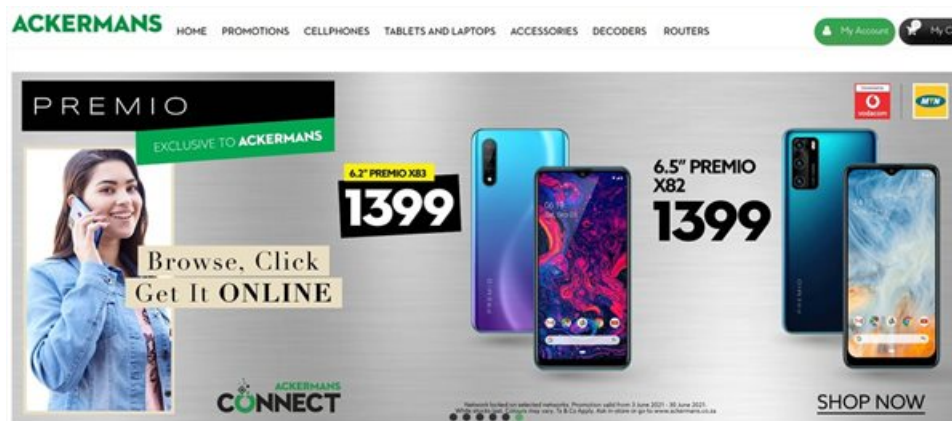


Ackermans doubles down on cellular with Ackermans Connect online

By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Ackermans shook up its digital presence recently, dipping its toe into the online retail waters by launching a dedicated online store for its cellular and tech products.



Source: Ackermans Connect online

The [Ackermans Connect online platform](#) houses a wide variety of cellphones and accessories like earphones, speakers and power banks, alongside a small selection of other connective devices.

Foray into online

With an expanding physical footprint comprising over 800 stores, Ackermans is a formidable retail brand in South Africa, and its positioning as a value retailer has stood it in good stead during the pandemic as cash-strapped consumers gravitated towards more affordable products.

But even with a solid presence and performance, in the midst of lockdown Ackermans recognised the need to offer its shoppers easier access to its cellular products.

Ackermans cellular manager Michael Grace explained, "When lockdown was announced in March 2020, our customers were subsequently unable to access our stores – yet the demand for connectivity increased as consumers were driven online."

Introduced in 1998, cellular has become a strong category for Ackermans, which sells over 2,5 million handsets every year. With the launch of Ackermans Connect online in March this year, it's become more convenient for shoppers to access these products through an additional Ackermans retail channel online.

Affordable product range

Through the Ackermans Connect platform, the retailer is enabling easy online access to the same tech products sold in Ackermans stores, and is offering some devices and gadgets previously only available from the Ackermans Connect physical stores located in Gauteng.

Ackermans Connect online also boasts a curated selection of higher-end products that will be exclusive to the online store, such as JBL earphones and the Samsung Galaxy A51 phone.

The product selection on the site is understandably heavily weighted towards mobile phones, from brands including Samsung, Huawei, Nokia, Hisense, Mobicel and of course Ackermans' in-house brand Premio. There are also a few laptops, tablets, modems and routers, as well as a selection of accessories from the likes of Volcano, SanDisk, JBL, Amplify, Pro Bass and Premio.



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Consumer tech is a competitive space to play in online, but Ackermans doesn't seem to be too focused on taking on the online giants as far as premium flagship models are concerned. The retailer knows that its market is made up largely of shoppers who appreciate good value, and Ackermans caters to them well.

As such, pricing on the Ackermans Connect online store is competitive and there's a wide range available for anyone in the market for a cellphone in the budget entry-level segment to the lower end of the mid-range segment. At the time of writing, there were 120 mobile phones listed - from the simple Itel 2190 feature phone retailing for R169, to the R499 Hisense U605 smartphone, up to the Samsung Galaxy A51 and Huawei P Smart for R5,999.

Starting price for Premio devices is R199 for a feature phone and R599 for the Premio S51 smartphone. Prices in this phone range don't exceed R1,399, making it an affordable (and rather good-looking) option for consumers looking to get connected cheaply.

Ackermans launched the Premio range in January 2016 with one device and one tablet, in a bid to offer customers an affordable but reliable handset. There are now 10 smartphones in the range, including two LTE devices introduced in May this year. According to the retailer, additional smartphones with enhanced processing power will be launched before year-end. Premio accessories available include cables, micro SD cards, power banks as well as earphones, including earbuds and stems.

On the higher end of the spectrum, I was sent the Samsung A21s, one of the devices stocked on Ackermans Connect, in light of the online store launch. The mid-range A-series is one of Samsung's most successful lineups, and retailing at R3,699 the A21s is a budget-friendly option in a range known for good design and capable features.



Samsung A21s. Source: Samsung

Battery life is the A21s' strength. This device comes equipped with a massive 5,000mAh battery cell that delivers up to two days of battery life with moderate to light use. It also offers a large display, solid daylight photography and design-wise, it's easy on the eye.

Site design, payments and delivery

The Ackermans Connect microsite is accessible at <https://shop.ackermans.co.za/>, but can also easily be found and navigated to from the main Ackermans website. The site design is simple, unfussy and uncluttered, making it user-friendly and unintimidating to consumers who may be new to online shopping.

The modular design looks especially good on mobile, which is likely the device most Ackermans customers would use to browse and shop online.

Product descriptions were sparse or missing in some instances, a detail that needs fleshing out especially for the purpose of comparison shopping, which is so often conducted online and when shopping for tech products in particular.

Accepted payment methods are currently limited to credit card and instant EFT, processed by trusted service provider PayU. It would be ideal to see more flexibility in this area in future – perhaps allowing cash on delivery, QR code payments, a buy-now-pay-later service, and the ability to purchase using one's Ackermans store account – as payment flexibility is something seasoned online shoppers are coming to expect more from e-tailers.



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Shoppers get free delivery for orders R500 and above, while purchases below this amount come with a R99 delivery fee. The introduction of a click and collect option, considering Ackermans extensive store network, would perhaps appeal to shoppers making a purchase below R500. My guess is that if a customer is buying a cellphone below R500, they probably won't be too keen on the additional delivery charge.

Delivery in major towns and cities takes between five and seven days, and all returns need to be made in store.

The Ackermans Connect online store is a solid framework on which to build. Looking ahead, the retailer says its goal is to provide a fulfilling online experience that includes more choice at competitive prices, and an online offering that evolves in line with changing customer needs and preferences.

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