

Buildings in 2023 - here's to a smarter, sustainable future

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The forecast for the buildings industry in 2023 represents a conundrum of sorts. On the one hand, South Africa and some of our Anglophone African country peers face the instability of a volatile grid, while on the other, we are making tremendous strides towards establishing smarter, sustainable buildings driven by renewable energy sources.



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The challenge is how to we bring together our current energy shortage with developing and establishing a sustainable building industry.

2022 – the return to normalcy

To contextualise the above, it's important that we take one step back. Last year undoubtedly saw the country return to some form of normalcy - many employers have implemented hybrid working models which escalated the demand for office space as employees returned to the office.

To that end, building managers started looking at greener, more efficient facilities. This is good news as buildings which offer energy efficiency that doesn't compromise on comfortable occupancy, such as HVAC and lighting, are leading the way to a smarter buildings industry.

Another major prerequisite has been 24/7 online capability. Buildings must also be online, and preferably offer automation which can push data into the cloud, providing important insights into how the facilities are performing and how energy usage can be adjusted to ensure sustainable operations.



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Cyber security should be a priority

However, as more buildings come online, it's also important that cyber security becomes a major priority. Both buildings and their occupants must be protected against any potential malicious cyber onslaughts.

This is particularly true for buildings that house data centres. In 2022, we saw many buildings used to facilitate new data centres - a trend that we believe will continue in 2023. Again, keeping data centres safe from both online and physical security breaches is paramount.

The year ahead

Looking at 2023, smart cities have become a bona fide industry buzzword, however, in order for South Africa and our Anglophone Africa peers to realise this futuristic development, we must first stabilise our energy resources and the provision thereof.

That being said, there is no doubt that smart cities lie in our future; already we are seeing smaller entities going completely off grid, using solar and wind power or a hybrid system to power their daily operations.

One of the major features of a smart city is the ability to be completely self-sustainable, living in a bubble of sorts. Here we are seeing developments such as Steyn City looking at how they can establish an infrastructure that is self-sustained, fed by a mix of renewable energy resources as opposed to traditional power.

Electric vehicles are also enjoying some adoption with mid- to higher-income South Africans investing in various manufacturer options. However, and this is also an important consideration when establishing a smart city, these vehicles require charging infrastructure which must be fed by a stable energy source.

Therefore, to make the most of the proliferation of electric vehicles, both residential and commercial buildings must have the requisite infrastructure to keep their vehicles charged and ready to roll.



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Developing sustainable, energy-efficient buildings

The bottom line is we need cleaner and more stable sources of energy. The buildings industry has the potential to lead the

way in a world that is moving towards renewables as the next, sustainable form of energy.

Developers and current owners can truly differentiate themselves by establishing buildings that are sustainable and energy-efficient whilst using clean resources such as solar. This will ensure that the building remains online, providing businesses with the assurance that they will be able to continue with operations even during load shedding and unplanned power outages.

Several solutions available

And it need not cost a fortune. There are several, proven technologies available to building owners and managers that can go a long way in optimising energy usage. A complete building management system (BMS) can then follow suit and will undoubtedly provide considerable returns, enhancing resource visibility, manageability, and sustainability.

2023 will continue to build on 2022, laying a foundation for a building industry that works smarter and leads the way to a more sustainable future.

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