

## **SchoolNet South Africa partners with University of KwaZulu-Natal to Empower 500 Young Business Leaders with Digital Literacy Skills**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), in partnership with SchoolNet South Africa as its training provider has successfully concluded its "Introduction to Digital Literacy Fundamentals" program, aimed at equipping 500 SMME business leaders and cooperative representatives with essential digital skills. This initiative, spanning five days between July and August 2024, was designed to address the growing need for digital literacy in today's technology-driven society.

### **Background**

Recognising the transformative impact of digital technologies on daily life and business, UKZN launched this program to build capacity in digital skills necessary for business success. The program was part of a broader effort to narrow the digital divide and foster a digitally inclusive society. The initiative targeted 500 SMME business leaders, providing them with foundational skills in computer usage, internet navigation, digital communication, cybersecurity, and the application of digital tools for personal and professional growth.

### **Project Description**

The program's beneficiaries included business owners and cooperatives from various regions across South Africa. Participants, selected and approved by UKZN, exhibited a wide range of digital competencies. The training was tailored to accommodate both novice and advanced users, ensuring an inclusive learning environment. The program was delivered in two consecutive workshops, each hosting 250 participants over ten days.

### **Customised Training Materials**

SchoolNet designed and customised the training materials to meet the specific needs of UKZN. The curriculum included five modules, each focusing on different aspects of digital literacy:

1. Introduction to Digital Literacy: Understanding digital tools, their relevance, and the importance of digital skills in overcoming economic barriers.
2. Basic Computer Skills: Hands-on practice with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, and file management.
3. Basic Computer Skills - Spreadsheets: Using Microsoft Excel for budgeting and setting business revenue goals.
4. Internet, Online Presence, and Cybersafety: Browsing basics, cybersecurity, and enhancing online business presence.

5. Market Intelligence Using Online Platforms: Utilising digital tools for communication, market insights, and social media for business.

### **Participant Demographics**

A baseline survey revealed that the majority of participants were aged between 22-30 (53.5%), with a significant representation from KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, and the Eastern Cape. The survey also indicated that 68% of the participants' businesses were start-ups operational for 1-5 years.

### **Training Overview**

The program was divided into two cohorts. Cohort 1, held from July 22-26, 2024, had 183 participants, while Cohort 2, from July 29-August 2, 2024, had 193 participants. The training was hosted on Microsoft Teams for 40 notional hours. Despite being online, the training sessions were highly interactive, with participants praising the comprehensive approach, practical examples, and the facilitators' expertise.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The program's success was measured through a baseline survey and an endline survey with continuous feedback from participants. By the end of the five-day intensive development, nearly 90% of participants rated their digital skills as very good to excellent. The training significantly improved their understanding of digital tools and their application in business, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

### **Conclusion**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's "Introduction to Digital Literacy Fundamentals" program has made a significant impact on the digital competencies of South African business leaders. Through the strong implementation by SchoolNet, UKZN is helping to bridge the digital divide and promote a more inclusive and prosperous digital economy.

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