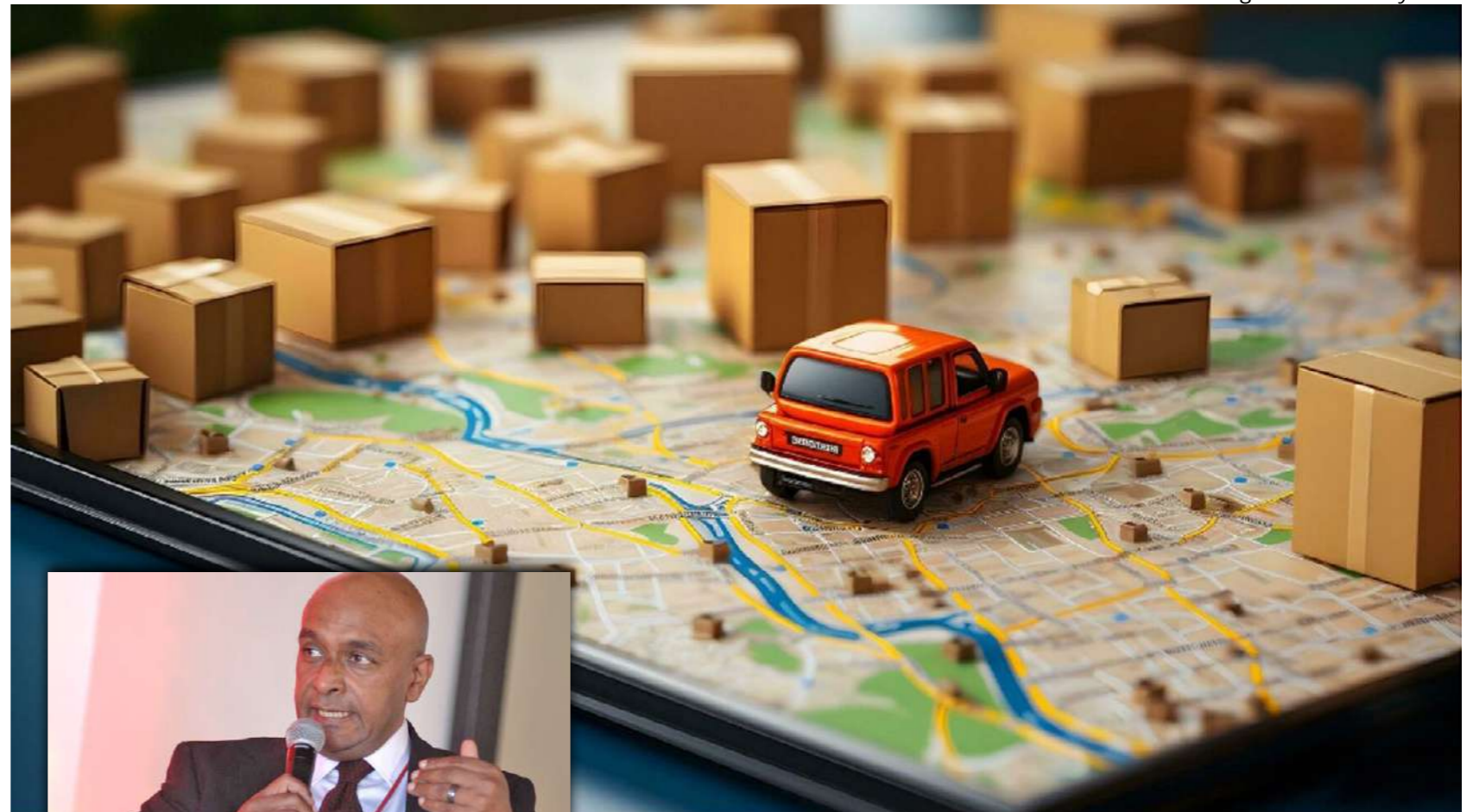


Embracing last-mile logistics for successful supply chains

Image: /www.vecteezy.com/

Smart. It's a word most people aspire to be associated with. However, this buzzword of our times is no longer just a description for clever individuals. It has become critical for success in any industry or business. From smart homes to smart cities, smart now signifies the era of technical sophistication in which we operate, encompassing sustainability and eco-friendliness. It is a concept that is reshaping our world. Staying competitive in today's rapidly evolving landscape requires businesses and individuals to embrace smart – smart thoughts and smart solutions. This principle is just as vital for the last mile – a crucial transport leg that can make or break a supply chain.

A study by leading consulting firm Deloitte found that the global average cost of last-mile logistics delivery accounts for 41% of the total delivery cost. The study found that worldwide there has been a deeper integration of intelligent technologies that has in turn resulted in a booming development of smart last-mile logistics solutions – all happening amidst ongoing efforts of improved efficiency and cost reduction. In this fast-changing technology landscape, Deloitte advises businesses to now continuously analyse and research their target markets to understand the specific conditions for which they are delivering logistics solutions. Beyond that, a clear and comprehensive



Oliver Naidoo

strategy for smart last-mile logistics is essential if enterprises are to meet the expectations of these target markets, the study found.

Oliver Naidoo, Managing Director of JC Auditors, says last-mile logistics has been evolving as rapidly in the South African retail sector as everywhere else in the world, driven by the need for speed, efficiency, and sustainability. He says ...

“Key trends include the rise of same-day and almost instant delivery options, the strategic use of dedicated fulfilment centres, and the integration of innovative delivery models.”

“Leading local companies like Takealot, Checkers, Pick n Pay and Woolworths are spearheading these initiatives. Furthermore, there is a growing emphasis on sustainability initiatives such as

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electric vehicles and optimised routing to minimise delivery costs and reduce carbon footprints.”



Renko Bergh

According to Renko Bergh, co-founder of CtrlFleet, understanding the final step in delivering goods is crucial for supply chain efficiency. He explains ...

“ Regarding the last mile, everyone wants to receive their orders as quickly as possible. Retailers are increasingly

making efforts to optimise this stage. It is much more important than it seems at first glance. If a company fails in last-mile delivery, it can expect its customers to switch to a more successful competitor in this regard. ”

Recent polls show that about 65% of buyers want to track their parcels online and expect this to become available for all shipments. Companies already implementing online tracking have reduced logistics costs by approximately 20%.

“Why is this feature in such demand? In most cases, buyers want to know the exact delivery times, and online tracking allows them to satisfy their requests. The technology is not super new; GPS is typically used for tracking, so its implementation rarely causes problems and provides many benefits,” says Bergh. “Tracking benefits both parties: the sender can monitor the parcel promptly and detect and address issues, while

Image: <https://nicecamsm.best/>



the recipient can see how their order is progressing and where it is at any given moment. The latter is even more critical: a satisfied customer equals loyalty to your company.”

the recipient can see how their order is progressing and where it is at any given moment. The latter is even more critical: a satisfied customer equals loyalty to your company.”

Companies already implementing online tracking have reduced logistics costs by approximately 20%.

The importance of the last mile is exemplified by Amazon, the world’s leading online retail platform. So much so that Amazon built its own last-mile solution to achieve faster delivery, lower costs and deliver a better customer experience.

For Amazon, the last mile remains the differen-

tiating factor for competitiveness. The retailer maintains that consumers worldwide are demanding new experiences on the last mile – not only more visibility on shipment status, but shorter



Amazon’s last mile centre in Rapho Township.



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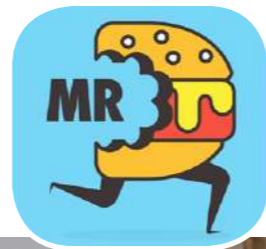
Amazon workers move packages into delivery vans. Photos: Suzette Wenger, <https://lancasteronline.com/>

time frames for deliveries. Considering that the last mile, in all probability, holds the most expense for the supply chain, doing it smarter makes sense. Failed delivery, for example, can so much as double the cost of the last mile's logistics.

In South Africa where logistics is already expensive, it comes as no surprise that cost is a critical factor when it comes to those last few kilometres.

"Managing high costs remains one of the biggest challenges in last-mile logistics in South Africa, especially in meeting consumer demands for faster delivery," says Naidoo. "Urban congestion and efficient return management are also significant hurdles. Balancing cost, speed, and customer satisfaction remains a delicate and ongoing challenge for retailers."

According to Naidoo, the explosive growth of e-commerce in South Africa, mainly since the Covid-19 pandemic, has significantly influenced last-mile logistics, increasing delivery volumes and heightening customer expectations for rapid and reliable service. He says ...



“ Companies like Mr D Food and Uber Eats have revolutionised delivery services, compelling retailers to adopt innovative solutions to keep pace with increasingly demanding consumers and enhance operational efficiency. ”



Photo: Valentyn Ogirenko, Reuters, <https://qz.com/>



Craig Langton

Craig Langton, Founder and CEO of Hero Motorcycles South Africa and Last.Mile.Fast, says last mile logistics has become the differentiator in e-commerce fulfilment.

"It arguably plays the most important role in e-commerce fulfilment. With the e-commerce explosion in South Africa, we have seen retailers panic and adopt to quick outsourced motorcycle delivery services as a route to market. Most motorcycle service providers offer a last-mile delivery service that is outdated, expensive, with poor infrastructure, environmentally unsustainable with little or no focus on customer experience or rider safety."

He says the growth of the sector has certainly highlighted the need for more sustainable solutions, more efficient motorcycle brands, utilising technology and smart solutions. "The growth in the sector has also forced a change for more customer focus, while offering a more product inclusive solution," he adds.



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Technology: Catalyst of change

In 2021, Gartner conducted research showing that by the beginning of 2025, approximately half of the companies involved in delivery-related activities were not only ready, but would invest in data collection and analytics solutions in the last mile space.

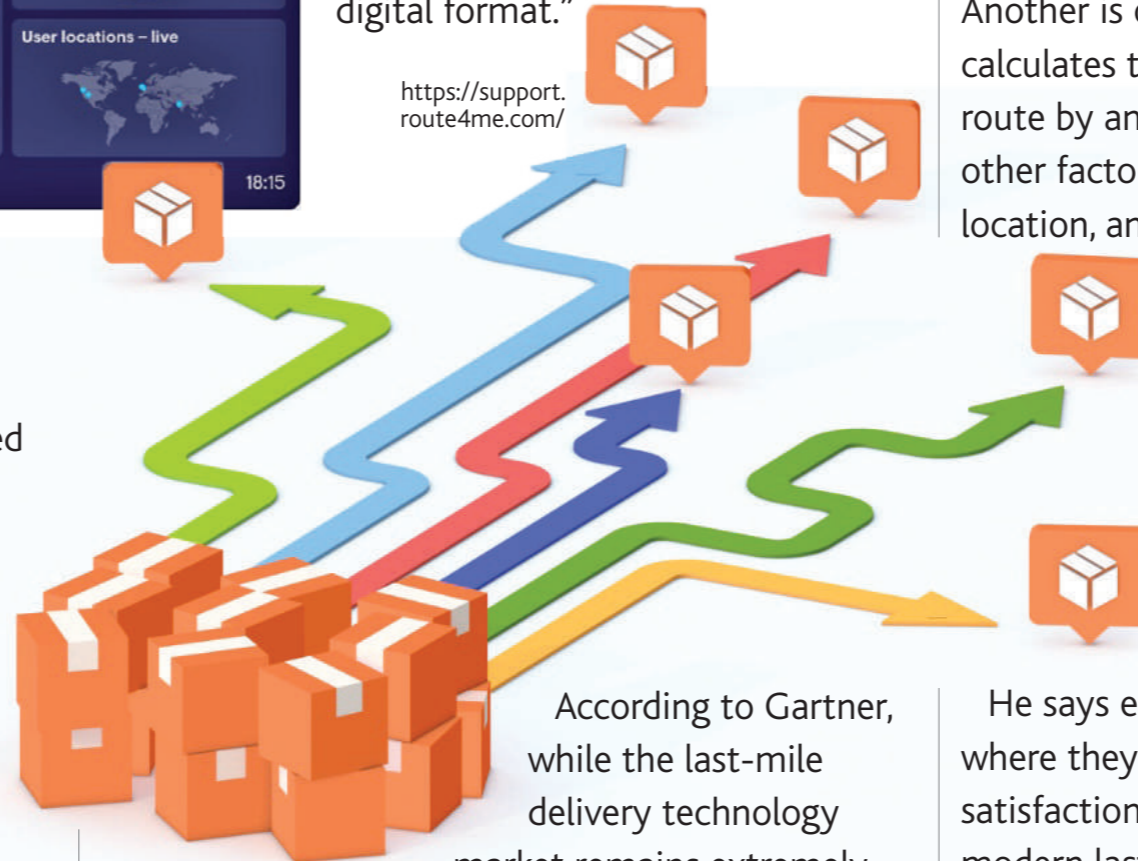
The company says nowadays, it is all about customer-centric transport management solutions that focus on managing the delivery process, which is how consumers and the products they order come together.

According to Bergh, the role of last-mile analytics is another fast-growing concept. He explains ...

“Last-mile analytics includes an analytical dashboard – an informative screen displaying all current and past data. It also entails heatmaps.”

These allow for evaluating new promising areas for creating delivery centres – for example,

identifying a location with many orders but poorly optimised logistics. It also includes digital reporting. This significantly saves time. You don't need to create schedules and analytics manually; many solutions generate this automatically in digital format.”



<https://support.route4me.com/>

According to Gartner, while the last-mile delivery technology market remains extremely fragmented, demand for these applications continues to grow, gathering interest from shippers and carriers alike as the need to optimise processes, reduce costs, and become more customer-centric increases. It says it is time to redefine the value in supply chains, and the last mile is critical in this.

Bergh says there is no doubt that more and more South African companies are coping and adapting to this changing environment.

The biggest challenge, however, remains implementing the required software applications that can provide the required outputs.

“Some of these applications that retailers find challenging to source and implement include logistics management. This allows for tracking trends, addressing issues, and improving service. Another is optimised delivery routes. This software calculates the fastest and most convenient delivery route by analysing road congestion and considering other factors like package dimensions, delivery location, and more,” he says.

“Integration with other services and businesses can also be challenging. Automation allows businesses to connect to complex delivery networks, create networks, and offer them for partner use. This expands their presence where it was minimal or absent.”

He says effective businesses seek to cut costs where they can, while retaining high customer satisfaction. “The technology associated with modern last-mile operations affects 20% to 30% of a business's delivery cost. Businesses that can reduce costs by the same amount stand to gain a competitive edge and win more customers and revenue.”

According to Bergh, last-mile delivery trends dictate business conditions, such as data collection on deliveries, real-time online tracking, environmental friendliness, process automation, and various delivery options.



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This enhances customer loyalty, improves the company's image, optimises logistics, and expands the customer base.

Langton says the traditional high cost of last-mile delivery can be reduced by over 30% by adopting more sustainable service providers using new technologies. "Investing in new solutions that reduce delivery failures and offering a wider range of products beyond what a traditional rider and box can deliver makes a significant impact. It's all about providing a bespoke, customer-focused delivery service."

He says the traditional high cost of motorcycles for last-mile delivery can now be avoided with a more sustainable B2B, B2C, and return mile service. As the 'drop fee' comes under pressure, service providers often reduce costs at the expense of customer experience and rider safety. However, the days when the quickest delivery was prioritised over cost are coming to an end.

"Current trends in motorcycle deliveries focus on providing a more efficient, customer-focused and lower cost service," he says. There is also a strong emphasis on reducing carbon emissions and enhancing packaging sustainability."

Sustainability takes centre stage



Liesl de Wet

Nowadays, the environmental impact is always close to any supply chain discussion, says Liesl de Wet, a sustainability expert and chairperson of the Road Freight Association's Green Transport Interest Group. "With the Climate Change Bill now approved, we can expect to see significant changes in the road freight sector," she recently said at a gathering of road freight transporters.

This is South Africa's first comprehensive piece of legislation to guide the country's transition to a greener and more resilient economy.

While it delivers the framework and roadmap to a low-carbon and climate-resilient South Africa that has signed the Paris Climate Agreement,

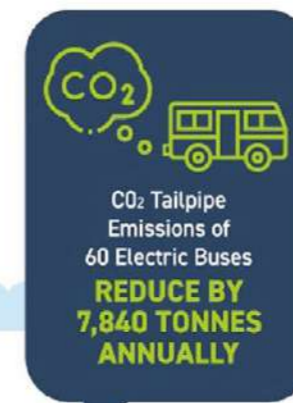
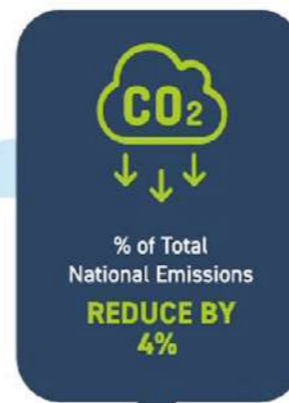
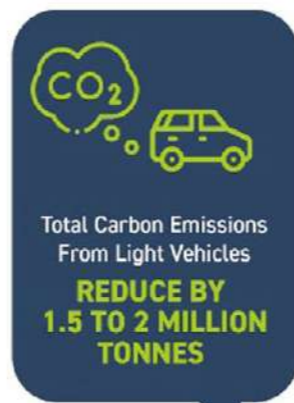
proactive steps to address these challenges and set a benchmark for the industry," says Naidoo. One of the leading sustainability issues is the high carbon emissions from traditional delivery vehicles. To combat this, various retailers have started integrating electric vehicles into their delivery fleets. These include Takealot, Woolworths, and Faithful to Nature, amongst other e-commerce retailers. Adopting electric cars reduces carbon footprints and aligns with global environmental standards.

committing itself to cutting emissions between 350 and 420 million tonnes by 2030, it also brings about change.

De Wet says what this change will look like remains unknown. "What we do know is that it will introduce sectoral targets to reduce emissions. What these targets look like and how they will impact the road freight sector specifically is still unknown."

This is because the transport sector has yet to be divided by the Bill and is currently considered one. However, this approach could be more practical. Freight must be separated from passenger transport and categorised by sea, road and air mode.

"Sustainability in last-mile logistics is a pressing concern in South Africa, where the environmental impact of delivery vehicles and packaging waste are significant issues. Several companies are taking



Some argue that EVs aren't any greener than cars that run on fuel. After all, electricity is produced by fossil fuels too.
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Another critical issue is managing packaging waste, says Naidoo. “Woolworths is one of the prominent South African retailers known for its sustainability efforts and has been leading the way in reducing packaging waste. They have implemented recyclable and biodegradable packaging for their products. Woolworths also encourages customers to return used packaging through their in-store recycling programme, ensuring that packaging materials are reused or recycled, thereby reducing landfill waste.”

According to Naidoo, optimising delivery routes to reduce unnecessary mileage is another effective solution to improve last-mile logistics – not just from a carbon footprint perspective but also when it comes to cost and efficiency. “All South Africa’s large retailers have invested in advanced route optimisation software to streamline their delivery processes. This technology helps to minimise travel distances and fuel consumption, thereby reducing emissions. The use of route optimisation not only benefits the environment but also improves delivery efficiency and reduces operational costs.”

A new study finds that depending on the location, in some cases an equivalent or even bigger reduction in emissions could be achieved by switching to lightweight conventional (gas-powered) vehicles instead of electric power vehicles. <https://news.mit.edu/>



Calculating a vehicle’s efficiency doesn’t begin and end with the fuel it carries, but should take into account all the factors that go into building and running it. Blue Planet Studio, Getty Images. www.autoweek.com/

Langton says motorcycles offer a viable option for last-mile logistics, making them more sustainable and capable of reaching every sector of the market at a lower cost per drop and with reduced carbon emissions.

“Around 40% of logistics costs are incurred in the last mile. New motorcycle brands with smart IOT and smart delivery boxes can securely deliver anything from chronic medications to mobile phones. By lowering the cost of last-mile delivery and increasing market share, this approach is certainly the way forward. Retailers can benefit from smarter, more efficient route optimisation, including return mile services.”

Fostering transformation and driving change

Naidoo highlights that it is not just about environmental sustainability but the overall bigger picture of delivering on customer expectations and needs. He adds, “Customer experience is paramount in last-mile logistics. Ensuring timely and reliable deliveries, providing real-time updates, and offering flexible delivery options and easy returns (reverse logistics) are essential. Retailers can continually improve customer experience by actively seeking and acting on customer feedback to refine their delivery services.”

Furthermore, he says, dedicated fulfilment centres are gaining traction. These are warehouses or stores located closer to urban areas and customers. Checkers Sixty60, the on-demand grocery delivery service by Checkers, uses dedicated fulfilment centres to ensure faster and more efficient deliveries. By identifying specific stores in ideal locations closer to customers, they can reduce the distance travelled by delivery vehicles, leading to lower emissions and quicker delivery times.





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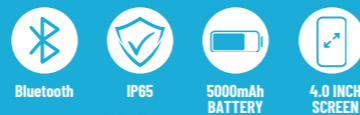
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Adds Langton, "To reduce last mile costs, an all-new approach is required. Customer experience is now considered as the new focus and disruptor in last mile deliveries."

Speaking about the use of motorcycles in particular, he says the days of procuring the cheapest or outdated models are over. "Now, the focus is on motorcycles built to the highest quality, designed to offer the lowest total cost of ownership while increasing rider safety and ergonomics, and still ensuring environmental sustainability. New motorcycle brands utilising technology have proven to increase efficiency and reduce the total cost of ownership by 50%. These bikes are designed with improved rider ergonomics, enhanced safety features, and solutions to prevent rider fatigue, theft, and hijacking."

Bergh says some retailers are opting for hybrid delivery models to deliver the much-needed efficiency required. "This is where companies try to combine outsourced and in-house delivery capacity to meet transportation and human resource demands as effectively as possible. It's far more convenient to use a partner's ready-to-go infrastructure when quickly growing and scaling a business in new cities," he says.

"Building such an infrastructure from scratch takes too much time and can lead to avoidable mistakes. However, when you need to launch a new product, having an in-house delivery service handle those logistics is better.

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This can give you the most control over the quality of the customer experience; everyone delivering the product follows the same unified company standards and is invested in seeing work go well.”

He says last-mile delivery trends dictate business conditions, such as data collection on deliveries, real-time online tracking, environmental friendliness, process automation, and various delivery options. This enhances customer loyalty, improves the company’s image, optimises logistics, and expands the customer base.

More technology can be expected in last-mile logistics. RFID technology, which allows for the rapid scanning of multiple items or packages, is already being leveraged to improve inventory management and order fulfilment.

It also improves accuracy in delivery tracking and reduces errors while enhancing the much-needed visibility and transparency demanded throughout the supply chain today. More so, each piece of tech will have to be deeply integrated with all others. Technology service provider Made4Net states the connection between a company’s Warehouse Management System (WMS) and last-mile delivery might only be obvious when there are integration data flows and real-time viewing throughout the supply chain.

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When these systems are connected, it allows companies to track inventory from the dock door to the customer's door, giving a better view.

Langton predicts that with e-commerce continuing its upward trajectory, the focus will remain on reducing carbon emissions. "Currently, independent fleet owners, responsible for up to 70% of last-mile deliveries, often purchase the cheapest motorcycles available, neglecting rider safety, environmental sustainability, and issues like carbon emissions, noise, and consumable pollution. Retailers' realisation and accountability in purchasing sustainable solutions will have the most significant impact in South Africa, driving the change toward a safer, cleaner, and more sustainable future."

Naidoo says last-mile logistics will remain prominent in the future. "The shift towards online shopping and the resulting changes in consumer behaviour are significant drivers of innovations in last-mile logistics. Additionally, collaboration between retailers, logistics providers, and technology companies is crucial for developing and implementing effective last-mile delivery solutions." **SR**



Catherine Larkin is a communication and marketing professional, specialising in Logistics, Transport and Supply Chain. Her company, CVLC Communication, is a corporate public relations, communication, marketing and events consultancy. Its services range from full secretariat support, project management and administration.



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If so, Relog and Goler are here to help.

Relog boasts extensive experience in designing and developing world-class logistics processes, infrastructure, and systems. Our expertise ensures that your investment yields maximum returns.

In today's fast-paced market, where efficiency and adaptability are paramount, having a partner like Relog can make all the difference. We help businesses streamline their operations, reduce bottlenecks, and enhance overall productivity, ensuring that your logistics systems are robust enough to handle growth spurts.

However, we understand that while upgrading logistics infrastructure is crucial, it often competes with other critical investments such as stock procurement or store expansion. The dilemma of whether to allocate precious cash flow to new infrastructure or other growth opportunities is a common challenge.

This is where Goler comes into play.

Goler, a subsidiary of Relog, offers innovative financial solutions that transform your capital expenditure (CAPEX) into operational expenditure (OPEX). This shift allows you to invest in necessary logistics upgrades without sacrificing other strategic initiatives. Whether you prefer a pure rental solution or a rent-to-own model, Goler tailors its offerings to meet your specific needs, ensuring flexibility and financial efficiency. With Goler, besides the initial conceptual design fee from Relog, all other costs are financed, alleviating the burden of large upfront payments. This financial arrangement allows your business to maintain healthy cash flow, which can be directed towards other critical areas like inventory or new store openings.

Goler's solutions are not just about financing; they come with unparalleled access to engineering expertise, ensuring that your logistics infrastructure is designed and implemented to the highest standards.

Our collaborative approach ensures that Relog works closely with your team to develop optimised logistics

operations that are fit for purpose. This partnership guarantees that the solutions we implement are tailored to your specific business requirements, facilitating seamless integration and immediate impact. The result is a logistics system that supports your growth objectives and enhances overall resource utilisation.

Imagine a logistics network that not only meets current demands but is also scalable to accommodate future growth. With Relog and Goler, this vision can become a reality. Our combined expertise in logistics and financial solutions provides a comprehensive package that addresses both operational efficiency and financial sustainability.

Moreover, our commitment to your success extends beyond the initial implementation. We offer ongoing support and optimisation to ensure that your logistics systems continue to perform at their best. This continuous improvement approach ensures that your business remains agile and responsive to market changes, positioning you for sustained growth and competitiveness.

In conclusion, as South Africa gears up for a period of significant economic expansion, now is the time to ensure your business is ready to ride the wave. Don't let outdated logistics processes or financial constraints hold you back. Partner with Relog and Goler to unlock the full potential of your business.

Contact us today for a free, no-obligation discussion to better understand how we can help you grow through enhanced productivity and resource utilisation. Together, we can build a logistics network that not only meets your current needs but also supports your future ambitions.



Relog and Goler – your partners in growth and efficiency.

