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A story of true customer centricity: How Nomanini's dedication to informal merchants in Africa is the key to its success

Since **Nomanini** launched a decade ago, the pioneering fintech has evolved into an integrated digital finance platform that is dedicated to empowering informal retail merchants across Africa.

Currently active in Zambia, Lesotho, Kenya, Namibia, and recently launching in Cote d'Ivoire, Nomanini's embedded new **supply chain finance solution** provides merchants with two key benefits: the ability to offer a wider range of digital products to attract more customers; and access to banking services and responsible working capital to help finance and grow their businesses.

'Nomanini', meaning 'any time' in siSwati, gives expression to the fact that the digital platform is available at any time. It is this unwavering drive to create real-time solutions for informal merchants to access digital financial services that has led to Nomanini's rapid growth on the continent.

A truly merchant-first approach

Nomanini's story of innovation goes back to recognising a need among informal retailers to provide fast and easy access to airtime for their customers. For many retailers, this is a core offering that draws customers into their stores, enabling them to cross-sell other items with higher margins.

Back in 2011, airtime sales were based on a scratch-card system and informal traders showed a preference for a safer, easier and faster way to offer airtime to their customers. To meet this need, Nomanini launched mobile airtime vending devices that were sold directly to informal retailers in South Africa. The devices, and the ability to quickly sell any denomination of airtime, were very well received by merchants and Nomanini was soon able to form partnerships with larger distributors to extend its reach.

The move to e-vending

By 2012, Nomanini identified a broader need for a white-label e-vending platform, which led to a fundamental shift towards providing technology for mobile top up distributors. The need for a white-labelled platform was driven by the fact that vendors' margins were being pushed down by mobile operators, which had a negative impact on their bottom line.

While this involved a shift in focus from individual retailers to distributors, it didn't compromise Nomanini's core mission in any way. In fact, the move to e-vending meant that it could reach more retailers with a richer offering.

Pan African

Even at this early stage, though, Nomanini recognised that there were limitations to developing country-specific solutions and made the decision to focus on interoperability. This would enable the company to take its offering into a number of different markets in Africa and to empower more merchants to attract more customers and to sell more.

This, in turn, led Nomanini to undertake a trial in Mozambique, which was launched in 2016 and was initially very successful. Soon, over 2 000 devices had been sold to retailers and another 5 000 were on order. It was just at this time that a major local economic crisis hit the country and, sadly, the distributor couldn't survive it. It was a big setback, but sometimes failures lead to the biggest opportunities.

It was while looking for investors to refinance the Mozambican distributors that Nomanini became aware of the fact that banks needed a business banking platform with which to reach retailers. This led to a second – and defining – change in focus for the company and it pivoted towards delivering not just airtime but also banking services.

Building business banking propositions

After developing its first banking platform in partnership with Moza Banco, which successfully reached hundreds of retail merchants, Nomanini recognised that it needed to return to retailer-centric solutions, rather than standard agency banking. Facing the tough challenge of producing interoperable technology in an economy struggling with both infrastructure and governance challenges, the team realised that building business banking propositions would create a platform for sustainable success.

A multi-national partnership with Standard Bank

In 2019, Nomanini partnered with Standard Bank, Africa's largest bank by assets, to implement an open-loop platform to provide business banking services to informal retailers in a format that is suitable to their businesses.

The partnership enables Standard Bank to onboard informal retail merchants as SME clients without requiring the bank to modify its existing SME processes or requiring informal retailers to open a traditional bank account, or even visit a bank branch.

The move to providing supply chain finance

In 2020, having formed a strategic partnership with Nestlé Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR), a strategic move towards supply chain finance became possible. Working with both Standard Bank and Nestlé, Nomanini deployed [a digital supply chain finance \(SCF\) solution](#) that would digitise payments from informal retailers into the FMCG supply chain.

This is now enabling retailers, whose businesses remain mainly cash-driven, to build up credit profiles and to qualify for loans to improve their product ranges. The underlying technology lowers financing costs and improves business efficiencies for both buyers and sellers. It works by automating sales transactions and tracking invoicing and payment right from initiation through to completion.

More specifically, it enables informal retailers to buy in stock directly from Nestlé under credit terms offered by Standard Bank. This means they no longer have to use microlenders, who charge high interest rates, to finance the purchasing of stock. And, as their credit profiles improve, they can access financing for an even wider range of stock.

In line with Nomanini's mission of enabling informal retailers to offer a richer selection of goods and services to their customers, the new SCF platform enables retailers to provide a broad selection of airtime and data packages, mobile banking solutions and retail goods to underserved markets and, in this way, to grow their businesses.

Learn more about unlocking the latent potential of Africa's retail economy. Request a copy of the case study, [Supply Chain Financing for Informal MSMEs](#).

ABOUT NOMANINI

Nomanini is a pioneering fintech that connects merchants, distributors and service providers to overcome fragmentation, optimise digital distribution, and scale Africa's informal retail ecosystem by combining new digital financial services with existing distribution networks.

Nomanini was founded in 2010 and is headquartered in South Africa.



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