

## SME Toolkit offers valuable information



IBM, Business Partners, the Department of Trade and Industry and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), as member of the World Bank Group, recently came together to provide South Africa's entrepreneurs with a free small business toolkit to help them start, finance and grow their business.

The South African Business Toolkit was launched in September and contains the latest information and communication technologies to help SMEs learn and implement sustainable business management practices. The toolkit was first launched in 2002 and is already operational in other emerging markets. The South African version is available both as online and offline modules which include the portal, offline CDs, mobile alerts and classroom training.

The resource was developed by IBM and IFC in order to provide South African small and medium business owners with access to key business management information and tools to address accounting and finance, business planning, human resources, legal and insurance, marketing and sales, operation and technology needs. Among the specially designed free tools are an online

calculator to help entrepreneurs determine their readiness for financing, free software to build a website, free business forms and templates, community tools such as online conferencing, blog capability and group calendars and a multi-lingual business

directory to help small businesses link locally, regionally and globally. "This truly is one stop shopping for small businesses and it levels the playing field. We know the tools that large businesses use mostly and we know the role technology can play in leading to growth. Now every business can have the same chance to succeed. It's vitally important that we help small businesses who are the major employers and growth engines in developing markets," said Stanley Litow, IBM Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Corporate Citizenship. Jo' Schwenke, Managing Director of Business Partners adds, "We are keen to ensure that the local content is relevant to South African entrepreneurs and to make this site the site of choice for entrepreneurs looking for information for their business."

In the future the SME Toolkit will add new partners, markets and languages and is planned to allow users to connect to it using wireless devices, such as cell phones. In developing markets, mobile devices are increasingly becoming the way users connect to the Internet, and sometimes the only way. <http://southafrica.smetoolkit.org>