

From nature conservation to IT

By Stanley Chishala

It is not common for someone to trade in their love for nature conservation for the ever-evolving and fast-paced IT industry. But for Corlette Wessels, retail branch manager at local distributor Comztek, IT proved more appealing than preserving nature so in 1991 with no formal knowledge of what IT was, she kick-started her career in the sector.

"I knew absolutely nothing about IT 17 years ago as I always wanted to go into nature conservation," she says. Everything changed when she met the man who became her husband as it was then that nature conservation took a back seat.

Wessels says for now, the closest she is to fulfilling her childhood dream is that she lives on a game farm north of Johannesburg and enjoys nature at its best.

She says although the IT industry has opened up a lot of avenues for her, it can be challenging at times but she is delighted that the market has changed a lot and women in leading roles have become more acceptable.

Wessels joined the IT industry in 1991 starting as a receptionist at TSD the then trading arm of Acer Africa. After a year at TSD, Wessels joined software specialist distributor Workgroup in its retail business unit and has loved being in retail ever since.

Wessels is particularly thrilled by the retail business as it is not only fast moving and changes frequently from marketing to stock deadlines but is also the fastest-growing sector in the local IT industry.

Having had the opportunity to work for TSD, Vantage Distribution, Hensta Structured Cabling, Workgroup and now Comztek, Wessels says the biggest lesson she has learnt is to leave emotions out of business. "Women shouldn't be intimidated even if the boardroom table is full of men," she says. "Women in SA and elsewhere on the globe need to believe in themselves and their capabilities, and be professional at all times."

Wessels points out that there should be more mentorship programmes to assist women enter-



Corlette Wessels, Comztek

ing male-dominated industries. She emphasises that this is especially necessary with young women. "It is important to ensure that local companies do not just adhere to black empowerment but also encourage women to join industries that are male dominated and assist them to be successful," she concludes. □