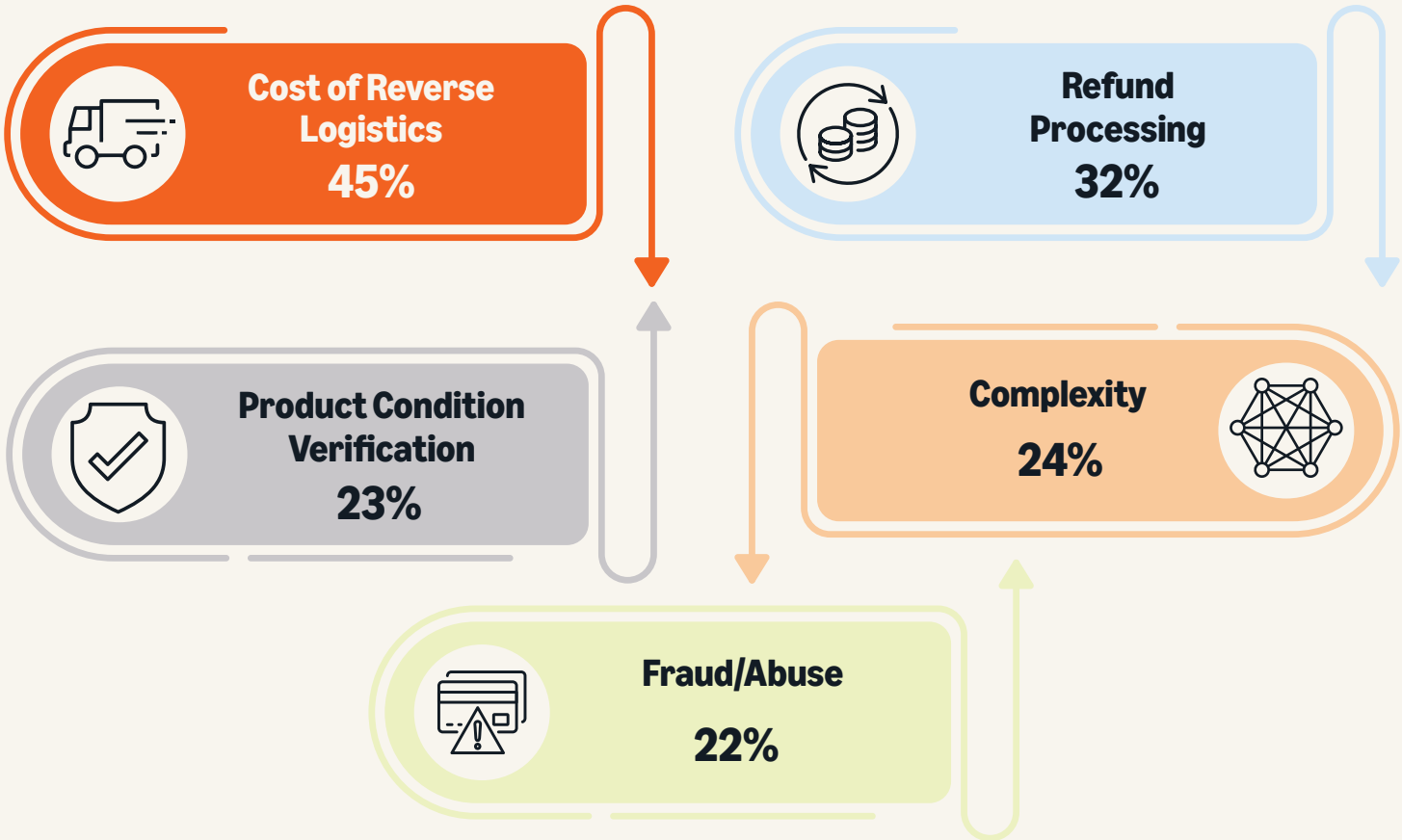
Online-Selling Pressure, by Online-Sales Share



Base: Active Online Sellers Answering the Question (n=1,199)

KEY INSIGHT **Cloud services provide the clearest marker of a more formal technology environment. The most online-dependent businesses report lower logistics and returns pressure but greater digital-marketing difficulty.**

Returns Management Concerns



Base: Active Online Sellers Answering The Question (n=1,188)

KEY INSIGHT **The cost problem is built into daily trading. The next phase of SMME digital development is less about getting businesses online and more about making online trade affordable and operationally manageable.**

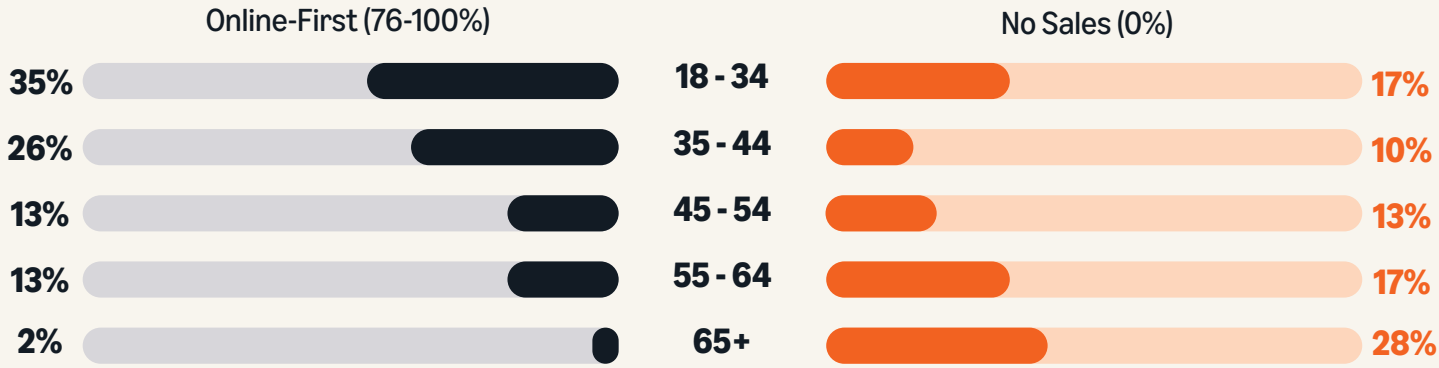
Financial Barriers to Digital Adoption



Ongoing Subscription Fees or Admin Costs	48%
Digital Transaction Fees	41%
Initial Setup Costs	14%
Hardware/Device Costs	9%

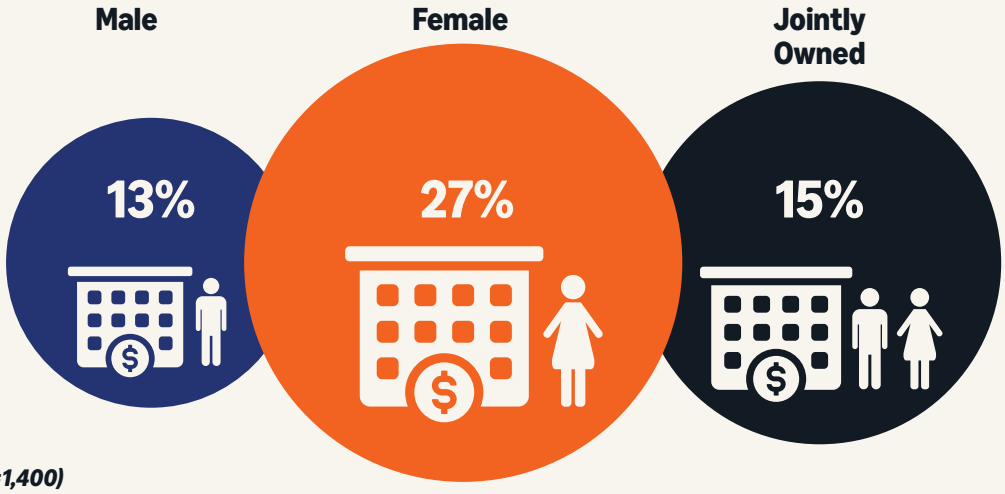
Base: Active Online Sellers (n=1,206)

Online-Sales Dependence by Owner Age



Base: All Respondents (n=1,400)

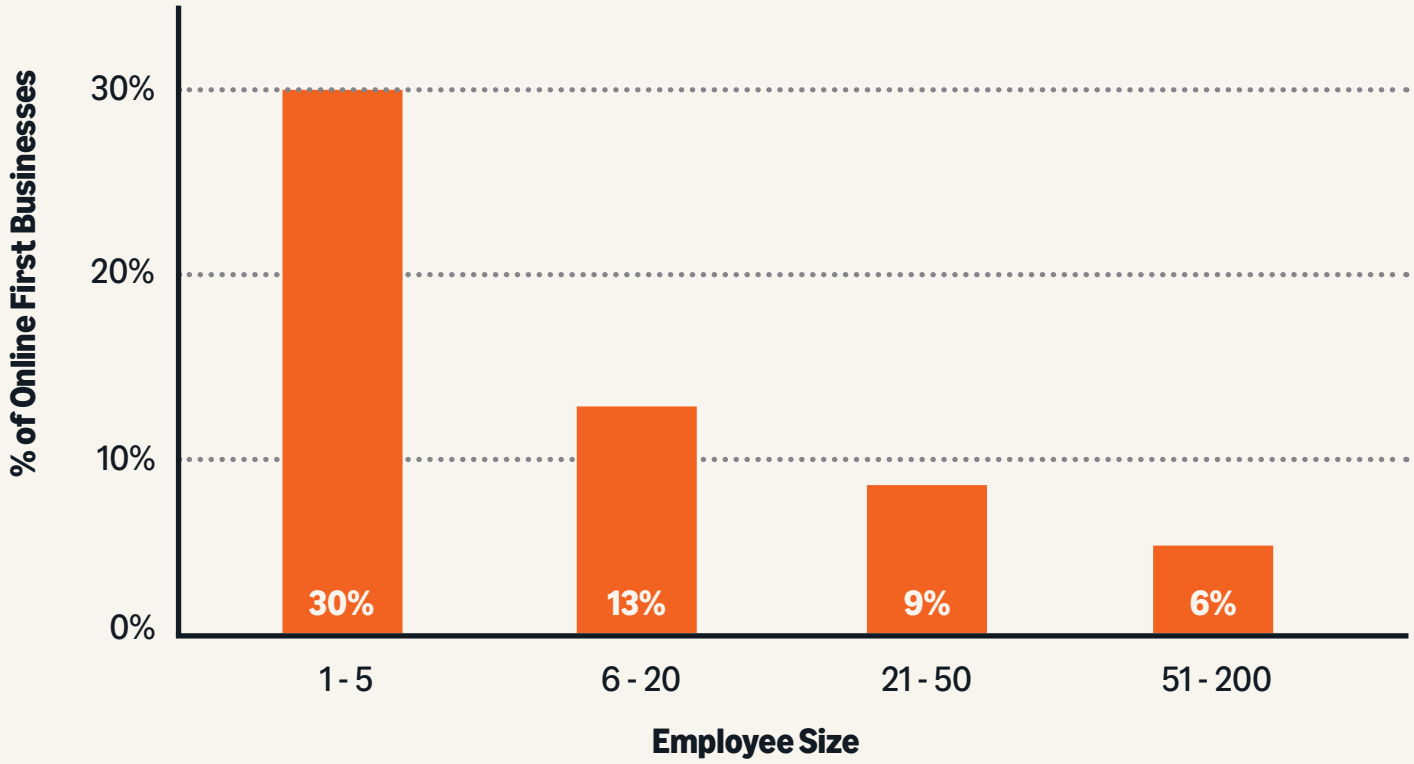
Online-Sales Dependence by Ownership Structure



Base: All Respondents (n=1,400)

KEY INSIGHT **The youngest businesses show both the greatest online dependence and a relatively large no-sales group. This reflects a cohort that includes digital-native firms as well as businesses still establishing a route to customers. Female-owned businesses are twice as likely as male-owned businesses to be online-first.**

Online-First Businesses (76-100% of Sales Online) by Employee Size



Base: Active Online Sellers (n=1,206)

KEY INSIGHT **Smaller businesses, especially those without a physical store, are more likely to have been built around an online route to customers.**

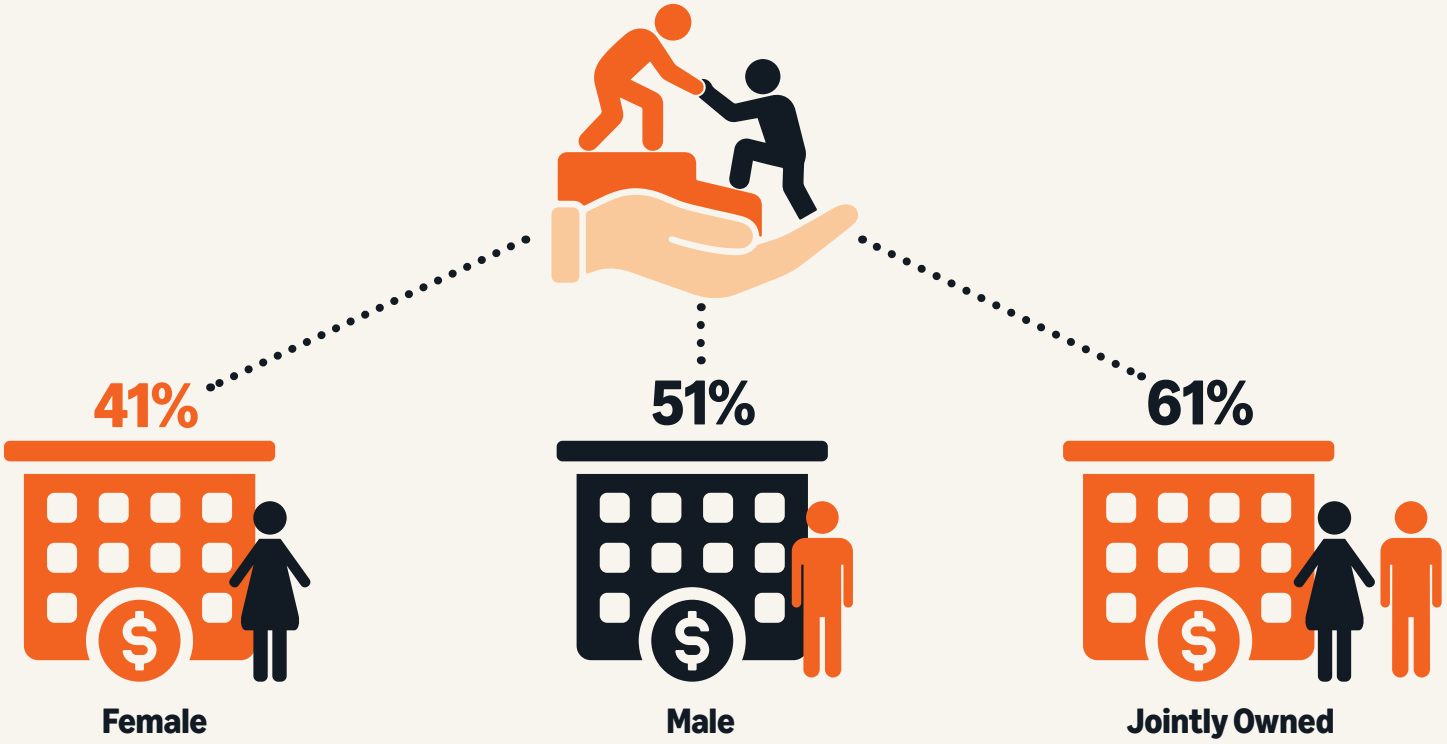
Channel Use Among Online Sellers by Gender Ownership



Base: Active Online Sellers (female-owned n=441); male-owned n=572)

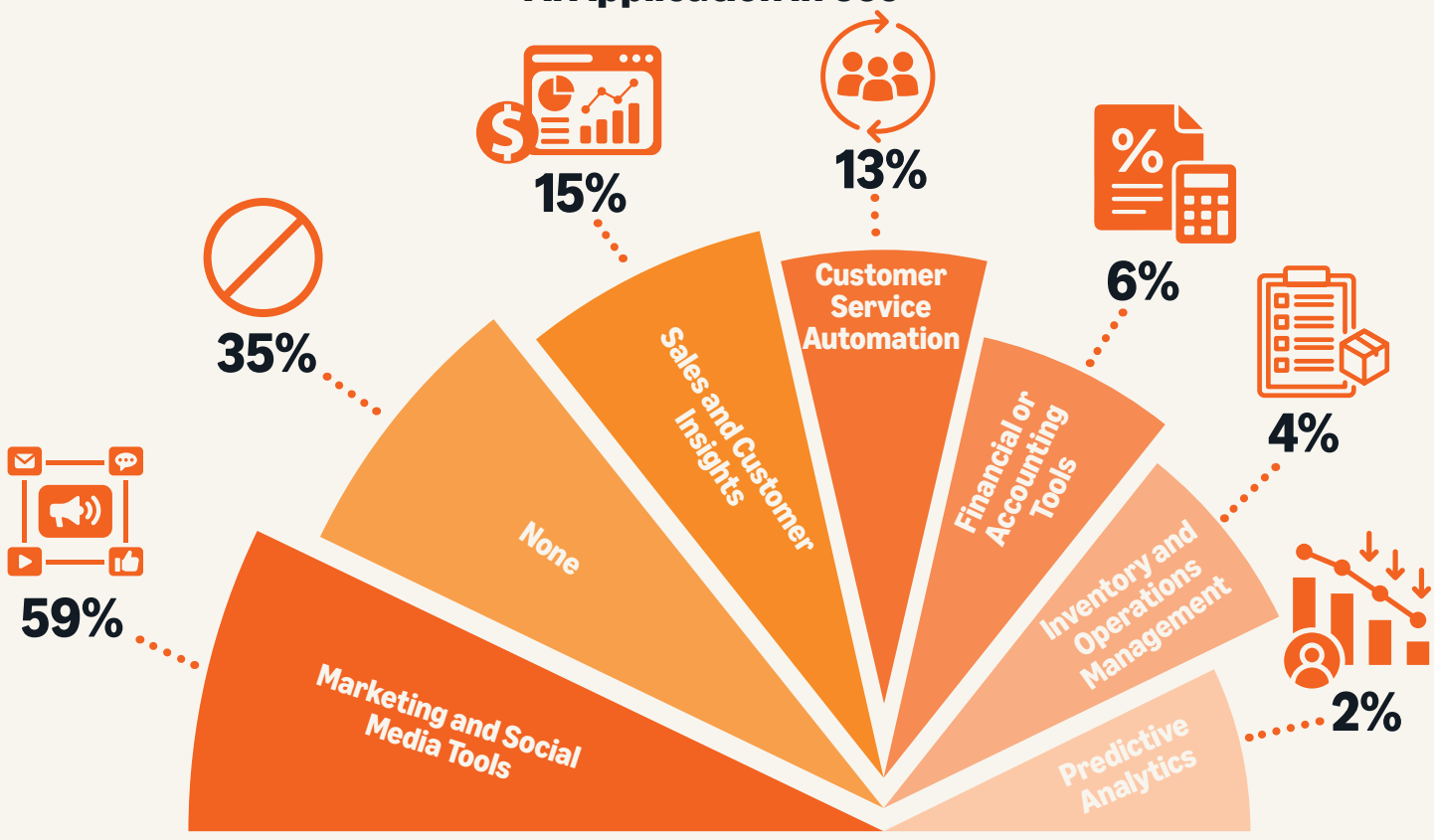
AI Adoption & Skills

Mentorship by Ownership Structure



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

AI Application In Use



Base: Active Online Sellers (n=1,206)

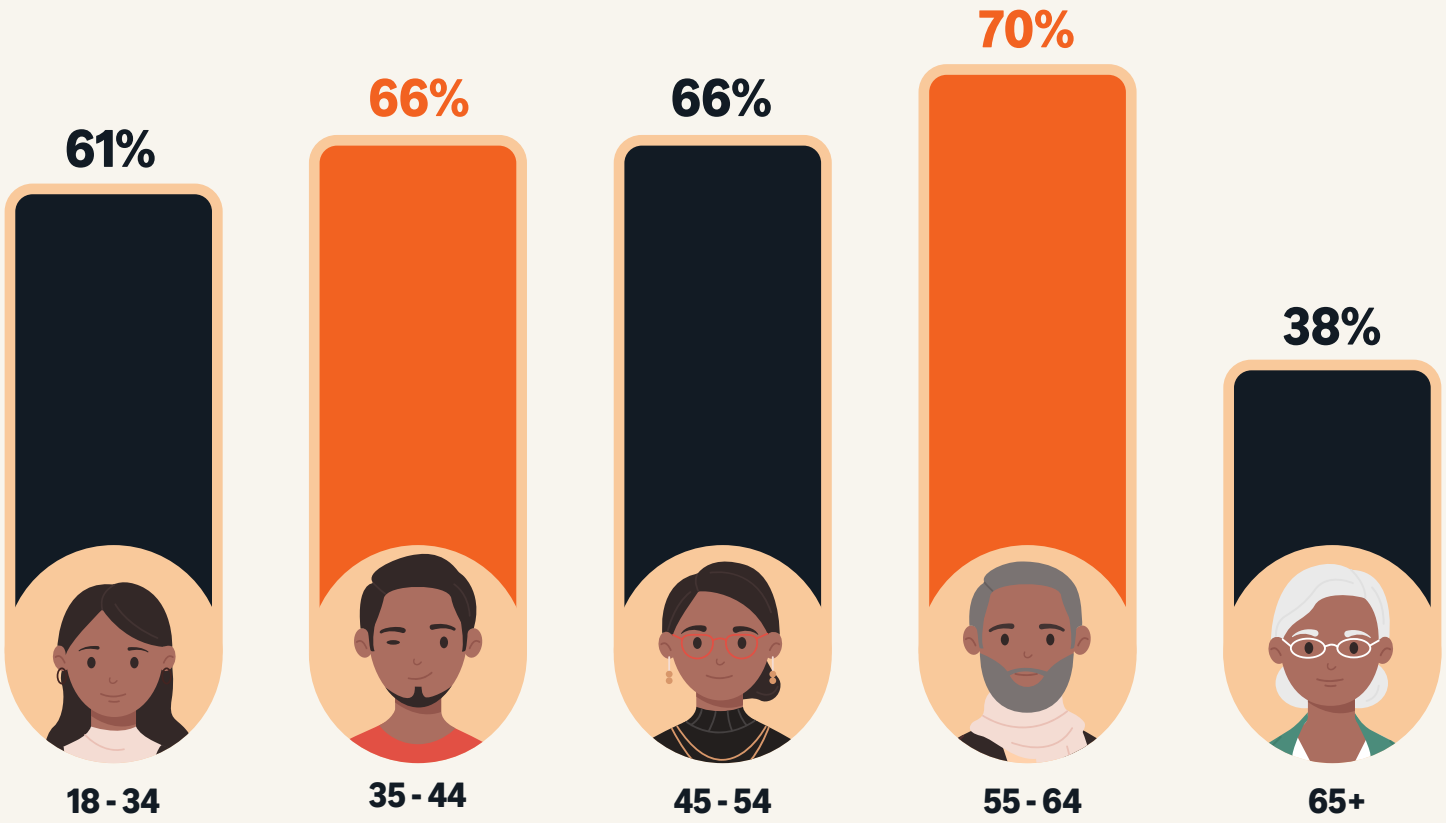
KEY INSIGHT **AI use remains broadly established through age 64, then drops sharply. Among businesses with owners aged 65 or older, 62% use no AI applications.**

AI Use by Business Size

	1-5 Employees	6-20 Employees	21-50 Employees	51-200 Employees
Marketing/ Social	56%	61%	65%	54%
Sales/ Insights	9%	15%	22%	24%
Customer Service	11%	15%	13%	16%
Inventory	2%	4%	6%	12%

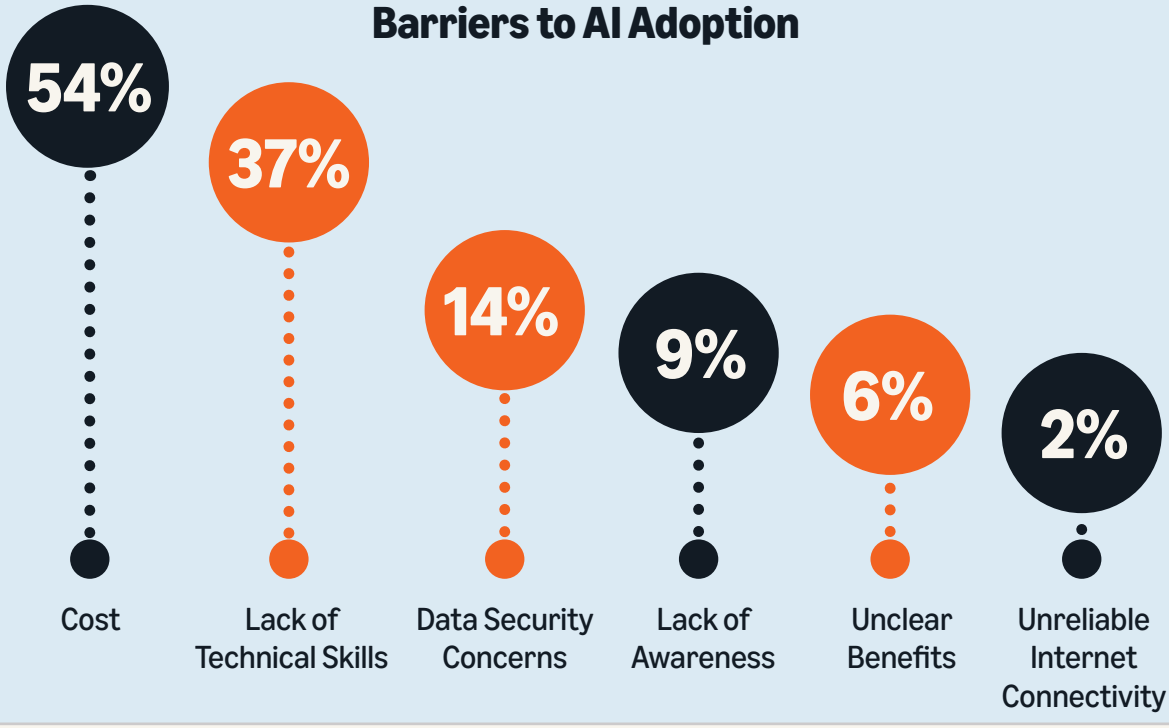
Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

AI Use by Owner Age



Base: All respondents (n=1,400)

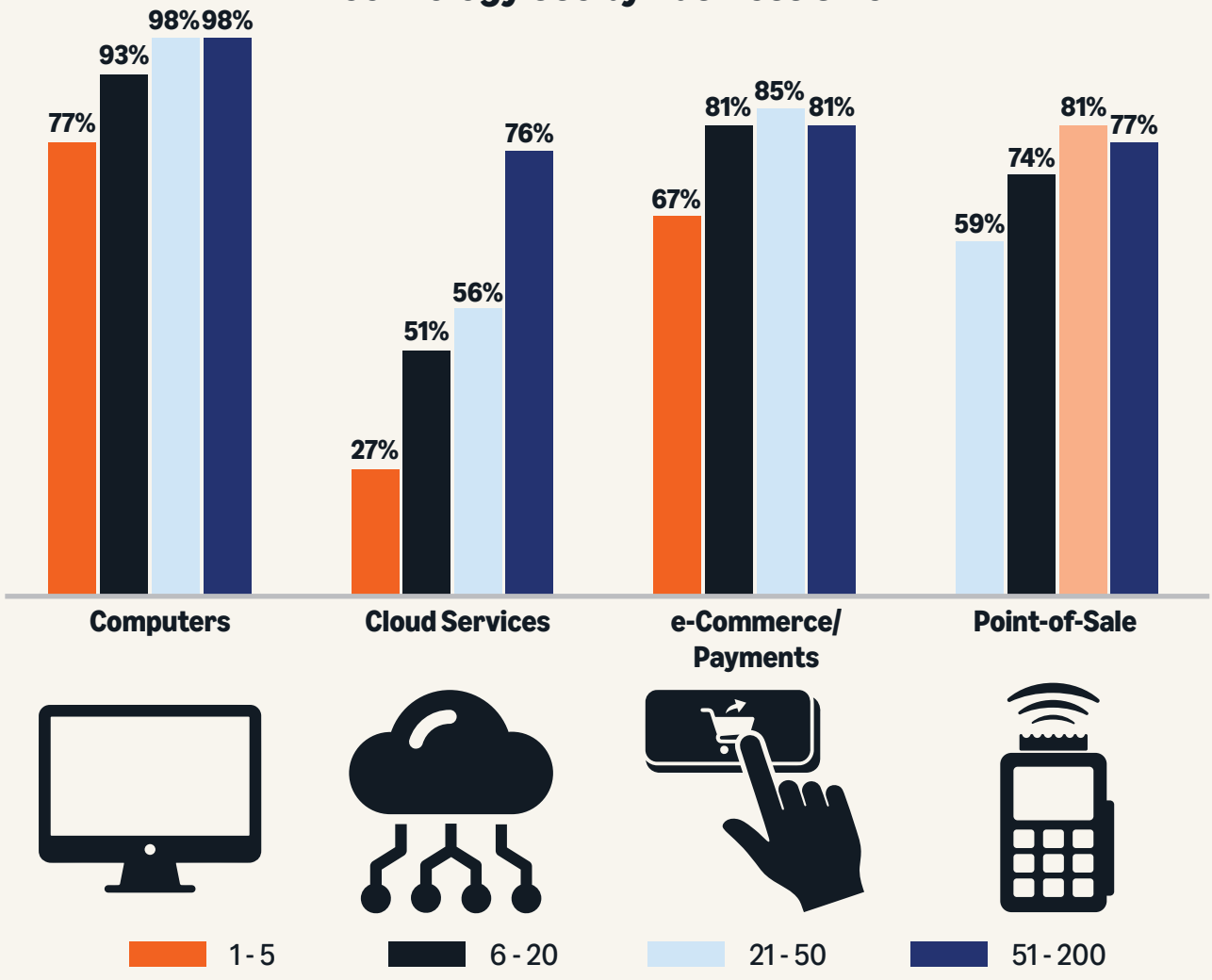
Barriers to AI Adoption



Base: Active Online Sellers (n=1,206)

KEY INSIGHT **The emphasis on affordability is revealing. It points to a need for low-cost tools that are easy to use and have a clear business benefit.**

Technology Use by Business Size



Base: Active Online Sellers (n=1,206)

Driving Marketplace Success by Mpho Modise: Head of Seller Success at Amazon



The seller success stories behind this report are as diverse as South Africa itself. They span different categories, different price points, and different business models. Yet beneath the diversity, the common threads connecting these success stories are strikingly consistent.

They embraced Amazon's fulfilment infrastructure as a growth lever, not just a logistics solution. Every brand featured in this report has made full use of Fulfilment by Amazon (FBA), and that is not a coincidence. FBA does more than move boxes, it unlocks Prime eligibility, same-day and next-day delivery, and the customer trust that comes with the reliability of the service.

For small and medium businesses without national distribution networks, this is a real game changer. It removes the operational ceiling that has historically kept great South African products confined to a purely local market segment. Skin Functional's +425% revenue growth and Natural Stuff's +187% growth year on year are not just impressive numbers – they demonstrate exactly what's possible when product quality meets world-class logistics infrastructure.

They invested in brand-building, not just selling. The most successful sellers did not simply list products, they built brands on Amazon. Skin Functional invested in A+ Content and a dedicated Brand Store. Caffenu built a review base of over 1,100 on a single product line. Natural Stuff deployed a sophisticated multi-size catalogue and voucher strategy. These are not accidental outcomes. They reflect deliberate, disciplined brand-building that drives discoverability, conversion, and repeat purchase.

They used Amazon's tools as a competitive advantage. From promotional pricing and vouchers to Brand Stores and A+ Content, which allows sellers to tell their brand story with rich content including images and videos, product features and use cases. The sellers who grew fastest are those who leaned into the full digital toolkit available to them. Natural Stuff's 15-20% active vouchers across its range, and Skin Functional's promotional pricing strategy, all demonstrate that smart use of Amazon's programmes amplifies growth beyond what product quality alone can achieve with a basic listing.

The unmistakable takeaway from these case studies is clear: digital adoption is not a theoretical opportunity for South African SMMEs, it is a proven growth multiplier. The sellers featured in this report have shown that when you combine quality products with the right infrastructure, the right tools, and the right strategy, the results are extraordinary and the sky is the limit. The marketplace is open. The tools are available. The question is no longer whether to embrace e-commerce, but how quickly you can start.

Amazon Case Studies

Caffenu: From South Africa to the World with Amazon

Caffenu® is a Cape Town-based innovator in coffee machine care, producing coffee machine cleaning capsules, descalers, and maintenance kits compatible with Nespresso, Dolce Gusto, Breville, Gaggia, and more. Before Amazon, scaling a niche consumables brand globally was a persistent challenge.

Caffenu products are sold in nine Amazon marketplaces around the world, including US, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Netherlands and South Africa, making it one of South Africa's most internationally scaled sellers. Fulfilment by Amazon (FBA), which unlocks Prime eligibility and next-day delivery, provided the logistics backbone to scale both locally and globally. A live Brand Store with detailed product information and a deep, well-structured catalogue covering multiple machine types made discovery seamless.

While 1,100+ reviews on a single product have helped harness exceptional customer trust and conversion. The results: +161% revenue growth and +149% unit growth year on year, with 50+ units per month across top listings on Amazon co.za.

"The seller support has been exceptional, from Seller University to our dedicated Account Manager. FBA frees us to focus on growing the business while Amazon handles fulfilment, especially valuable with Prime now in South Africa, ensuring fast delivery for customers. Brand Store and A+ Content let us tell our story and help customers make informed decisions with detailed product descriptions, while Deal participation has significantly boosted our order volumes." – Judy Isaacman, Co-founder and Marketing Director, Caffenu









SKIN functional:
From Local Lab to Category Leader

sf | SKIN functional

SKIN functional was founded by Shannon Dougall, winner of Woman of the Future 2025, from a deep passion to transform customers' skincare experience with superior skin solutions.

SKIN functional is a scientifically formulated range using multi-functional biotechnologies at optimal concentrations to restore and maintain ideal skin function across all ethnicities. By cutting through skincare jargon and misinformation, the brand delivers honest SKINtelligence that empower customers to confidently navigate their ever-changing skin journey – fostering lasting skin confidence at every stage.

SKIN functional's success on the Amazon marketplace stems from the combination of exceptional product quality, an authentic local identity, and the strategic adoption of Amazon's tools. Using Fulfilment by Amazon (FBA) across its full range removed logistics barriers, while a dedicated Brand Store, A+ Content, and an active promotional pricing strategy amplified visibility and built consumer trust. The result: +425% revenue growth and +486% unit growth year on year, with multiple products exceeding 100+ units per month, signaling strong repeat-purchase momentum.

A Shop Mzansi Amazon Award winner, SKIN functional proves that pairing quality products with the right digital infrastructure turns local brands into industry leaders.

"Amazon has provided an incredible opportunity for us to access new customers. The brand uptake has exceeded our expectations, and we are so proud to be a part of the Amazon world." – Shannon Dougall, Founder and CEO



Natural Stuff:
Smart Strategy, Natural Growth

Natural Stuff is a South African natural health, wellness and beauty brand with cold-pressed oils, superfoods, herbal products, and natural skin and hair care. Built on a belief in the power of nature to enhance health and beauty, the brand's commitment to purity and quality is resonating strongly with Amazon customers.

With the full product range listed on Fulfilment by Amazon (FBA) with Prime eligibility and next-day delivery, Natural Stuff runs a sophisticated promotions strategy – deploying active 15-20% vouchers across multiple products simultaneously, driving discoverability in search results and incentivising first purchase.

A deliberate multi-size catalogue strategy with products listed across different weight and volume variants captures customers at every price point and builds basket value.
The results: +187% revenue growth and +195% unit growth year on year, backed by a 4.6-star rating across 60 reviews.

This is a volume-led, organic growth story – built on product quality, smart pricing, and active mastery of Amazon's promotions toolkit.

"Amazon gave us a way to reach customers all over South Africa. FBA takes care of storage and delivery, so we can spend our time on the products." – Mumtaaz Lorgat, Director



In Closing by Suzelle Abe: Head of Marketplace at Amazon



This research confirms what we see every day in our marketplace: South African small businesses are digitally capable, commercially ambitious, and ready to grow. The question is no longer whether SMMEs can get online – 86% already generate online sales – but whether their access to the right infrastructure network is limiting their growth.

One of the most striking findings in this report is that only 49% of SMMEs have access to mentorship, dropping to just 41% among female-owned businesses. That gap matters, because mentorship is often the difference between a business that lists a product and one that builds a brand.

At Amazon, we see our Seller Support Centre, Seller University, webinars and seller roadshows as key resources designed to provide the practical support and guidance SMMEs need to grow. For a small business owner without a formal mentor or advisory network, these resources offer practical guidance that is always available. From setting up a first listing to optimising pricing strategy and understanding advertising tools. We meet sellers where they are.

More than three quarters (76%) of SMMEs express strong interest in affordable tools that help them scale, and the research shows that businesses are already managing multiple digital channels, including websites, social media and WhatsApp, largely on their own. What many haven't yet realised is that a marketplace like Amazon.co.za can consolidate that effort, giving sellers access to a national customer base, built-in trust signals, and operational infrastructure that would take years to build independently. Notably, 21% of non-marketplace sellers believe their business is too small to qualify – a perception, not a reality. We welcome businesses of all sizes, and our role is to demonstrate the opportunity more clearly and make it more accessible.

The research shows that 48% of SMMEs cite recurring subscription and administration fees as a financial barrier, and 41% point to transaction fees. These are legitimate concerns, but they also reflect a broader perception that doesn't always match reality.

On Amazon.co.za, the monthly selling plan costs R1. Until 31 March 2027, sellers pay a flat 5% referral fee across categories, only when a sale is made, and no FBA fulfilment fees. Costs scale with sales rather than sitting as a fixed overhead, which matters for a small business watching every rand.

Perhaps the most commercially significant finding in this report is that 62% of online sellers cite logistics and delivery as their biggest challenge, followed by 46% who struggle with returns. The difficulty of digital trade has moved into the physical world. Fulfilment by Amazon (FBA) was built for this exact reason. By allowing sellers to store inventory in our fulfilment network and letting us handle picking, packing, shipping, and returns, FBA removes the single largest operational barrier identified by this research.

For the 76% of businesses that still maintain a physical store alongside their online channels, FBA doesn't ask them to change their model, it simply takes the logistics burden off their plate.

South African SMMEs have proven they can adopt digital tools, build online revenue, and serve customers across channels. Businesses don't need to be persuaded to go digital, they need partners who reduce the cost of staying digital, simplify the complexity of scaling, and provide the practical support that turns ambition into sustainable growth.

That is the role Amazon's marketplace is built to play, and this research only strengthens our commitment to doing it well.

Expert Profiles:

Robert (Rob) Koen Amazon: Managing Director Sub-Saharan Africa



Based in Cape Town, Robert (Rob) Koen is Amazon's Managing Director of the Sub-Saharan Africa region. In his role, Rob is responsible for leading the consumer business expansion strategy, guided by four principles: customer obsession (buyers and sellers), passion for invention, commitment to operational excellence and long-term value creation versus short-term gain.

With over 30 years of management and e-commerce experience, Rob has a proven track record in retail, strategic partnerships, business leadership, and cloud computing. He is known for his ability to build and lead high-performing teams that reflect Amazon's diverse customer base, and is committed to developing talent so they may reach their full potential.
Rob joined Amazon in 2015 to lead the third-party fashion seller business and has since advanced through various roles, including U.S. Head of Partner Network and Director of Buy with Prime, which he launched in 2022 to extend Amazon Prime benefits to diverse online stores. His initiatives in these businesses significantly enhanced customer experiences and provided added value to customers across the United States.
Prior to joining Amazon, Rob held leadership positions at Tibco, Language Line, Genesys, and IBM UK.
Originally from Johannesburg, Rob's international experience spans Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce Degree from the University of the Witwatersrand and a Master's in Marketing from the Manchester Business School (UK).

Suzelle Abe: Head of Marketplace at Amazon



With a 20-year track record in the dynamic retail and e-commerce industry, Suzelle Abe is a seasoned professional. She has been within the global Amazon fold for over 12 years, during this time she has held a number of key positions spanning across the retail, business development, and marketplace divisions.

Prior to taking on her current role, she spent nine years developing her expertise and understanding of the Amazon business in Germany's robust ecommerce landscape. In her current position as Head of Marketplace for Sub-Saharan Africa, Suzelle plays a pivotal role in driving Amazon's expansion and success in this diverse and rapidly growing region.

Suzelle is a passionate advocate for fostering innovation and empowering local businesses. She believes that the growth of e-commerce in South Africa will play a vital role in the economic development of the country and she is committed to help drive this forward by empowering local small businesses to bridge the digital divide.

Mpho Modise:
Head of Seller Success at Amazon



Mpho Modise leads the SMB Marketplace at Amazon South Africa, where he spearheads initiatives to scale local micro, small, and medium enterprises on the local marketplace. His most notable achievement at Amazon is launching Shop Mzansi, a dedicated storefront showcasing locally made products, connecting local sellers with consumers nationwide.

With extensive expertise in the SMB sector, Mpho has built a track record of success across global technology and consumer brands. At Uber Eats, he expanded the business beyond restaurants by pioneering the Convenience & Grocery vertical during COVID-19, while driving territory expansion throughout five South African provinces. During his time at Otter, he expanded market reach across multiple Middle Eastern countries and created direct-to-customer solutions for small food businesses. At PepsiCo, he led large-scale regional operations, consistently delivering substantial sales growth, operational efficiency, and strong team development overseeing more than 100 employees across multiple territories.

Throughout his career, Mpho has consistently demonstrated the ability to build high-performing teams, create opportunities for small businesses, and establish strategic partnerships that drive inclusive economic growth. He remains passionate about developing sustainable business models that blend innovation with meaningful impact in emerging markets.

Arthur Goldstuck:
CEO of World Wide Worx



Arthur Goldstuck is an award-winning writer, author, analyst and technology commentator. He is founder of World Wide Worx, South Africa's leading technology market research organisation.

He has received lifetime achievement awards in multiple sectors, including the Distinguished Service in ICT Award from the Institute of IT Professionals of South Africa in 2013, and being elected to the Southern African Speakers Hall of Fame in 2021. For his work in training and mentorship, he was named to the Southern African Educators Hall of Fame in 2023. In both 2022 and 2024, the global insights community ESOMAR named him to the Insights 250 honour roll of the world's top innovators in market research, enterprise intelligence and data-driven marketing. In 2019, he became Honorary IT Ambassador for ORT SA.

He is the author of 21 books, including South Africa's all-time best-selling IT book, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Internet. His current work, The Hitchhiker's Guide to AI: The African Edge, was published by Pan Macmillan in August 2025.

Arthur is past president of the Professional Speakers Association of Southern Africa and currently serves on its executive committee.

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