



265 Employees

Salesforce customer
since 2010

CUSTOMER **SUCCESS STORY**

SEACOM connects a continent with Salesforce

In 2009, SEACOM did something historic. It laid the first subsea cable system, bringing the internet to Africa.

As you can imagine, the company's growth and evolution since then has been nothing short of sensational. In 2020, they're a full-blown telco service provider catering to every size and kind of organisation you can think of, from complex solutions to enterprises and small businesses, public infrastructure to government organisations, as well as bringing fibre-direct-to-the-home.

This kind of growth is good news for the African continent. It's given a rapidly growing generation of businesses and entrepreneurs the tools they need to compete on a level playing field both globally and domestically. But to make that growth seamless for customers and employees, it's taken the guile, experience, and hard work of SEACOM's Business Operations, Sales, and IT teams.

We spoke to Shereen Rimmell, Head of Business Operations at SEACOM, and Marius Burger, CIO, about how the company evolved from selling 20 deals a year to selling hundreds of solutions to a whole range of customer segments every month – and how Salesforce is helping them keep it simple.

"Salesforce is helping us automate and simplify the way we sell to different segments with very different needs."

SHEREEN RIMMELL, HEAD OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS AT SEACOM.

SEACOM

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New markets... new problems

In its early days, SEACOM was selling a relatively small number of very large wholesale solutions, requiring extensive checks and balances. By the time Shereen joined SEACOM, it was a very different company, having diversified into selling enterprise technology solutions (including connectivity, cloud, and security products) to businesses in South and East Africa.

"Our deals used to be wholesale – huge in size and very complex, but low in volume. Once you're selling enterprise products, the volume of deals goes up – there are a lot more needs our products can satisfy," says Shereen. "Plus, customers expect things to move faster – you've got to get your order forms out there far more quickly." And with a lot more products to sell and many markets to sell them to, things were destined to get much more complicated (and this was before SEACOM widened its remit to include SMEs, fibre-to-home, and terrestrial infrastructure). Marius attests: "From a business process perspective, it's all become much more complex. Our product model alone has become so complicated."

Improving sales processes



The particular challenges thrown up by enterprise sales – of selling more products to more customers faster – have been largely met by SEACOM through the use of Sales Cloud and Lightning Platform. Both were implemented by CloudSmiths, Salesforce's largest partner in Africa and a trusted partner to SEACOM throughout the transformation.

SEACOM uses Sales Cloud to handle its entire sales journey, right up to the point of service delivery. The automation of processes offered by Sales Cloud has enabled SEACOM's sales teams to work at the speed and with the efficiency enterprise sales demands. Take the process of capturing leads. "Before, salespeople would only look at accounts and then opportunities – they wouldn't even consider leads," explains Shereen. "Now, because we're capturing leads through Salesforce, we're really improving our conversion rate." Then there's the process of automated approval requests. Built into Salesforce and adapted by SEACOM, Shereen credits this with significantly speeding up both governance and the reporting of sales. "Once a sale is closed, it now automatically comes to my team for approval or rejection," she says. "Before, I could only really get sales numbers out on the 15th of each month. Now I'm getting them out much sooner, and this is, in large part, due to that verification process."



Onboarding made easy

Most significantly, from the point of view of SEACOM's customer satisfaction, is the onboarding process for new customers. This process used to be challenging and lengthy, involving a credit check, a Know-Your-Customer compliance procedure, and several internal approvals. Now, all of this is done on Salesforce, via an onboarding app that SEACOM's developers built using Lightning Web Components in their preferred language. They also used Flows to guide users through sales processes with a seamless experience.

"The onboarding app that we built with the Platform allowed us to take onboarding down from 21 days to around three days," says Shereen. "Given that we have to do a due diligence on the customer and wait for audit reports, that's about as short as onboarding can get." Once the customer has been onboarded, an account is automatically created in SEACOM's ERP system, which then brings back a customer code.

By removing the need for manual input, a huge chunk of admin time has been cut out from the process. "It's fantastic for the customer, which is the most important entity – they're up and running with us quickly and we can start helping them sooner. It saves us so much time," adds Shereen.



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Automating commissions

In the same way SEACOM has deliberately built apps to improve the customer experience, Shereen and her team have also made sure they use the same technology to improve the employee experience. Using Platform, SEACOM has made the process of calculating and paying commissions faster, more intelligent and, crucially, more transparent.

"We were using complex Excel spreadsheets to calculate sales commissions before," says Shereen. "That process used to take a week out of my life, and it was a manual process which caused me much anxiety". Now, both KAMs (key account managers) and sales team managers have user-friendly dashboards they can use to check on their performance (in both ZAR and USD) against sales targets. They're more reassured and SEACOM has a more reliable way to guide their performance too.

"We can now identify problems with deliveries, forecasting, and commissions as they occur," says Shereen. "The sales teams don't have to wait for them to be flagged the next month. And the KAMs don't have to wait for their pay check to find out what they've earned." To the relief of Shereen (and her team), commission is now calculated – and adjusted according to performance – automatically. Commissions paid in the past can also be easily accessed and, if necessary, adjusted for recoupment. "Now that everything gets handled in the Sales Console, we're able to do our jobs much more effectively," says Shereen. "The general feedback has been: 'Wow, the Business Ops team are really on the ball now!' That's been huge."

A silver lining in the time of COVID-19



Shereen has found that SEACOM – which has always had a globally dispersed workforce – has been more productive than ever during the COVID-19 lockdown. And with the support of implementation partner CloudSmiths, SEACOM has been able to keep things simple in a time that's anything but.

"I think there's a tendency with humans to complicate things," said Shereen. "CloudSmiths helps us solve complex tasks with simple solutions, quickly. We can do so much just by using Salesforce's inherent capabilities – CloudSmiths can literally run something past us in UAT and implement it there and then." The improvements SEACOM has made to its processes are a big silver lining – as are the reactions of customers and employees.

"We were missing our objectives and overshooting our timelines before," says Marius. "That caused a lot of noise from the business. Now there's much less noise and fewer complaints. Everything runs more smoothly." Shereen has noticed a difference in reactions too. "Now we're getting emails thanking us. The tone has changed."

Such internal changes have underpinned SEACOM's transitioning into new markets over the last 11 years, and will set an ever-evolving technological foundation for the company's future transformation. The cables they laid made history. But it's this intelligent, deliberate use of technology and empathy that's helping this remarkable business serve more customers and spread the power of connectivity to more Africans.

"With Salesforce enhancing our processes, we're able to work at the pace and standard that we need to in order to continue to grow and transform as a business"

MARIUS BURGER, CIO