

Kuza Mobile - inspired by local entrepreneurs

 By [Anton Crone](#) 13 Sep 2012

When Pieter Nel takes a break it means getting as far away from technology as he can. So, after leaving MXit as chief technology officer, he decided a stint in the Himalayas would be just the thing.

There, amid remote glaciers and mountains, trudging in the wake of yaks and sherpas, Nel heard the shrill flutter of Peruvian pipes and thought he had finally found contentment - but Peruvian pipes? Then a Sherpa fished around in his pocket and answered his phone.

Expanding access to mobile communication

Of course this will be of no surprise. We live in a shrinking world due to our ever expanding access to mobile communication. But the emphasis that Nel puts on this Himalayan moment is the benefit that mobile technology holds for the entrepreneur in remote emerging markets.

"That Sherpa's livelihood depends on the weather and access to trekking tours that fly into the Himalayas," explains Nel. "Before, he would have had to trek down from his village and wait out the unpredictable weather at the airport to be sure he was in line for a porter job. Now, he can get up to date weather reports wherever he is and let people know his availability by phone."



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Back in Africa, Nel ended up on a warm beach in Tofo, Mozambique (if you're wondering if he ever works, that bit's coming). He watched fishermen offloading their catch and, after buying the freshest possible fish for dinner, he wondered how the fishermen could get as much of their catch sold in the shortest, freshest time possible.

And then there was Kuza Mobile

Ironically, these technology-escaping holidays inspired a new piece of mobile technology. Last year, Nel, and user experience specialist, Andrew Maunder, created Kuza Mobile.

In Swahili, Kuza means: flourish or grow, and this is ultimately what they want the businesses of small-scale entrepreneurs to do using their new location based business platform for mobile phones.



Maunder talks to traders at the spice market in Old Town, Mombasa

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"For single person traders or producers, opportunities are often time-critical; trade is very localized due to lack of efficient transport, and tradesmen rely on physical interaction to be able to showcase their work or goods. Reputation management is also important in gaining and keeping customers. All of this can be solved through a more efficient way of exchanging information."

Quick solution to create web presence

With Kuza, Nel and Maunder built a simple solution allowing people to create a web presence from a basic feature phone in about five minutes.

They can create micro ads on their phone that are instantly broadcast to users in their area, accept recommendations and feedback from customers through various digital channels and even create business cards on their phones and get them printed anywhere with an internet connection. All of this is monetized through small micro-payments using airtime on a pay as you go basis.

It is no surprise that Nel likens it to finding fresh fish in Cape Town:



Kuza customer, Maasai Market, Nairobi

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"With Kuza, I can search the listed fishermen and see who has the most recent catch, or receive ads broadcast by them. I can even book the snoek and be there when the boat gets to shore."

Enhancing business in Africa

Kuza is funded by Founder Collective in Boston, Massachusetts as well as local investors. It is going through trials in South Africa and Kenya where it has several thousand users, from plumbers and builders to domestic servants and gardeners. It even has an Opera singer with a page.



Kuza co-founders, Andrew Maunder and Pieter Nel

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"Fine-tuning will be based on real user feedback," explains Nel. "We believe strongly in learning from our users and being deeply involved with them."

As Nel and Maunder get busier they don't see another holiday on the horizon any time soon, but their reward will be enhancing the businesses of Africans with technology in the palm of virtually everyone's hands.

ABOUT ANTON CRONE

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