

# Top five predictions for the African PR and communications industry in 2016

By [Claudine Moore](#) 29 Jan 2016

As the African economy grows, more sophisticated PR and communications services will be required across this diverse continent.

Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the fastest-growing economic zone in the world, and the final GDP across the region is expected to be recorded at 4.5%, overtaking Asia's regional average of 4.3% annual growth. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects lists six African nations in the top 13 countries around the world with the highest projected compounded annual growth rate from 2014 to 2017.

This economic surge and subsequent business development growth from both international and local companies has been mirrored by the increased need for worldclass PR and communications across the continent.



Benchmarks of this growth in the African PR and communications industry in 2015 include the move by agency Hill+Knowlton Strategies to expand its footprint on the continent by opening an office in the key West African market of Nigeria earlier this year as well as the increase in the need for fully fledged pan-African communications and PR campaigns spanning several markets, such as the launch of the Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurship Program, which spanned all 54 countries across Africa.

Over the last several years, I have been heavily involved in the African business landscape. As 2016 promises to bring more advances and change, here are my top five predictions for the African PR and communications space.

## **Affiliates out, new agency openings in**

To date, international PR agencies have typically worked with affiliates and consultants across the continent in an ad-hoc fashion when business needs required activation in a particular market. Of the top 10 global F

agencies, fewer than three have an actual office in Nigeria, the biggest market in Africa and a key hub for business activities across the growing western region.

With rapidly expanding client interests across the continent, expect to see global agencies bite the bullet and mirror this expansion by opening offices in key markets such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana to partner with clients in a fully integrated and seamless way to provide world-class communications.

### **Increased need for professional training**

A recent survey from Russell Reynolds Associates, a global headhunting company, highlighted a major scarcity in top executive talent to handle the new roles created by investments in the region. Sourcing top communications talent is an issue. According to the survey, the talent gap has proven to be a make-or-buy issue for top companies.

With this in mind, more African organisations will be forced to aggressively seek further professional training for their PR and communications executives in domestic markets. New media skills, sophisticated content development, crisis communications, and effective social media strategies are just some of the skills required to ensure they can deliver the world-class communications organisations need to compete on the international and regional stage.

### **Upsurge in US-based African communication experts**

Earlier this month, the US Chamber of Commerce announced the formation of the US Africa Business Center, which will launch efforts to lead the US business community in a new period of unprecedented engagement with Africa's vast regional economic communities, the established African private sector, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

The opening of this centre will undoubtedly lead to US-based consultancy firms and PR and communications agencies to have an in-house Africa expert or consultant on board to help their US clients who have an interest in expansion on the continent. For many, Africa still seems far, remote, and distant, and the establishment of US-based in-house expertise will position agencies to align closer with their clients' communications and overall business-development needs.

### **Mobile marketing on the move**

In Africa, mobile usage is high and access to desktop computers is comparatively low. As mobile penetration continues to increase, the opportunity for PR and communications campaigns to leverage this platform will grow and is set to become more entrenched as a key communications medium in 2016.

Despite nuances in target audiences, in more digitally sophisticated markets such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, it will increasingly become standard practice for PR and communications campaigns to include mobile marketing as an intrinsic and essential platform to reach target audiences, especially the rapidly growing and digitally connected under 35 middle-class demographic.

### **Continued rise of public affairs**

Business and politics is intrinsically mixed and lends to a complicated and sometimes chaotic business environment in several markets across the continent. It must be noted that one size does not fit all, and while public affairs as a discipline will undoubtedly continue to grow in 2016, more emphasis will be placed on

leveraging highly customised local content to address local issues.

The use of global best practices in public affairs adapted for the diverse markets in Africa will be essential. Other changes to come in 2016 include the more sophisticated use of social media across all industries, increased recognition and awards for campaigns executed in Africa, and more involvement in capacitating journalists to help address the shortage of specialist journalists across the continent.

Considering the above, combined with the steady simmer of business activity, 2016 promises to be a year of significant advancement in the African PR and communications space.

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