

E-commerce surge spells opportunity for SA's SME transporters

By [Justin Manson](#)

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The growth of e-commerce has been unprecedented, reshaping consumer habits and driving increased demand within the transportation sector. To bolster e-commerce expansion in South Africa, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must embrace new technologies, adapt to changing consumer preferences, and employ innovative operational strategies. By staying abreast of e-commerce trends and developments, transporters can effectively navigate the dynamic e-commerce landscape.



Source: [Freepik](#)

Consequently, since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a [remarkable surge](#) in technology adoption and a transition to e-commerce, resulting in heightened demand for transportation services. This shift presents a significant opportunity for existing and emerging transport companies to capitalize on the evolving market dynamics.

According to Statista, revenues in the worldwide e-commerce market are [projected](#) to reach around US\$3.18t (R59.34t) by the end of 2024. With an annual growth rate (CAGR 2024-2029) of 9.47%, volumes are expected to reach \$5trillion (R93.3t) a year by 2029 from 3.2 billion active users, or a 44.4% population penetration (up from 36.6% in 2024).

These rate estimates may be moderate, given the anticipated exponential advancements in efficiencies and productivity driven by artificial intelligence across various sectors, including energy, manufacturing and transportation.

Market analysis

Aspiring transporters must grasp the factors driving the rapid growth of e-commerce, including new ways of working, emerging technology, consumer behaviour and decreasing technophobia across age groups.

Freighters need to remain vigilant and stay updated on the latest technological advancements that influence e-commerce,

such as AI-driven personalisation, blockchain for supply chain transparency, and augmented reality (AR) for immersive shopping experiences. They need to be aware of these innovations to adapt their services accordingly and offer value-added solutions to e-commerce businesses.

Partner with retailers

The digitisation of the economy, coupled with the adoption of smart technology in vehicles, renders traditional business practices obsolete. The emergence of user-friendly apps that can simplify starting and managing an online business makes it accessible to entrepreneurs and small businesses. The involvement of financial institutions further democratises e-commerce, ensuring it is no longer exclusive to large retailers.

Add value

Transportation alone is no longer enough, operators must uniquely differentiate themselves. While some may emphasise scale, others can offer promotions in partnership with retailers, commercial (product) insights, regular newsletters or subscription services. The possibilities are endless and limited only by available tools.

Plan your routes

Delivery is no longer about speed; personalised care for business and customer information is crucial. Forward-thinking transporters conduct additional research on target areas' planned development or provide real-time updates on road works to offer real-time communication to customers.

A customer may be willing to wait a few extra days, knowing that a transporter has communicated about potential disturbances, like social unrest.

The power of data

The day, when every aspect of public and private infrastructure is digitised, is fast approaching, where vehicles talk to each other and the surrounding environment in real-time. There is already an enormous and ever-expanding repository of data collected through GPS-powered apps, mapping solutions and even businesses themselves. Accessing and maximising this data enables transporters to be more than just couriers, they become advisors.

While an expanding range of telematics tools and data is already powering large fleets, these same cost-saving and value-adding benefits are also available to smaller operations, including solo operators running one vehicle.

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