

Venturing into Africa

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arket knowledge is the greatest asset for trade into Africa, and that extends far beyond the basics of transport and documentation.

Making the best of Africa's creaking infrastructure to construct transcontinental logistics networks requires access to the latest information in this segment. "It's a minefield, and every country has a challenge of its own, which is why GAC Laser established a highly experienced Export Department to provide its customers with a single point for comprehensive regional information," says GAC Laser's Regional Manager for Gauteng, Grant Palmer.

The Export Department led by Anthea Turner, is not only about manuals and information for local shippers, but also handles cross-trade. Intelligence gathering includes updating and maintaining country portfolios, and covers a range of information from infrastructure limitations, Customs legislation, Reserve Bank requirements to transport service providers and comparative transport options. "We control shipments in South Africa from anywhere in the world into and out of Africa, without shipments touching South African soil," says Anthea. "It's all about risk management, especially in the current economic market - you need to be well informed to make prudent choices".

GAC Laser has extended its footprint across most of Africa, with special focus on Angola, Nigeria, Zambia and the DRC. "We choose our service providers carefully to ensure measurable consistency, thereby offering a personalised service", says Grant, who lists infrastructure and legislation as two of the major issues and challenges. Limited airfreight capacity into Africa and the demise of a number of airlines into Africa is a cause for concern.

However, the biggest impact of improved logistics in Africa may be good governance. Prompt payment of customs dues by logistics companies on behalf of the client and paperless transit have increased tax revenues and reduced corruption.

Finding the most effective routing is part of the challenge and this keeps our Export specialists busy - they also ensure that our valued customers can choose their mode of transport versus time options with the added benefit of comparative costings.

About the future, Grant confidently says "We are already one of the main clients to the majority of airlines serving Africa from South Africa. With the great team we have on board, and with the support of our international partners, GAC Laser continues to make significant strides into Africa." ■

