

Airtel, Ver se' Innovation develops mHealth platform

Airtel Africa on Friday, 2 March 2012, announced a key partnership with Ver se' Innovation, taking a step towards the development of its mobile health (mHealth) platform. The partnership, marked by the launch of the teleco's 'Mobile Health Tips' feature, sees the two companies come together to provide low cost, easily accessible mobile health services to consumers across Africa.

The initiative aims to bridge the information gap about healthcare issues, raise awareness and enhance understanding about these issues, and educate customers on how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Through the 'Mobile Health Tips' feature, Airtel hopes to improve overall health of the population by encouraging behavioural changes that can reduce or prevent diseases such as Malaria and HIV.

"Our goal is to work with our consumers to overcome the healthcare challenges being faced on the continent," explains Andre Beyers, chief marketing officer at Airtel Africa. "The growing need for consumers to be informed and educated about healthcare provides us with a huge opportunity to help educate those who do not have constant access to healthcare services and professionals. Our first initiative under the mHealth platform - 'Mobile Health Tips' - will enable Airtel customers to receive reliable health education through their mobile phones at any time during the day."

Tackling health issues

A majority of the population faces several challenges in accessing quality healthcare advice and services in person. Many rural areas, for example, lack medical health professionals and facilities. According to reports by the World Health Organisation (WHO), on average, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have less than 20 doctors per 100 000 people. Furthermore, in areas of increased accessibility to healthcare, many are unable to afford the services. The reports suggest that inhabitants of SSA spend an average of US\$6 per capita on healthcare services compared to inhabitants of more developed nations who spend over \$200.

It was for this reason that Airtel decided to partner with Ver se' Innovation. Founded in 2007, the company creates a range of value added services which are specifically crafted for emerging markets of the world. Ver se' services over 390 million mobile phone users worldwide through its various products applications.

Improving lifestyles

Virendra Gupta, CEO of Ver se' Innovation says, "Mobile VAS services are not only about music, gaming, and entertainment. The real value of mobility is driven through services and applications that deliver significant value to the lives of consumers in emerging markets across the world where technology has made it possible for people across all walks and situations in life to access information that helps them improve their lifestyles. Ver se' is committed to delivering such products and services that help MNOs worldwide deliver added value while also pioneering new revenue streams in VAS

The mHealth market's worth is predicted to hit US\$23 billion globally in terms of revenue by 2017, according to a recent report, 'Touching Lives through Mobile Health: Assessment of the Global Market Opportunity', released by the GSM Association (GSMA). The report predicts that US\$1.2 billion of this revenue will come from Africa, but that this milestone must be driven by mobile technology which will play a significant role in providing healthcare services.

The growth of mHealth platforms

"These results are very telling of the scale and potential of mHealth both on the continent, and on a more global level," explains Beyers. "Indeed it is true that mobile service providers will play an integral role in propelling mHealth to reach this potential. However, we cannot work alone. Collaboration between service providers, local governments, regulators, the

healthcare industry and consumers is absolutely vital."

The GSMA report explains that the entire healthcare ecosystem must work together to adopt mHealth services. The report suggests that governments worldwide must embrace policy agendas on mHealth and encourage its use by public healthcare providers. It also suggests that governments should incentivise private providers to deliver mHealth services. Furthermore, widespread acceptance amongst the healthcare industry and medical professionals, as well as user adoption, will help drive the growth and market opportunity for these services.

Airtel's first mHealth product to hit the market, 'Mobile Health Tips', will offer subscribers a comprehensive range of tips from different categories. Based on their needs, customers can subscribe to one or more packs with multiple categories that include medical conditions such as Malaria, Cancer, HIV; life issues such as parenting, beauty and personal care, and exercise tips; nutritional information; and many more. All tips are delivered directly to the consumer's mobile phone through an SMS.

Airtel will continue to add more features and services to its mHealth platform in the coming months including SMS appointment reminders for health institutions and a pan-African drug authentication service that will help prevent the use of counterfeit drugs. The teleco also has plans to launch a medical helpline that will allow consumers to speak directly to medical professionals about healthcare issues.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>