Kwesé TV disrupts pay-TV market in Africa

By Louise Marsland

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Kwesé is the new kid on the block in African TV, built to respond to the way audiences want to access and consume content: from subscribing to their monthly contract or a three day viewership, it is inspired by the ‘TV everywhere revolution'.



Joseph Hundah

Kwesé TV is multiplatform, so viewers can access content on numerous platforms, including the Kwesé app. It has been launched in several African countries, including Ghana, Zambia, Rwanda, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Swaziland and Uganda.

Joseph Hundah, president and CEO of Kwesé TV, talks to Bizcommunity.Africa, about how the brand has disrupted the TV market and trends in the pay-TV industry to look out for.

How has Kwesé disrupted the TV market on the African continent?

Kwesé is premised on the concept of TV everywhere and anywhere - we are revolutionising the media industry in Africa by catering to the changing needs of today’s globally connected African viewer. Kwesé’s multi-platform offering, as well as the diversity of premium and exclusive content we have, sets us apart from any of our competitors.

We are also the first media company to create the largest pan-African Free-to-Air channel by geography and viewership: Kwesé Free Sports, which is available in 25 markets across the continent.

In addition to this, Kwesé also provides flexible payment options that cater for diverse budgets. These include three-day, seven-day and 30-day subscription options to our full content bouquet.

What is your business focus right now?

We are focused on expanding our reach on the continent and will be launching our offering in more markets before the end of the year, with the ambition of being in all English speaking markets. Kwesé has invested in a multi-platform content distribution model which it has expanded to include IPTV, with the recent launch of Kwesé Play in South Africa. More and more homes are getting connected through fibre-to-the-home, so we felt it's the opportune time to take advantage of this. We endeavour to meet current trends in moving with the digitally savvy consumer who has shown a move towards over-the-top (OTT) services, particularly among viewers looking for diversity and choice. Launching in South Africa first, this product will be available in the rest of the continent soon.

Key to the launch of Kwesé Play is our distribution and marketing partnership with Netflix. This is a ground breaking partnership, which is a first of its kind for Netflix. We will have the ability to accept payments in local currency using our integrated billing gateways. Netflix is available on all our Kwesé Play Set Top Boxes

How does Kwesé as a brand differentiate itself from competitors in the industry?

Kwesé provides a multiplatform approach which means subscribers can consume content wherever and whenever they want. We also went out of our way to acquire the best in entertainment programming available to us, content that is exclusive to Kwesé and completely new to the African market. Moreover this content is available at a fair price. People can only access the NBA, ESPN and other leading sports content exclusively on Kwesé. On the entertainment side we are bringing cutting edge youth content that has never been seen in Africa before, including VICELAND and Diddy's music channel REVOLT, amongst others.

Kwesé also offers flexible billing which is something pay TV viewers have been requesting for a long time

The biggest trends to note in the pay TV industry?

Internet connectivity has been improving in the continent, the amount of data traffic and the exponential growth in mobile penetration shows rapid development towards digitisation. This then means issues of internet connectivity are slowly being alleviated. There is a growing trend towards mobile video consumption as data costs drop across the continent. There is also an increase in connected homes with faster speeds.

Consumers look for content that is relevant to them and our audiences now want to pay for what they consume, which has resulted in the pay TV industry curating slimmer, more niche bouquets.

What is your main challenge?

We see every challenge as an opportunity to demonstrate the value of our offering in the market. Operating across different markets introduces an additional level of complexity to any business. The need to understand different in-market nuances will always present a challenge but it also encourages innovation.

An important aspect of operating in different markets is navigating the regulatory frameworks which govern each country. This requires significant focus and can take time, but we have found that dealing with various regulatory bodies across the continent has been of benefit to our business and the industry. Progress and advancements in the legislative and regulatory frameworks has also been encouraging. We are seeing increased consistency when it comes to the application processes across various markets, as well as willingness by regulators to create an operating environment which is conducive for investment. This is a positive development in terms of encouraging new industry players like ourselves to invest in and cement a strong footprint across borders.

Lack of critical skills in the media space in Africa has been a hindrance to our business. This is really a reflection of the lack of development of the pay TV media space.

While we have been successful, acquiring exclusive premium content was tough due to the relationships built with incumbent pay TV competitors. This really required great resolve from the management team and a realisation that competition is always good for any industry by most rights holders. Some of these rights were also artificially high, especially for a continent like Africa.

What is your core strategy?

African viewers are increasingly looking for choice, quality and more importantly, access and convenience. We bring this or as we like to say, #wegotthis, and so much more with our content and how we engage with our viewers through our various touchpoints. We're young, dynamic and we have a model which is made to express these qualities and speak to our viewers wherever they may be on the continent.

We are proud to be a supporter of home-grown content and we are producing and curating some of this continent's finest in terms of production and original programming.

We understand that it isn't enough to have the best programming, we have to make it accessible to audiences. At Kwesé this means disrupting the traditional payment model by giving customers choice in how they consume our content. We've already highlighted the fact that our programming is available on multiple platforms, on every screen. Through our innovative payment options, viewers can also choose how to pay for our services. This true 'pay-as-you-watch' service turns the traditional pay-TV model on its head. This flexibility is as a result of our internal systems and our strategic partnership with businesses in complementary industries within the media and ICT ecosystems. Our model is responsive to the realities facing our viewers and we have focused on giving them choice and flexibility. We have built our business to respond to their needs and make our services accessible.

How do you make an impact in the industry?
The only way to impact an industry is a strong understanding of consumer needs and trends. We spent a lot of time determining how we could be different and how we can serve customers with the best content possible.

The creation of local content is going to set us apart and we are heavily focussed on this. Ultimately however it's all about innovation, innovation and more innovation. We are not afraid to try out new things.

Where do you draw your creative inspiration?
I am not sure I can call myself creative but I would say that we have some of the brightest, hardest working minds in Africa working with us at Kwesé. These wonderful people are constantly questioning everything about the industry and how things are done - this forces innovative and maverick thinking, which keeps me on my toes.

How do you inspire others?
I like to lead from the front. I am very clear on our vision and I constantly articulate this to our team. Above all however, I work extremely hard and hopefully this gets everyone else going.

Your life philosophy?
Treat others as you would like to be treated. Work hard, stay humble and never give up.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMCG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.
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