

## Econet Media puts bet on fast-growing e-sports

Econet Media is betting heavily on e-sports, the latest phenomenon in online gaming. The online video activity is gaining popularity across the world, attracting millions of viewers. Lately, broadcasters have sought ways to enter the lucrative market.



FA on Econet

Econet Media has secured an online channel from ESL, a company that organises e-sports tournaments. The channel is available on Econet Media's Kwese app and showcases video games competitions.

The popularity of e-sports has surged in recent years on improved internet access. Econet Media is a subsidiary of Econet Group, founded by businessman Strive Masiyiwa.

There was an opportunity for Kwese to own the e-sports space in sub-Saharan Africa, Econet Media CEO Joseph Hundah said. It planned to make the ESL channel available on its pay-TV platform when it launches in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

"E-sports is a big part of our strategy," said Hundah. While the sport is still in its early stages, with no formal body, Hundah said that would change as it garnered more interest from investors. "This is a new revolution in sports," said Hundah.

"There are people that are spending time watching video games competitions. There are even commentators for these games. It is quite fascinating," said Hundah.

The players and viewers are sometimes based in different countries. Econet Media does not have plans to develop its own games, but it will host tournaments to promote e-sports on its platform.

In SA, where the online gaming market is estimated to be valued at R3bn, companies such as Telkom, Kagiso and MWeb have hosted and sponsored online video games. In November 2016, Kagiso Media, through e-sports platform Mega8, hosted its first tournament in a bid to grow and further legitimise the industry.

Kagiso Media chief innovation officer, Vincent Maher, said the tournament was a success and attracted 7,000 viewers. With more tournaments expected to be held in 2017, "brand interest is at an all-time high and there are going to be lots of new sponsors entering the space", Maher said.

A report by US-based Super Data Research released in July 2016 predicts e-sports viewership will reach 303-million by 2019 from an expected 214million by the end of 2016. The report says e-sports is becoming more mainstream and that has attracted traditional media channels such as ESPN.

Broadcasters now have e-sports programmes on their platforms. "There is a growing interest in advertising to the coveted millennial male demographic on a medium they know well," the report says.

Source: [\*Business Day\*](#).

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