

The expert



# “Get out there and understand the needs of your customers”

**Vincent Lyonnet is the commercial and marketing director of easysteelsheds.com and its French variant batimentsmoinschers.com, a company that sells industrial steel kit buildings and agricultural sheds to more than 20 countries throughout Africa**

**Give us a quick rundown on the concept of your business.**

Our core business is to sell steel structures and provide sheds for different functions. They could go on to become warehouses, spaces for crafts people, or used as agricultural storage.

**Launching a business in Africa for the first time can be a daunting experience. How did you bring your business to the continent?**

The first time we sold a building in Africa was back in 2005. We received an enquiry from an expat in Niger who needed a building to dry their onions. We were very surprised as this wasn't an opportunity we had considered

exploring before – it opened our eyes. After that, we had secured a good reference and started to invest in some advertising. Now, we are in more than 20 different countries across Africa.

**What do you put your success in the African market down to?**

The African market is different to the European market. In Africa, our customers are looking to build brand new infrastructure, whereas in Europe we're renewing roads and buildings. What's more, our clients in the African

market are less fearful of importing goods. Many of our customers are happy to go online and order what they need.

**What advice would you give to anyone thinking of launching a business in the African market?**

Try to really understand the problems in the field. You must be prepared to adapt your thinking to the African mindset. Get out there and try to really understand the needs of your potential customers.



## WINNING STRATEGIES FOR AFRICAN BUSINESS LEADERS

*Vincent reveals his top three tips for the next generation of entrepreneurs*



**1. Be patient**  
In Africa, business can stall for six months then restart very quickly. It can be an emotional rollercoaster.



**2. Do your homework**  
Make sure you build a solid understanding of the needs of your customers.



**3. Believe in yourself**  
There are plenty of opportunities in Africa, all it takes is a bit of faith in your ability.