

Institutions move to adapt learning to a digital world

● *But while the significant impact technology is having on education is acknowledged, many insist traditional methods of teaching remain relevant, writes Penny Haw*

According to the 2017 Digital Report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, 28.66-million South Africans (that is, 52% of the population) are internet users.

This number grew by more than 2-million (7%) between January 2016 and January 2017, and continues to swell. It's no wonder then educators are reviewing what and how they present postgraduate studies.

"With information so widely available on the internet and thousands of free online courses, learning institutions can no longer be places where people just sit in a classroom and listen to an expert," says dean and director of Henley Business School Africa, Jon Foster-Pedley.

"Learning institutions need to transform themselves into spaces of engagement and debate, places where there are no clear answers, but rather multiple perspectives. They must be in places where people learn to interpret information and use knowledge to make sense of conflicting opinions. Having these skills are essential for business in the digital age."

Or, like Rhodes University Business School, you could take

the "if you can't beat them, join them" approach. According to director of the school, Professor Owen Skae, the institution recently "moved into the digital space" by launching its own television channel, which is sponsored by Nedbank and available via the Tuluntulu app.

With the objective of being an incubator to promote social enterprise, entrepreneurship and empower people with business management skills, the free-to-download app is available without subscription and is designed to use less data than many other streaming apps when connected via mobile networks.

Content created by Rhodes University Business School provides more than 40 hours of study material covering economics, commercial law, entrepreneurship and financial planning. If the initial model is successful, the school plans to develop a fully-fledged television channel, which will include languages such as IsiXhosa and a full spectrum of business subjects.

Skae believes partnerships with the government and business can lead to greater entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

"It is the digital era and we



Prof Owen Skae ... crossroads.

need to find ways of making knowledge accessible at the lowest possible cost to as many people as possible. SA is at a crossroads in its social economic development, having averaged 1% economic growth over the past quarter century. As part of the pilot programme, we wanted to focus on more specific subjects and audiences to inspire young people to start businesses, grow the economy and employ more people."

But, while nobody denies the significant impact technology is having on education, many insist traditional methods of teaching remain relevant.

"We are looking into online learning courses, but our teaching method remains blended learning," says Master of Business Administration (MBA) director at Henley Business School Africa, Adri Drotskie. "We believe students on a postgraduate level need to have face-to-face contact with lecturers and other students on group work, experiential learning and action learning. We are developing online immersions where students can have the same experience although they are online."

The University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) is also a proponent of the blended learning approach, but this, says MBA programme head at USB, Martin Butler, should not be confused with the conventional "online" or "distance" learning.

"Our blended MBA uses both contact time on campus in Cape Town and a synchronous learning environment in our 'glocal' classroom which allows for attendance via a computer, tablet or smartphone connected to the internet," he explains.

Blending, he says, happens between students physically attending lectures and those attending using a digital platform of their choice. "It is

still synchronous learning, that is, they attend class; it is just their place of attendance that is completely flexible," says Butler.

"Students attending class remotely also have the opportunity to interact, make comments and ask questions in class. They also engage in group work with their fellow students via a set of technologies."

Also responding to the demands of a digitally driven world, Wits Business School (WBS) established a Chair in Digital Business through a five-year funding commitment from Telkom. WBS says the motivation was to ensure that the school is "at the forefront of developing important research as well as teaching programmes that are essential for doing business in today's digital world". The programme includes a Masters degree in Digital Business, a postgraduate diploma, and online and executive education courses.

"New and rigorously conducted research will underpin the development of the curriculum (of the Chair)," says WBS Professor: Chair in Digital Business, Dr Brian Armstrong. "And there will be exciting opportunities for people to participate and share in this research."