BIZCOMMUNITY

Africa finding its own solutions using mobile tech

By Dr KF Lai

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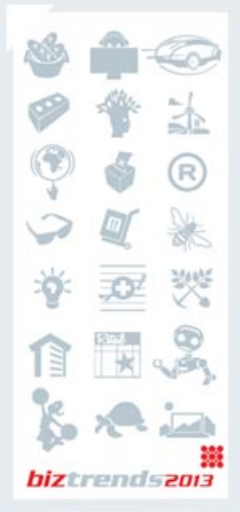
There are several key trends that will present themselves in 2013. Increasingly, we will see more and more innovative solutions to issues facing emerging countries being developed in-country and, while cost of smartphones is still hindering wide-scale usage of these handsets, the tide is turning as cheaper units enter the market. Marketers, too, are seeing their roles and responsibilities expand.



From m-payments to HIV/AIDS prevention, emerging markets are leading the way when it comes to innovative uses of mobile technology. Across Africa and Asia, "mobile phones are used less for talking and more today as platforms to support daily living," writes Robin Renee Sanders, a former US Ambassador to Nigeria, who argues that creative apps and mobile services are improving people's quality of life.

In South Africa, there is the M-ubuntu initiative. The pilot project was launched in mid-2012, and uses inexpensive, low-threshold mobile phone technologies to empower teachers to address the country's literacy crisis. There is also an NGO called Refugees United which "offers a safe, secure and anonymous way to find family and friends".

As for m-commerce, without question, in parts of Africa, in South and Southeast Asia, mobile commerce is now mainstream.

"In banking and finance, the big ideas in cashless transfers and mobile, flexible exchanges are not to be found in Geneva or London or New York," Ken Banks writes for *National Geographic*. "A revolution in mobile money transfer has occurred, but not in these financial centres. Instead, it's happened in Kenya."

In this East African nation of 43 million people, almost anyone you meet has used a phone to make a transaction. Over 90% of the population has a phone (up from just 3% in 1999) and 96% of mobile phone users has used a handset to make a mobile payment or for m-banking. Kenyans use their phones to pay electric bills, taxi fares, get cash or even buy produce and other essentials in rural markets.

Kenya may be ahead of the curve, but it is far from alone.

In the year ahead, we thoroughly expect more mobile innovations to originate in developing countries, which already account for the majority of the world's mobile users.

The rise of affordable smartphones

A massive migration from feature phones to smartphones is currently underway. In some markets, nearly everyone is using a smartphone. Global adoption of the device has reportedly topped one billion handsets. And, in at least 30 countries, at least half of all mobile surfers are using smartphones.

Based on BuzzCity's most recent traffic statistics, here's a look at the top 10 countries for smartphone use in December 2012.

	Country	% smartphone penetration
1.	Japan	82%
2.	Switzerland	80%

3.	Kuwait	80%
4.	Oman	79%
5.	Denmark	76%
6.	Brunei	74%
7.	Israel	73%
8.	Iraq	70%
9.	Palestine	69%
10.	Qatar	68%

	African country	% smartphone penetration
1.	Egypt	37%
2.	South Africa	19%
3.	Tanzania	13%
4.	Kenya	12%
5.	Nigeria	12%
6.	Ghana	10%

Consumer preference for smartphones is undeniable, thanks in part to lower prices. The fact that smartphones are gaining ground is not nearly as surprising as the explosive nature of the growth. Watch out for rapid shifts in Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico and the Philippines in the year ahead.

Smartphones are also gaining ground in African markets though it might take a bit longer, say, into 2014, before we see wholesale smartphone penetration there. Overall, by the end of the year, 75-80% of the global handset market should be dominated by smartphones.

And what does all this mean for marketers? Across our network we see savvy marketers targeting consumers on feature phones even before they migrate to smartphone use. This trend will continue as more mobile commerce becomes more prevalent.

Marketers become data crunchers

It used to be that when people in our industry talked about fragmentation, they were lamenting the huge variety of handset models and operating systems. Now, though, fragmentation increasingly refers to the variety of media channels.

It's no secret that the days of Mad Men, when you could simply design a great magazine ad or TVC are long gone. But today's media world is also extremely different from that of just a few years ago as well. More than ever, consumer attention is divided across multiple screens - television, mobile, computer, tablet, radio and print - and a plethora of channels within each media. Building critical mass is difficult now and will only grow harder.

In addition, I could be watching a TV programme on my tablet while surfing sites on my phone. Which media will influence my purchasing behaviour? And how will marketers deliver a message to me while my attention is divided?

Start by analysing your own campaigns in detail. If you work with multiple ad networks, consolidate the data. Do the same for PC networks. Then factor in data from your QR and SMS campaigns. At every turn, brands and agencies will view ads as an exercise in integrated marketing: activate, analyse data, optimise, amend, analyse in a repeating cycle.

The key for marketers going forward is definitely data analysis. Get used to crunching numbers.

Mobile first

Increasingly, advertisers will develop strategies for mobile first, then work outwards to progressively enhance their campaigns for larger screens. This is pretty much the opposite of the current approach of many brands, which spend less on mobile and sometimes treat it as an afterthought.

But there are some six billion mobile subscriptions worldwide, according to ITU. Plus, there are now more than one billion active smartphones, according to Strategic Analytics, which estimates that this threshold was crossed in the third quarter of 2012. (Strategic Analytics also says that Africa has the potential to add another one billion smartphones by 2015.)

In a world where smartphones are mainstream and there are two times as many cellphones as televisions and computers combined, it makes sense to put mobile first.

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