

TECHNOLOGY and innovation in the media



Colin Mukete

Information and Communications Technology and **change** were the challenging concepts at the 2011 African Media Leader's Forum. Hosted in a country celebrating its' recent induction into democracy, aided by social media and bloggers, it was easy to see the positives of technology and change. However, delegates were uncertain about exactly how to use this new media. In response many speakers reiterated the same idea: the platforms may be different, but journalists still need to tell compelling stories.

How to get content to Africa's huge mobile audience

Mobile technology is often seen as the medium for Africa – the personal, portable devices are more numerous on the continent than traditional desktop computers.

A plenary discussion titled '**How mobile technology is disrupting media distribution models**' centred on the potential mobile technology has to disrupt traditional distribution models for media content, and how media organisations can make use of this medium to reach their audience.

Mobile platforms like cell phones give media organisations the opportunity to interact with communities on a device that is always on and used throughout the consumer's day. The devices allow for a level of personal interaction that is not possible with traditional media outlets.

Despite the strengths of the mobile platform, many companies find it difficult to make money from mobile devices. Audiences are often reluctant to pay for content, and some media organisations find it difficult to generate revenue.

The speakers emphasised the need for unique, quality, contextually relevant, local content if media organisations aim to profit from mobile platforms. "People are only willing to pay for things that interest them," said **Chairman of Spectrum Media Group and MTN in Cameroon, Colin Mukete**.

Mobile Entertainment Forum's Emma Kaye said, "There is a deep need to interact and the mobile platform has the potential to actively engage the end user. Traditional media has its' limitations and the mobile screen is the next platform."

Are you ripe for mobile disruption?

Vincent Maher, Chief Technology Officer, Motribe, stated "My mandate in life is to 'disrupt' using mobile technology.

The key question raised are; How do you recognise the conditions for disruption? What are the tools for disruption? How can you disruption-proof your own organisation?

"An industry is ripe for disruption when it has been slower than its' audience in embracing new technologies.

Journalists and concerned citizens are now the same thing. One writes professionally, while the other writes to support the cause.

The mediators in this situation are the business structures of the media and the editors. What has happened over the past 10 years is that there have been question marks around the value that has been added by this mediation especially in situations where things are happening on Twitter well before they are happening in print and broadcast".

Mobile disrupts not just traditional media but also digital media. If you are talking about reaching big audiences in Africa there is only one channel and that is mobile. There is a deep personal connection with that device which is always on.

"Over 95% of mobile users are in the pre-paid market and they have the ability to make micropayments right now. This allows media organisations to profit from subscription fees and other payments, while allowing users to make a quick, safe and easy transaction".

"In Nigeria, the Guinness beer company decided to launch a content community around football and over the 7-month period that this campaign lasted they grew to just under one million users (a fifth of the size of Facebook in Nigeria). There was a massive hunger for content from the people who joined."

According to Maher, the questions that must be asked are: why is this being done by an alcohol brand as opposed to a media company? What does this say about the media companies? What you have at your disposal are editorial processes, huge amounts of content, multimedia, photographs and all of these things can be repackaged into something which is new and can delight your audiences".

He concluded by saying that "media is fundamentally a disruptor and this is the role that the media originally carved out for themselves a couple of centuries ago".

Welcome to the mobihood

"In Africa we are going straight to the mobile phone and tablet. We are starting to see the consumer's deep need to interact, to have a voice, to be able to engage with their environment, their politics, the economy and using technology to do that" said **Emma Kaye of Bozza.mobi**.

"The application we have developed to help do this is Bozza, which sits on phones from Nokia Express through to the smarter phones. It is addressing a deep need for distribution and a marketplace to trade. We are focusing primarily within informal markets that have not been considered as a vast contributor to the GDP. The majority of people in informal markets do not have access to distribution mechanisms, to express, to trade, to develop and produce their own content".

"Why, when we have got this amazing, ubiquitous platform to express and disrupt, is there little to no local or hyper local content? In other words, where is the African content that means something to me whether I am in Khayalitsha or Lagos. Is there a demand for generic content or is there a demand for local content?"

"We worked in two townships, Alexandra (Johannesburg) and Khayalitsha (Cape Town) producing seven minutes of hyper local news. We had 40 000 users in two days through word of mouth.

We shot up to 170 000 users in two months with just seven minutes of content. We discovered that there was an enormous, deep appetite for local news, stories around local culture, local language, local environment and local community. Bozza is a platform on the mobile device – a **mobihood** – that can enable voices to be heard."



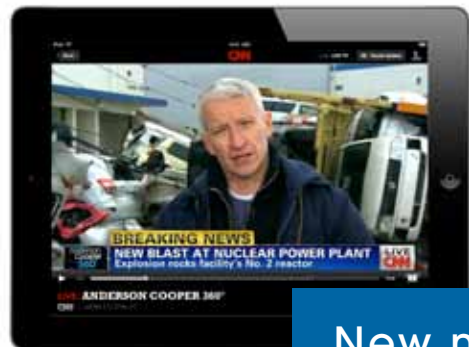
Vincent Maher



Emma Kaye



"We have a variety of content creators that are coming from all over Africa, including over 250 artists, musicians, poets. We are now starting to encourage small to medium enterprises to come on board our platform".



New media: new challenges and new opportunities

AMI's Chief Digital Strategist, Justin Arenstein stated at the start of the media technology and innovation breakaway session, content produced by media organisations is still paramount.

Technology can be used to augment and promote the content, but is still simply a platform which can be used to tell the story.

The benefits of technology for media organisations were mentioned in numerous presentations, for example, the ability to:

- track and monitor consumer information and engagement with both mobile and online media to reach audiences in distant locations and in different ways;
- represent information in ways not possible with traditional media.



QUOTES OF NOTE

Question from Ali Abdi, Shabelle Media Network, Mogadishu, Somalia: "We are aware that there are a lot of countries in Africa where you cannot receive fast internet services. To provide content through the mobile phone you need to have fibre optic or satellite infrastructure. Media organisations need the support and cooperation of network operators. That cooperation is hard to come by in Africa. I am not including South Africa in this. In some countries the telecom sector is controlled by the state. This creates obstacles and restrictions on how you can create a platform to reach out to more people".

Response from Vincent Maher: "From an operator point of view, if you are arguing that you have a very powerful and high-demand content service then why are you coming to me without any audience and expecting the operator to help you build the audience. The operator will say bring us something that is working and let us help you accelerate that. Data and internet revenues are still below 15% for operators. However, from the content producer's point of view, what you are saying to the operator is that you are acting like a gate and you are preventing me from reaching your audience. How the operator controls the operator portal fundamentally affects where the traffic gets distributed because of the power they have on that portal".

"You have to fight this out based on individual circumstances. In many cases, operators are prepared to have this discussion with you. The problem is they are not prepared to tell you who the correct person is to initiate the conversation with. There is a long history of organisations approaching operators with ideas that are not novel and don't add any value. The operators have built systems to prevent spending time with people who waste their time experimenting as opposed to being really serious and bringing something of value to the table".

Mobile media: what does it really mean and how is it changing our businesses?

The large number of mobile phones in Africa has left media owners wondering how to use the tool to their advantage and adapt current practices to reach audiences using mobile technology.

The make and model of cell phones in circulation vary greatly, and so handset detection is a very important step in the process. This ensures that images and text can be rescaled to fit any screen, so users with any handset can receive clear images and legible information.

Ver Se Innovation India's Virendra Gupta suggested that media organisations should enter into partnerships with local mobile operators, who have the expertise and infrastructure necessary to distribute media content to audiences, instead of investing in the technology themselves.

Grocott's Mail's Steve Kromberg explained how the oldest independent newspaper in South Africa has developed 'Grahamstown Now', a mobile platform that delivers news updates, information and advertiser specials to subscribers.

Kromberg said that by working closely with the advertisers, to find out their specific needs, 'Grahamstown Now' was able to ensure the continued use of their services and the success of the platform, while still catering to the interests of their readers.



How personalised broadcasting and live streaming are changing radio and TV

"Who died and put radio and TV programmers in charge of my life?"

Gone are the days when audiences were content to consume radio and television programmes at set times. Now they want to watch and listen when it suits them, and will produce their own content if the offerings of the media are not to their taste. Is user generated content the end of journalism?"

"People can make their own content, but the content that is the most popular is the content with the highest production value," explained **Kagiso Broadcasting's Nick Grubb**. He encouraged media organisations to produce unique, high quality content to ensure the continued success of their broadcast programmes. Information that can be found easily online through a simple search is unlikely to form the basis of compelling, exclusive and popular programming.

Ellington Kamba the M.D. of Research Bureau International a pan-African research agency based in Zimbabwe said that traditional radio stations are seeing a decline in listenership in some areas, as "the young consumer has access to portable mobile devices where they can download music" and stream radio programmes from stations in distant areas and even different countries.

CNN's Kim Norgaard explained how CNN's citizen journalism project, iReport, has become a way for the broadcaster to gather user generated content which, if it meets production standards, can be



Virendra Gupta



Steve Kromberg



Ellington Kamba

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broadcast alongside the stories produced by CNN staff. All of this is done at a fraction of the cost and the amount of time it takes to send reporters and film crews to distant locations.

He emphasised that the content is still the most important aspect of media production – the platforms used by the media may change even more in the future, but the content produced for those platforms must still be worth the audience's time.

QUOTES OF NOTE

Kostas Vrahnos (Athens Technology Centre) on the importance of monitoring staff's adaptation to new tasks and training them effectively in new technologies: "People working with an organisation for a long time are not happy with change but we need to actively bring them along on the journey if we are to succeed."

Mira Milosovic (WANIFRA – WAN Mobile Case Studies) on organisations' focus on generating revenue: "Digital media carries no guarantee that you're going to earn anything."

Ellington Kamba (Research Bureau International) on personalised, user-generated programming: "Legacy Media must realise that nowadays people can choose their own content and become their own programmer."

Nick Grubb (Kagiso Broadcasting) on trends in broadcast: "Radio as a medium has not kept up with the production values of TV and video. Radio station production hasn't increased or improved in the same way."

Kim Norgaard (CNN Africa) on User Generated Content (UGC): "As long as you have a system in place that verifies what you're getting, UGC is



Kostas Vrahnos



Mira Milosevic



Kim Norgaard



The African News Innovation Challenge (ANIC)

A \$1-million fund dedicated to media innovation and experimentation in Africa

AMI is proud to announce the creation of an annual innovation fund to drive experimentation and to lower costs and risks of innovation. Legacy media are facing great challenges and are therefore very risk averse. The idea is to draw on innovation models from around the world – including the Knight News Challenge in the United States which has proved that there is a wealth of creativity in legacy media. However, it is often a challenge to find people who can implement the engineering of those ideas.

Justin Arenstein of AMI explained that the fund AMI has put together will try to find tangible solutions to media challenges in Africa. It will have a wide ambit ranging from the journalism side of our work right to the back office systems that make our work profitable and sustainable. It is aimed at identifying solutions that can be scaled continentally and even globally.

Funding will range from small seed funding allowances of \$12 500 all the way up to \$100 000. The prize packages include additional news mentorship, engineering and innovation support, as well as rolling out market traction strategies.

Applications will happen in the second quarter of 2012. Rigorous judging processes will happen in the second half of 2012, where some applicants will be weeded out.

The first phase winners will be announced at the 2012 AMLF and money will be given out in stages so that people are assisted in meeting developmental benchmarks. The project aims to help people solve the unexpected problems they encounter in reaching their solutions. ANIC wants to be sure that solutions that are developed are appropriate for African newsrooms. AMI member organisations will be used to test these innovations and once working prototypes have been developed, winners will be assisted in taking them on a global road show.

A network of hacks and hackers chapters across Africa will be built separate from the awards process itself. These will be societies for individual journalists, programmers, developers and digital creatives to come together at least once a month to develop solutions to local problems that they are facing in their local economies and, more importantly, to take advantage of local opportunities.

Each chapter will roll out quarterly mini-challenges. The idea is that a pipeline of tested prototypes and proven ideas is created that can be channelled into the major million-dollar-a-year challenge.

Successes and failures will be documented in a repository of case studies. Failure is a necessary part of any innovation process.



Justin Arenstein

