

## Making the connection in Africa

As many Western economies continue to stagnate in the wake of the recent recession, emerging markets, particularly those on the African continent, are increasingly responsible for driving global economic growth. With mobile and broadband penetration figures skyrocketing across sub-Saharan Africa, opportunities for IT companies are plentiful.



In order to truly tap into the wealth of potential that the continent provides, global enterprises would be well advised to seek assistance from locally based PR and marketing firms, whose familiarity with Africa's many cultural and societal nuances can prove invaluable in delivering real ROI.

### Print prominence

While many African markets have demonstrated extensive technological growth in recent years, their media consumption habits remain somewhat behind the curve. Limited electricity supplies and erratic internet connectivity in a number of regions have ensured that print media remains widely consumed, particularly amongst tech executives, who tend to be significantly older than their western counterparts.

Many PR executives attempting to manage campaigns from afar tend to make the mistake of utilising online channels as the sole platform for their communications, isolating the majority of their key audience as a result.

### Managing the media

Due to its collectivist cultural ethos, Africa's business environment is defined by relationships, with success largely dependent on one's ability to establish meaningful connections.

Consequently, it is a very difficult region to manage remotely, and PR professionals attempting to achieve results overnight often come up short.

Not only do local PR firms have an intrinsic understanding of the localised practices and how best to manage them, but they are also able to keep abreast of the issues affecting the local population.

Establishing thought leadership without sufficient knowledge of the hot topics in the region is very difficult. Africa's challenges are unique, and what might be insightful and hard-hitting in a Western context may not necessarily have any relevance to African audiences.

### Culture shock

Africa is a continent laced with complexity, and, as such, an overly broad approach to communications will invariably prove ineffective. Whilst English is the primary language in the majority of Africa's markets, it is by no means the only one.

South Africa alone has 11 official languages and Nigeria is home to almost 400 different dialects. A localised approach is key when looking to effectively communicate with African audiences, and campaigns should be tailored to take into account cultural, linguistic and religious differences.

Another key to African success is the ability to assess the audience's understanding of any given product or service. Whilst technological developments in African markets closely mirror those of their Western counterparts, varying levels of education mean that audiences' understanding of these can differ greatly.

## **Keeping it local**

Without an appropriate understanding of Africa's diverse and sometimes confusing landscape, companies looking to launch PR campaigns unaided are unlikely to achieve significant success.

Only by partnering with experienced PR firms, who boast an innate understanding of both the complicated media landscape and the region's diverse audiences, can companies hope to effectively capitalise on the wealth of opportunities offered by this booming continent.

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