

12 African startups to watch in 2017

By [Gabriella Mulligan](#)

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Here at Disrupt Africa we're privileged to meet innovative and enthusiastic startups from across the continent on a daily basis. But – we have to admit – every now and again we meet one that gets us really excited. We've fought amongst ourselves long and hard, to bring you what we think are 12 of the top African startups to watch in 2017.



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NORTH AFRICA

Instabug

Launched in 2012, Egypt's Instabug isn't exactly new to the scene. However, 2016 saw the startup up its game, come out of a four-year beta phase, and make some serious waves. [Instabug](#) allows users to offer feedback from within apps to report bugs and issues with the product. The app allows for in-app conversations, powerful crash reporting, advanced analytics, and there's a range of other cool features too.

In February 2016, Instabug was selected to participate in the Silicon Valley-based Y Combinator accelerator; and [announced it was coming out of beta testing](#) at last (fair, seeing as the app was already running on 100 million devices at the time. By June, [the startup announced it had closed a US\\$1.7 million seed round](#) led by Accel Partners, to allow it to expand its suite of tools to provide a comprehensive support kit for mobile apps. Oh, and by the way, Instabug has been used to report 20 million bugs already... and counting. 2017 will be exciting for these guys.

RoamSmart

Tunisia's RoamSmart is something of a startup world veteran, also launched in 2012. But the startup is on a renewed push to take the world by storm, and we think they might just do it in 2017.

[RoamSmart's](#) solutions [aim to assist mobile operators to manage their roaming businesses](#) more efficiently; helping operators to optimise workflows and monetise existing roaming sources through an automated data reporting and analysis platform.

The startup has clocked up 29 clients, including Vodacom and Orange – they're clearly tapping into operator demand. But

RoamSmart has [set itself high targets](#) for the coming months: accelerated growth and surpassing 50 customers worldwide. Initially funded through private funds and bank loans, RoamStart secured its first funding round in 2016 to help it on its way to world-domination. We're excited to see what's next in 2017, aren't you?

Tutorama

For our third pick, we've gone with a very new candidate. Founded in January 2016, Egyptian ed-tech startup Tutorama spent most of the [year in closed testing](#), working through technical kinks and refining its business model.

[Tutorama](#) is a platform connecting parents with top quality local tutors in their area. Parents can schedule and pay for sessions as well as monitor the progress of their child online. It's not only Disrupt Africa who thinks this startup has got what it takes to shake up the ed-tech space.

In April, Tutorama [won first place in the ideas track](#) of the MIT Enterprise Forum Arab Startup Competition, securing US\$50,000.

Hot on the heels of the startup's first win, global startup pitching competition Seedstars World [crowned Tutorama winner](#) of the Egyptian edition of the contest. It will soon represent the country at the Seedstars global finals in Switzerland, standing the chance to win US\$1 million funding. We think they have what it takes.

EAST AFRICA

Fuzu

Kenyan career development startup [Fuzu](#) only launched in late 2015... but did this team hit the ground running or what? Fuzu provides a one-stop career development platform, which aims to allow users to learn new skills and find jobs regardless of their levels of education.

The platform provides career counselling, learning solutions and information about open positions and industry updates, providing support and guidance at different stages of user's career. For employers, it offers advanced search and recruitment solutions with competence evaluation and algorithm-based ranking to identify the best fitting candidates.

The startup immediately received backing from the Rockefeller Foundation and Accenture, and by December 2016, [Fuzu announced it had raised US\\$1.88 million in funding](#) to support its business development, and expansion from Kenya to other African countries as well as to Asia.

Flare

Kenya's Flare app is a great example of a startup responding to a local pressing challenge. Created by startup Capsule, Flare is a mobile solution that aggregates available ambulances onto a single system, and allows patients or hospitals to

request emergency help via smartphone.

“Today, there is no well-functioning emergency response dispatch system like 911. In Nairobi, Kenya it takes up to two hours to get an ambulance. During an emergency, patients struggle to locate and connect to private ambulance companies through their individual dispatch phone numbers. They are often unaware of their options and waste critical time. Meanwhile, there are up to one hundred available ambulances sitting idly around Nairobi waiting for patients,” [explains co-founder Caitlin Dolkart](#).

The app was under construction and testing with ambulance companies throughout 2016; with the startup raising funding ([US\\$150,000, still open](#)) in the last quarter of the year to enable a full-scale commercial launch. We’re looking forward to seeing the emergency response space in Kenya thoroughly shaken up in 2017.

Jamii

Tanzania’s Jamii is our next tip from East Africa. [Jamii](#) offers a mobile micro-health insurance product for the low income and informal sector. The startup has built a mobile policy management platform that performs all the administration activities of an insurer, and allows users to access cheap insurance via USSD.

Launched in January 2015, the startup has racked up some impressive successes so far. It received backing from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and [won the Tanzanian leg of Seedstars World](#) – progressing to the global finals (just a reminder: up to US\$1 million funding up for grabs).

[Jamii has promised launches](#) in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa over 2017, and is raising funding. We’ll definitely be keeping a keen eye on this startup.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Custos Media

The bitcoin fad may well be ebbing worldwide; but this South African startup has found an innovative use for bitcoin and blockchain technology which we think is worth following. South African startup [Custos Media Technologies](#) uses bitcoin bounties as a means of cracking down on piracy of digital media.

[The startup embeds bitcoin bounties as watermarks within videos](#), which can still be watched normally. However, if the media passes out of the control of the intended recipient – usually a reviewer offered a pre-released version of the movie – there is a small bitcoin reward that can be collected by one downloader using a free tool.

Once someone has pocketed this bounty, Custos can see the transaction on the blockchain and informs the media owner, who can then take whatever action they see fit. We’re not the only ones to have our interest piqued. Custos raised two funding rounds in 2016 – [US\\$265,000 from a South African private investor](#) and the New York-based Digital Currency Group in April, followed [by US\\$420,000 from South Africa’s Technology Innovation Agency](#) in August.

Cape (Asimmetric)

South Africa’s Cape – which rebranded from Asimmetric in November – had a very exciting 2016... and we think it’s just the beginning for this startup. [Cape](#) operates a WiFi network and application quality monitoring tool. The Cape Sensor monitors WiFi network and application performance 24/7 by behaving like a real user and reporting issues in real-time before users complain. The Sensor includes features such as mobile connectivity and power backup. It works alongside a cloud-based Dashboard, which [Cape says is the simplest WiFi monitoring dashboard](#) available.

[Launched in February 2015](#), Asimmetric (as it then was) became the first South African company to join the San Francisco-based hardware accelerator [Highway1](#). By April 2016, [Asimmetric announced it had raised a seven-figure dollar](#)

[funding round](#) from three United States (US)-based early-stage hardware and Internet of Things (IoT) investment firms, allowing it to launch operations in San Francisco. The startup launched an all-new edition of its product in November, coinciding with its rebranding to Cape... in preparation for great things this year, we're certain.

Dr CADx

Zimbabwe's [Dr CADx](#) is a new kid on the African startups block, but we think these guys are worth keeping an eye on. Founded in August 2016, the startup is developing a computer-aided diagnostic system to help doctors diagnose medical images more accurately, and to provide pervasive radiology diagnostics in regions which currently do not have radiologists.

Designed to be used by medical professionals on existing computers and tablets, the solution is able to diagnose most diseases if it is supplied with the sufficient training data, although the startup's initial focus is on lung diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia and lung cancer, as well as head injuries and breast cancer.

In September 2016 [Dr CADx's prototype achieved an accuracy of 82 per cent](#) in distinguishing between chest X-rays of healthy people from X-rays of patients with TB and those with lung cancer. The [startup was named winner of the Zimbabwean edition of Seedstars World](#), and is heading to the finals to compete for that US\$1 million prize to help make trials of the tool possible in 2017, with a view to a full launch of the solution in 2018.

WEST AFRICA

Printivo

Nigerian digital printing startup Printivo was [voted the country's most investable startup](#) in 2016, beating the likes of Hotels.ng, Andela, and iRokoTV to take the top spot... and we're not about to disagree – it's a great venture. Launched in 2014, [Printivo](#) aims to help Nigerian startups and SMEs print business and marketing materials with ease, and hopes to grow Nigeria's US\$200 million print market, which has until now had no credible online presence.

Late in 2015 the startup [hit the headlines announcing](#) it had closed a six-figure funding round from early-stage technology venture capital firm EchoVC Partners. We also know the startup is already [working with blue chip firms](#) such as Google, Samsung, Stanbic IBTC, Honda and Uber. It's time to sit back, grab the popcorn, and watch what this startup pulls out the bag next.

SpacePointe

Nigeria's SpacePointe develops products geared towards small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with a particular focus on retailers. The startup has been busy over the past couple of years; making waves at the DEMO Africa event in 2014 – following which it was [selected to pitch at DEMO Fall](#) in Silicon Valley-, and [launching extensive pilots](#) in 2015.

But 2016 was its strongest year to date. In June, [SpacePointe announced it had raised US\\$1.2 million](#) in funding from multiple investors, enabling it to launch two in-store business management and point of sale (PoS) applications into the market. The first, CommercePointe, integrates in-store business management and PoS applications with a marketplace platform working off the same inventory, designed for the informal sector.

PointePay is a mobile application with multiple payment options acceptance options, including cash, e-wallet, and debit or credit card. It allows retailers to manage product and inventory, as well as employees and customers, while also offering value added service such as the ability to sell wireless top-up and perform mobile wallet loads. The startup is busy pushing its products out to as many customers as possible, and we're eager to watch uptake soar in 2017.

Tress

Ghanaian startup Tress showed us it means business by going straight [for a global launch](#) in February 2016, having been

incubated at the Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology (MEST). [Tress](#) is a social haircare app primarily for black women, which allows women to discover new hairstyles, find out detailed information about hairstyles such as the exact products used, the name of the stylist, and the price range, and share their favourite hairstyles and receive compliments and haircare secrets from the community.

Only four months after launching, [Tress was selected to join](#) the Y Combinator Fellowship Programme in Silicon Valley, and took part in the eight-week programme complete with US\$20,000 in funding. With the global black haircare industry valued at over US\$500 billion, we're eager to see how much of the market Tress will dominate this year. So there you have it, the Disrupt Africa top 12 to watch for 2017.

[We got nine out of 12 in 2016](#)... pretty sure we've got 12 for 12 this time round.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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