

App teaches business skills to Kenyan shop owners

A new digital app is being piloted by store owners in Nairobi, Kenya to learn basic business skills vital to managing a profitable retail shop. This innovative e-learning platform was designed and created by TBWA\Khanga Rue and the Busara Centre for Behavioural Economics in collaboration with non-profit organisation, TechnoServe.



The app is part of TechnoServe's "Smart Duka" program that aims to bridge the skills gap among Kenyan store owners.

In Nairobi and other Kenyan cities, dukas ("small-scale stores/shops" in Swahili) are the primary source of basic goods for most of the population and serve as a vital engine for employment and economic activity in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. However, little formal training is available to duka owners, who must learn "on the job" how to run a business.

The initial behavioural analysis completed by the Busara Centre confirmed the need for accessible and digital training to duka owners who are both time and cash poor. With that in mind, the training curriculum, originally designed for in-person training, was transformed into a digital format.

Varied learning materials

Through the mobile app, duka owners enrol in a curriculum that includes video learning modules on merchandising, marketing, customer care, bookkeeping, and inventory management. Students can also access case studies of real Nairobi dukas that have successfully applied the lessons, and each class is followed by interactive quizzes and learning comprehension surveys.

The app was developed as part of TechnoServe's groundbreaking "Smart Duka" program - funded by the Citi Foundation, the MasterCard Centre for Inclusive Growth, Eelea Foundation, Moody's Corporation, and other donors - which aims to empower small store owners with business skills vital for managing a profitable shop. Three partners collaborated to bring this mobile app to life: TBWA\Khanga Rue's creative team,

TechnoServe's technical team and Busara's programming and behavioural analysis teams.

"We merged our strength in creative content design with Busara's robust capacity in programming, data mining, and of course, behavioural analysis, to create a truly immersive and interactive learning experience for the student," says Pat Olvera, creative director of TBWA\Khanga Rue.

In addition to providing behavioural analysis, The Busara Centre developed all the post-class interactive elements, executed the programming, and provides data analysis of user activity.

"Over the past four years, we have seen that the Smart Duka curriculum helps shop owners to significantly increase their sales and profits. This app will allow us to deliver that training to a larger audience, and it will help our programs to be more efficient and cost-effective," said Alice Waweru, TechnoServe's Kenya entrepreneurship portfolio lead.

"It's also a great example of three very different organisations, each with a unique skill-set, coming together to create something innovative, scalable, and transformative."

Chaning Jang, Busara's chief strategy officer explained the value of digital learning, "Developing digital training materials for a mobile platform was an exciting endeavour, both in the programming of app, but also in applying behavioral science principles to develop the post-class interactive elements that measure understanding. The promise of being able to understand specific user behaviour and tailor future course content for each learning journey has incredible potential to transform learning in these contexts."

Currently, there are approximately 500 shop owners piloting the app in Nairobi. Eventually, TechnoServe together with its partners aims to enrol at least 40,000 shop or "duka" owners in Kenya alone, with plans to expand to Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Tanzania.

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