

Mobile Technology - Enriching the lives of the less fortunate: Part 1

 By [Yusuf Begg](#)

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"The digital divide is beginning to close. The flow of digital information through mobile phones, text messaging, and the internet is now reaching the world's masses, even in the poorest countries, bringing with it a revolution in economics, politics, and society." says Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.



Africa is a continent burdened with shortages that result from years of political instability, ethnic conflict, climate change, colonisation and other man-made mechanisms. It is evident that regions plagued by extreme poverty usually equate to extreme isolation and now mobile technology is attempting to breach the communication gap between the 'have' and 'have not' that results from years of social and economic separation.

Why mobile?

Many underprivileged African communities are limited in their access to media and communication. Accessing the internet from desktop or laptop computers is significantly limited and traditional forms of media, such as television and radio, encourage far less interactivity between organizations and masses.

Currently, there are more than 450 million mobile phones in Africa; that's one cell phone for every two people on the continent. Mobile penetration's rapid increase is bridging the gap and ending extreme isolation, proving to be the most transformative technology of economic and social development. The mobile initiatives of the Praekelt Foundation have ensured communities have access to services or information previously inaccessible to them. Praekelt's current programs concentrate on healthcare, education and even employment.

A little bit about the Praekelt Foundation

The Praekelt Foundation is an African non-profit organisation dedicated to using mobile technology to improve the lives of people living in poverty. Gustav Praekelt founded the organisation in 2007 in his response to the rapid spread of mobile phone use throughout Africa and the opportunities it created. The foundation understands the versatility of mobile devices in that it can communicate with users via SMS, MMS, USSD, e-mail and mobile internet (WAP) platforms.

Their programs now reach more than 50 million people across fifteen countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Praekelt's aim is to create the next generation of mobile services for the developing world by ensuring scalable, open source, mobile technology that enables a myriad of apps to be built. These deployed solutions are flexible, cost effective, designed to facilitate dialogue between the audience and service provider, and meet the demands of emerging markets.

The foundation is involved in some notable projects. They include:

- **Young Africa Live** - a mobile portal platform designed to be a space where young people can talk and learn about critical issues that affect their lives: love, sex, relationships, HIV and AIDS
- **Project Masiluleke** - employing mobile phones and other technologies as high impact, low cost tools, in the fight against HIV/AIDS in South Africa
- **Yoza Cellphone Stories** - a project developed in conjunction with the Shuttleworth Foundation to promote youth literacy using short cellphone stories, or m-novels
- **TxtAlert** - an appointment reminder system for people on chronic medication

Affiliated with the Mobile Marketing Association

The Praekelt Foundation is a member of the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA), whose primary focus is to establish mobile as an indispensable part of the marketing mix. The MMA is very diverse and its members include agencies, advertisers, handheld device manufacturers, wireless operators and service providers, retailers, software and services providers, as well as any company focused on the potential of marketing via the mobile channel.

ABOUT YUSUF BEGG

Yusuf Begg is currently working as part of the MMA SA team (Mobile Advertising Association of South Africa) to establish mobile as an indispensable part of the marketing mix and to promote, educate, measure, guide and protect the mobile marketing industry worldwide. Contact Yusuf on ybegg1983@gmail.com and follow @D1g1boyB on Twitter.

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