

ELTON PAKA

Digital Strategy & Platform Leadership | Financial Services & Retail | Sub-Saharan Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology and digital strategy leader with a decade of experience spanning both sides of financial services: former security consultant at Barclays Africa Group, now Absa, and senior solutions architect at AWS, advising CIOs, CISOs, and CTOs at the region's largest financial services and retail institutions. The work has consistently sat at the intersection of digital platform strategy, commercial outcomes, and regulated environments, influencing over \$50M in technology investment across 15+ enterprise accounts by connecting platform decisions to revenue growth, customer retention, and operational efficiency. The scope has covered pan-African programmes in cloud modernisation, AI and data platform strategy, and enterprise security governance. Currently completing a BCom Honours in Management Information Systems at UCT, with research focused on AI governance and innovation in South African organisations.

CORE COMPETENCIES

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Digital Strategy & Transformation | Platform Leadership & Lifecycle |
| Commercial Acumen & Revenue Linkage | Customer-Centric Innovation |
| AI, Data & Analytics Enablement | Governance, Risk & Compliance |
| Pan-African Executive Engagement | Change Management & Adoption |

EXPERIENCE

Amazon Web Services | Jan 2022 to Present

Sr. Solutions Architect, Security and Resilience Lead

Operating at the senior end of the AWS solutions architecture function, serving as a strategic advisor to AWS's largest pan-African enterprise accounts. Conversations run at CIO and CISO level, covering multi-year digital platform strategy, resilience in regulated contexts, and the business case for significant technology investment.

Strategy, Transformation & Commercial Impact

- Defined and led the regional digital platform transformation programme across more than 15 enterprise accounts spanning financial services, retail, and telecoms, building C-suite relationships and designing practical multi-year roadmaps grounded in each organisation's regulatory and commercial context.
- Built a flagship retail account relationship from zero, shaping the enterprise data, AI, and digital platform modernisation strategy over two years and supporting the organisation through a competitive four-way procurement against Azure, GCP, and Oracle. The outcome was a multi-million USD five-year platform commitment, the largest technology investment in the account's history, directly tied to revenue growth and customer experience transformation.
- Presents technology and platform strategy regularly to senior executive teams, translating complex architectural trade-offs into business language that informs capital allocation, digital investment prioritisation, and board-level decisions.

Customer Platforms & AI Enablement

- Shaped AI and data platform strategies for several of South Africa's largest retailers, covering machine learning infrastructure, recommendation systems, and real-time analytics. The architecture was designed around business outcomes that matter to the organisations: customer retention, personalisation, and operational efficiency.

- Designed enterprise data architectures spanning data lake, warehousing, and event streaming platforms, enabling the analytics and customer segmentation capability that large consumer organisations depend on for digital adoption, cross-sell, and client value optimisation.
- Led MLOps and AI capability programmes including SageMaker Immersion Days, helping organisations move from experimentation to operationalised machine learning models that improve customer experience and decision-making at scale.

Platform Resilience, Governance & Risk

- Delivered over 100 architecture and security workshops across the region, resulting in the remediation of more than 500 critical platform risks and ensuring digital platform integrity, regulatory compliance, and operational resilience across the enterprise customer base.
- Designed disaster recovery and high-availability architectures for mission-critical financial services and retail platforms, where downtime carries significant regulatory, commercial, and customer experience consequences.
- Established the CISO Circle and Security Builders Circle, two structured executive forums connecting security leaders from the region's largest organisations to work through shared governance challenges and align on digital risk management standards.

Adoption, Change Management & Capability Building

- Created and ran the Zero Trust re:Inforce Recap Roadshow across seven communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, reaching more than 150 engineers. Built as a sustainable digital capability and adoption programme rather than a one-off event.
- Leads cross-functional teams across concurrent client programmes, accountable for delivery outcomes, stakeholder engagement, team capability development, and executive reporting.
- Represented AWS at NRF New York and SAP Retail Day and co-led the first AWS Retail Day in South Africa in 2025, convening C-suite leaders from the country's largest retailers to shape digital platform strategy and industry collaboration.

Amazon Web Services | Sep 2016 to Dec 2021

Cloud Engineering – Identity Architecture Lead

Progressed from graduate associate to identity architecture lead over five years, building deep platform expertise and global recognition as a subject matter expert in identity and access management. This discipline sits at the foundation of secure digital platform design and customer authentication experiences.

Platform & Identity Architecture

- Recognised as a global subject matter expert for Amazon Cognito, handling the most complex identity and customer authentication architecture escalations across the business. The work underpinned secure digital onboarding, self-service, and omnichannel customer experiences for enterprise clients.
- Authored four identity provider integration guides covering Apple, Google, Facebook, and custom OIDC, reducing resolution time on critical enterprise identity escalations and accelerating digital platform go-to-market for customers.
- Provided architectural guidance to enterprise customers across compute, serverless, AI, and mobile services, ensuring digital platforms followed best practices for security, resilience, and cost efficiency.

Enablement & Programme Delivery

- Authored and maintained the Cognito learning curriculum at 200 to 400 level on AWS's internal training platform, adopted globally across solutions architecture, support, and technical account management teams.
- Co-designed and delivered a global enablement bootcamp for Amazon Connect, training twelve engineers across multiple regions.
- Core team member on the AWS EMEA Graduate Support Engineering Onboarding Programme, designing the curriculum and training more than 50 engineers and graduates.

Barclays Africa Group (now Absa) | Apr 2015 to Aug 2016

Security Consultant

Security consultant embedded within what is now Absa's technology organisation, with direct exposure to the governance, compliance, and operational culture of one of South Africa's largest financial institutions.

- Led security assessments and penetration testing programmes across the bank's digital services portfolio, producing executive risk reporting for senior leadership and governance committees.
- Worked with engineering and product teams to embed security requirements into new platforms at design stage rather than retrofitting controls, a discipline that matters considerably in a SARB-regulated environment.
- Operated within Barclays Africa's risk and governance frameworks, gaining direct experience of the compliance, assurance, and regulatory requirements that govern South Africa's largest financial institutions, including the platform integrity, data privacy, and cybersecurity standards that are central to digital platform leadership.

EDUCATION

University of Cape Town

BCom Honours in Management Information Systems | 2025 to present

Research: AI governance and innovation in South African organisations

University of Johannesburg

BSc in Computer Science and Informatics | 2010 to 2014

CERTIFICATIONS

AWS Certified Solutions Architect, Professional • AWS Certified Developer, Associate • AWS AI Practitioner • AWS Certified Solutions Architect, Associate • Google Cloud Digital Leader (in progress)

TECHNICAL PROFILE

- Cloud platforms: AWS at expert level, plus GCP and Azure across hybrid and cloud-native environments
- Security and compliance: Zero Trust architecture, IAM, OAuth2, OIDC, SAML, POPIA, King IV, SARB cloud frameworks
- Data and AI: MLOps, SageMaker, BigQuery, Vertex AI, data lake and warehouse architecture, analytics platforms
- Architecture: Enterprise architecture, resilience and DR design, serverless, microservices, API design, infrastructure as code