The project has resulted in the development of a significant new facility, which will be central to supporting the development of e-commerce in the country. The "Ecommerce Service Centre" is more than a warehouse – it is a purpose-built structure to train and support local firms with everything they need to conduct e-commerce.

The ECSC was built from the ground up in partnership with local business partner, Sawa Citi. Local businessman Theo Kubwimana, CEO of Sawa Citi, is convinced about the potential for e-Commerce in Rwanda: “We believe that e-commerce can be an important channel for us – and other local businesses – to grow, without the need to put stores all over the country. The ECSC is not only for Sawa Citi – it is a fantastic new resource for small firms to get the support they need to try out e-commerce, with limited investment and risk”.

"The ECSC will have a central role to play in making e-commerce accessible to all in Rwanda.”
Sébastian Ioannitis-McColl, ITC Project Manager

"The facility is a great demonstration of Rwanda showing good on its intention to be a leader in digitizing Africa”
Theo Kubwimana, CEO of Sawa Citi
A reception area receives customers who wish to place an order, or local enterprises consigning goods into the storage area. Customers may be guided to the showroom on the first floor, where they can browse the range of Rwandan goods available for purchase online. Next door to the showroom are offices, training rooms and a call centre.

When small firms arrive with their goods to be consigned, ECSC staff check their quality and suitability for e-commerce, ensure accurate coding of products into warehouse systems and arrange for further “digitization” if necessary. Sessions can be organised within the digitization studio – where professional photography equipment is available to trained staff. Assistance with writing descriptions and marketing copy is also available.

On the ground floor, the logistics operations cover an area for staff to complete the data entry of received goods, a pick and pack area and a vast area of shelving. By consolidating shipments in one place, and linking local and international transporters to its systems, the ECSC is able to propose competitive pricing and service for shipping goods.

The Rwanda Post Office, IPOSITA, is an enthusiastic partner of the project. In partnership with Botswana headquartered logistics technology firm “Load Africa”, IPOSITA will implement last mile delivery and use crowd logistic solutions in partnership with private transport freelancers and professionals for inter-provincial shipping* that will open new and more efficient deliveries in Rwanda and create economies of scales for actors involved. Currently, the ECSC is centralised in Kigali but it will extend its operations through IPOSITA branches and Sawa Citi stores across the country.

"We now have digital solutions to help us provide accurate and timely deliveries across the country, whether from the 17 distribution, collection and pickup points at Post Office branches or all the way to the addressee at their home or office location."

Patrick Safari, Commercial Department Director, IPOSITA

The ECSC has also required a set of processes and a digital architecture to be built – every bit as important as the building. Underpinning the operations is an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, developed by ITC with software engineers in Rwanda and India. Incorporating a dozen different modules to handle stock consignment, pick and pack operations, transportation, accounting and customers service, the ERP is a complex undertaking that ensures linkages between online transactions and all of the various necessary services.

Sébastien Ioannitis-McColl, ITC Project Manager, remarks: “the ECSC can be described as the ultimate ‘e-Solution’ – a network of physical and digital processes that make it easy for Rwandan SMEs to provide world class support for e-Commerce in Rwanda and toward international markets”.

RWANDA: ENABLING THE FUTURE OF E-COMMERCE