

Venture Network | Pitch Night hosted at Esri South Africa

Human creativity drives us forward. The technological revolution that has taken over the world is one example of this. It can feel sometimes that South Africa is merely a consumer and importer of modern technology more than a producer and innovator. After attending Venture Network South Africa's first pitch hosted by Esri South Africa – a geospatial software provider in Southern Africa – I spent the rest of the evening reflecting with friends who I had attended the event with on the strides that tech enthusiasts are making locally.

Esri South Africa collaborated with Venture Network South Africa to help emerging businesses to access to tools to build mapping and location analytics capabilities into their products. Geographic Information System (GIS) has the potential to create access to businesses into informal settlements or townships to allow consumers to receive Takealot, DHL or postnet parcels. A simple innovation which would make use of geospatial technology which Esri South Africa could provide, that would effectively make online shopping accessible to millions of South Africans.

It isn't only business however that would stand to benefit from such an innovation – but possibly our legal system too. In my time of working at a social justice law firm, there were many suspects are denied bail, and subsequently kept in remand, because of addresses their addresses could not be verified.

One of the requirements for a successful bail application is address that can be verified. In my mind, there is no doubt that the South African legal system stood to benefit from geospatial technology of this nature.

The event managed to bring together developers from all over Johannesburg and pairs the start-up companies with venture capitalists who can help the start up with financing. Business is hard – more so in the tech space where the price of developer software is constantly rising and the support for startups is non-existent. And it goes without saying, that greater government support is needed to empower innovation in South Africa.

As the evening drew to a close, a gentleman stood up during open-ended Q&A session, an in an effort to encourage all the techies in the room quoted Henry Ford: If we had asked the people what they wanted – they would have asked for a faster horse.

It's a quote that stuck with me well into the night. We will never be sure what the South African consumer is ready for, and we may well be surprised. If developers are able to get the right amount of support – there's no telling the kind of innovation that South Africa can pioneer.

