

BBC launches pilot chatbot from Nigerian developers

By [Tom Jackson](#)

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The BBC World Service has made available a new way for audiences to interact with BBC News via its Nigerian-designed pilot BBC Newschatta.



It is the latest stage of the BBC World Service's activities in Africa, which has already seen pilots launched in [Nairobi, Kenya](#) and [Cape Town, South Africa](#) as the BBC looks to increase its global reach to 500 million by 2020.

BBC Newschatta is a chatbot developed by Nigerian technology company [Codulab](#), which generates news stories based on the user's input, using keywords and topics to send relevant news stories to them via the WeChat Messenger app.

The pilot was developed following an open submission process by [BBC Connected Studio](#) and the BBC World Service at an event in Lagos in February 2016. Similar events have previously taken place in Kenya and South Africa, from which ideas have been developed into live products.

A second pilot idea from the Lagos brief was also selected to go into development – named 'Timerail'. This solution curates big news stories using multiple sources, which can then be presented to users with a compelling mix of content navigable by time and relevance. A working prototype is expected later this year.

“BBC World Service continues to harnesses local tech expertise in Africa that allows us to keep innovating with new formats, platforms and content distribution models, specifically targeted at young audiences through mobile,” Dmitry Shishkin, BBC digital editor for World Service Languages, said.

“Before coming to Nigeria we successfully collaborated with tech hubs and startups in Kenya and South Africa, bringing live products from both locations, and I am thrilled that the trend continues in Lagos. Given the massive editorial investments that the BBC is making in Africa, it’s important that digital innovation is a crucial part in that process.”

Stanley Ojadowa, product developer at Codulab, said Newschatta is a chatbot that provides news content in a more personalised manner to young people across Africa.

“The aim is to deliver the latest news contents to users in a timely and interesting way that fits into the user’s current daily digital routines,” he said.

“Newschatta is targeted at young people in Africa aged between 16 and 34, living in urban areas. This audience has a high mobile use, not just for calls and social networking purposes, but for other aspects of their life such as emailing, banking, playing games and reading news.”

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