

## African media scramble for audiences - *African Film and TV Yearbook*

Media in Africa have expanded rapidly in Africa over the past few years with an increase in the number of radio stations as well as television channels available to audiences. Other forms of media have been introduced including pay TV channels, DVDs and time-shifting technology creating a wider spectrum to choose from. Balancing Act's *African Film and TV Yearbook* provides an overview of the industry and a listing of film and TV companies in Africa.

SMS information services and the Internet are eating away at the edges of the audiences, according to the latest edition of *African Film and TV Yearbook* (2009/2010) published by Balancing Act.

Dakar will shortly have seven television stations, not including the three Pay-TV channels. Lagos has 13 television stations and three main Pay-TV channels. Kinshasa has over 40 television stations, many of which show pirated television content. In this circumstance, no channel will get more than 20-30% of audience share on a regular basis.

According to the *African Film and TV Yearbook*, while Pay-TV may seem a very modest presence in most countries, its audience reach is understated by its subscriber numbers as it is widely watched in public places. Furthermore, piracy means that a large number of additional subscribers (sometimes double the number) are watching without paying for content.

Vernacular radio has exploded and the number of radio stations is exponentially larger than for television stations as many of them are much more local. Uganda has 150 stations and Kenya over 90. But whilst radio might have a wider and deeper audience reach than television, the fragmentation makes it difficult for advertisers to reach their audiences.

The standard broadcasting formats that seemed to serve so well in less competitive times are now being taken apart and put back together by the viewers and listeners themselves. Legitimate and pirated DVDs provide a steady stream of relatively cheap entertainment, particularly of films. Recent releases may command a better price but three relatively old action movies (Bruce Lee, Stephen Seagal, that kind of thing) can be bought for around US\$2. PVRs, streaming and catch-up downloads will all become a reality as part of the dividend of cheaper bandwidth in 2009.

According to one of the contributors to the *Yearbook*, Russell Southwood: "African broadcasting is undergoing a profound transformation and the transition to digital broadcasting will add even more broadcast channels to the mix. As a result, themed channels, as we already see on Pay TV, will begin to emerge".

Middle class Africans are using a growing array of devices. Laptop use is growing as sales of this kind of computer begin to equal those of desktop PCs. High-end smart phones like Blackberries and iPhones are increasingly visible. One African

carrier has 800,000 high-end phones on its network.

These devices are not just for doing work or making phone calls. They have become media in their own right. Recent surveys show that in North Africa 3-7% of the population cited SMS as one of their most used daily information sources. Likewise the Internet is set to have a much greater impact with the spread of broadband subscriptions.

According to Alexa.com, Facebook and You Tube are already amongst the Top 10 sites in the African countries that it analyses. Again based on survey work, between 1-8% of the population used the Internet daily across a range of very different countries. With cheaper international bandwidth, these figures will increase slowly but surely. Mobile Internet will become cheaper and play an increasingly large role in people's lives.

Current ad spend on the Internet and SMS is tiny but ad money will migrate as it gets larger. This is money that will most likely be lost to newspapers which seem the most vulnerable as the media landscape's tectonic plates begin to shift.

So what can the African broadcaster do faced with all of this? There are two ways to stay in the game: by using new media to extend the appeal of interesting content across all platforms and by stealing new media's best ideas and using them to survive. Unfortunately too few TV stations have invested in convincingly local TV content that might well provide the adhesive that would keep viewers eyeballs glued to the their channel.

Balancing Act's *African Film and TV Yearbook* (2009/2010) has two parts: an overview of the industry and a listing of film and TV companies in Africa. The industry overview provides a mixture of analysis and data on the following topics: Africa's slow transition to digital broadcasting; the fragmenting media landscape; a question of what you understand - co-productions and local language groups; the African Broadcast and Film industry - some key metrics; different approaches to encouraging local film production; and the Best of Africa?: - A selection and analysis of 100 films chosen by European Film Festivals.

The second part of the *Yearbook* contains a full listing of African film and television companies broken down by country as well as a section with useful international addresses for anyone in the sector in Africa. There is also two specially focused listings: one looks at Film Location Agencies and Screen Commissions across the continent and the other lists companies and education institutions providing film and television training.

**Source:** [Balancing Act](#)

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