

Africa needs more devices, relevant content, cheap data - Google Mobile

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Despite Africa's mobile explosion, there is a belief that there's still a long way to go before the continent accedes to the throne of the mobile revolution, thanks to expensive Internet data, lack of relevant content and affordable devices, and difficult access to remote areas. "We need more devices and relevant content, and data is too expensive," [Brett St Clair](#), head of mobile of Google in SA, said.

"Huge opportunities"

"Africa is a very important market and there are huge opportunities. For every 1% of Internet users, there is 4.3% increase of exports export GDP; it's awesome," St Clair told a recent GIBS marketing and innovation forum in Illovo, Johannesburg.

"It's all great that ~~half of Africans are accessing the Internet through their mobile devices~~ that half of all Africans have mobile phones - 500 million mobiles to 1 billion Africans - but we need to get more devices. Besides, the price of data is terrible, meaning we need cheaper data - that is Google's mission in Africa," he said.

"We are living in disruptive times and in the connectivity revolution made possible by mobile phones, an era where knowledge has now become a commodity," said [Janine Hutton](#), Nielsen director for telecom practice in southern Africa.

"We have got to go further than data"

"We have got to go further than data - there are over 2000 languages in Africa and we have to translate all these languages to help people fully understand the Internet," St Clair noted, adding that sustainability is also one of the factors his company is working on for its Africa Internet mission.

St Clair said African communities may be developed by providing tools, such as giving them the knowledge and capacity to start making money on the Internet. However, he said every single country in Africa is different culturally, with its own regulations and banking systems, thus requiring ubiquitous solutions.

SA, which has the fourth largest mobile advertising market in the world, has been described by Hutton as a region of extremes.

"We need to market to those extremes"

"We need to market to those extremes, and the key point is that companies should be client-centric, with mobile treated as complimentary, not competitive; consumed together they will amplify reach and engagement," Hutton urged.

There are over 37 million registered mobile users and nine million active users, and there are more 4.7 million more households with more than one cellphone, according to Nielsen. SA is ranked fourth in the world in data usage, just after Indonesia, India and the US, and 60% of South Africans have bank accounts.

"State of chaotic change"

"The world is in a state of chaotic change; are you changing?" asked Hutton, revealing that 12% of Kenya's GDP moves through M-PESA.

It is believed that more than one-third of urban SA consumers have an Internet-enabled device, and mobile banking and shopping are gaining popularity in Africa, especially with the growth of mobile.

According to St Clair, there are four trends that make mobile one of the main attractions of today's business environment.

Entertaining, immediate, effective, local, shopping

"Mobile entertains us," he said, adding that there are ~~thousands~~ hundreds of thousands of mobile playbacks a day on YouTube.

"Mobile is immediate, effective and local," he listed, revealing that one in three mobile searches is local, and it is the ultimate shopping companion as 79% of smartphone Internet users use their devices to help with shopping.

"Smartphones are exploding, and smartphone queries have increased a lot in 2011 in Africa, with 250 000 applications in the market place global Android market place and ~~150 000 android activations globally~~ over 150 million Android devices have been activated to date, with over 550 000 activations happening every day globally," St Clair revealed.

St Clair, who spent a decade in London, is also the co-chairman of Mobile Marketing Association in SA, while Hutton is the former MD of Ogilvy Interactive.

The [GIBS Marketing Concepts & Innovations Emerging in Africa Forums](#) are hosted in partnership with *FinWeek* magazine. The next forum, themed 'Innovation Management in the SA Context', will be held on 27 October 2011.

Facts corrected at 9.28am on 19 October 2011. Bizcommunity.com regrets the errors.

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Issa Sikti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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