

Google's African affair: An internet giant puts its money where its mouth is

 By [Vanessa Clark](#)

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At the start of last year I wrote an article for Memeburn with the only slightly tongue-in-cheek headline: "[Instead of smallpox Google is colonising Africa with 'cool stuff'](#)". As a rule I tend to prefer African solutions for African problems, and am also always somewhat sceptical of geeks bearing gifts (sorry!).

Twenty months later, I need to concede that it does look as if Google is putting its money where its mouth is when it comes to the African continent. It has offices in eight African countries and has launched, whether intentionally or not, products that have the potential to be game changers on the continent.

Android

...when an African consumer upgrades, or buys a tablet, they are more than likely going to choose an Android device. This is according to IDG Connect, whose research paper "Tablets 2020" says that African tablet owners demonstrated the lowest percentage of iPads (46%) and the joint highest number of Android owners (49% - tied with Asia).

...This preference is no doubt partially price motivated: for instance Nigeria's Fasmicro produces Android tablets that sell at N59 900 (R3 380 / US\$390 at time of writing). In addition, Samsung is pushing hard across the continent building an Android-based ecosystem, as is Huawei with its cut-price handsets.

SMS 2 email

...earlier this year Google launched GMail SMS, a service that lets you send and receive emails as SMSs. Previously Gmail users were only able to access the service via a PC or a smartphone. So it made sense for the search giant to pick Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya as the countries where it would launch the service.

Google speaks your language

Google currently offers 33 distinct African language user interfaces for Google web search, according to the Google Africa Community Translation site, which invites volunteers to translate, localise and review Google user interfaces. Some, such as Afrikaans and Swahili are well on their way, 89% and 79% complete respectively; others have a way to go: Zambia's Bemba language sits at 0%.

Caching

Google Global Cache sets out to circumvent some of Africa's bandwidth constraints by allowing ISPs and companies to serve Google and YouTube content from inside their own network. Because the content is cached locally, accessing it becomes faster and cheaper.

Read the [full story](#) at www.memeburn.com.

ABOUT VANESSA CLARK

I'm a freelance journalist, copywriter and editor based in Cape Town, South Africa. I write as a journalist and for corporates and agencies. My specialties are business-to-business and technology writing. I like unpacking complex ideas so they are more easily understood - especially when it involves innovation taking place in South Africa, and the rest of Africa.

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