

Mobiles will trigger digital economy boom on continent

Web access through mobiles will close the digital divide, says Robin Parker, MD of Bizcommunity.com. Speaking at the PublishOnline conference held in Cape Town yesterday, Wednesday, 21 November 2007, Parker said life will change drastically with the advent of smartphones. Phones of the future, he said, would be as fast and as capable as any laptop.

By [Vivian Warby](#), issued by [Bizcommunity.com](#) 22 Nov 2007

Parker was one of four speakers on the morning panel talking on “10 years of web publishing in South Africa, where to next?” The conference, hosted by The Skills Portal and sponsored by the Online Publishers Association (OPA), marked the 10 year anniversary of the online publishing industry in the country.

Mobile phones, said Parker, would change the African continent, giving it the ability to leapfrog into the digital future.

Grow in importance

Africa, he predicted, was set to grow in importance for the digital economy as a place to invest in. Web-based business would be based on mobile connectivity. It would boom on the continent, with 500 million mobiles set to be in Africa by 2011.

“That means companies will access to 50% of the population,” he said.

Parker suggested that companies that were only looking at SA to invest should start moving out into the balance of the continent. As it stands, Angola has the fastest media growth and Nigeria, the fastest mobile growth.

He predicted that while Africa had, up to now, been ignored by investors, that that was about to change.

“We need to dispel the notion that Africa is a poor country. In fact it abounds with skills and amazing entrepreneurial work

Africa, he said, had embraced Internet access and, in places like a lake in Uganda you would have a fisherman using his cell to ascertain where he would get the best return on his catch when deciding which market to sell his catch to.

“Will come rapidly”

In SA, until the monopoly is broken and enough people have access to broadband, initiatives were not as many as on the rest of the continent. “But when it comes here, it will come rapidly,” said Parker.

Matthew Buckland, GM of the *Mail & Guardian Online*, agreed. “We will definitely see the rise and rise of mobile Internet. We are already seeing rapid improvements in resolutions of screens.

“Mobiles will be the dominating platform to connect to the Internet.

“In Japan, already 70% of the population connects to the Internet via mobiles. This will become a world trend.”

Rise of individual entrepreneur

Buckland also predicted the rise of the individual entrepreneur with the unprecedented access to code and applications.

He said that a digital revolution would create opportunity for Africa and other developing countries. He believed literacy issues could be overcome with video and audio stream to phones. “It's coming.”

Both men predicted digital overload, digital fatigue and information overload. “We'll see doctors in the future prescribing

digital-free holidays,” said Buckland.

Mobile Internet was real and tangible and already in the market and working, added Graunt Kruger of Vodacom.

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