

Africa Connected semi-finalists announced

The 20 semi-finalists of Google's Africa Connected competition have been announced. The semi-finalists were selected from over 2,200 entries from 35 countries.



The competition was launched in August 2013, calling entrepreneurs, creatives, innovators and web-lovers to share their stories of how the web has transformed their lives and work.

Five successful winners will win \$25,000 [ZAR 278,000] each, and will also have the opportunity to work with a Google sponsor over a six-month period to further their online business success. The competition categories included Education; Entertainment/Arts/Sports; Technology; Community and NGOs; and Small Businesses.

"We received over 2,200 entries from a diverse set of 35 countries across the continent, ranging from Mali to Uganda to Namibia. Each of them demonstrated how people are using the web and technology to overcome challenges, do extraordinary things, and be successful, not only for themselves but also for others in their communities. The projects include everything from using YouTube to learn about eco-friendly building techniques, to an award-winning blog on mental health. Selecting the 20 semi-finalists was tough, but we were really impressed with their initiatives, and wish them the best in the next round!" says Affiong Osuchukwu, Google Lead for the Africa Connected initiative.

Semi-finalists:

The semi-finalists, in random order, include:

- Kangai Mwit, Kenya, [Belleza Africa](#). Mwit is a makeup artist offering services for weddings, ad shoots and other events. She hosts tutorials on her YouTube channel, which has almost 26,000 subscribers, focusing on techniques for women of colour.
- Steve Kyenze, Kenya, [Uweza Slum Gallery](#). Kyenze uses Google Search to inspire and train underprivileged art students and improve their skills, so that they can sell their artwork to support their schooling.
- Sitawa Wafula, Kenya, [My Mind, My Funk](#). Wafula is described as an influential blogger on mental health in East Africa, who has used Google Blogger to establish his award winning blog which is a reference point for people looking for support and information.
- Dennis Njagi, Kenya, [RockSci: The Funky Scientists](#). Njagi has used Google and YouTube to develop an interactive website, blog and vlog for primary and high school users who want to learn more about science topics through experiment instruction, online content and tutorials.
- Francis Macharia, Kenya, [Pinklakeman Eco-Lodge](#). Macharia used Google and YouTube to teach himself about eco-friendly building techniques which he used to build the successful Pinklakeman Eco-Lodge.
- Gloria Mangi, Tanzania, [African Queens Project](#). Mangi created a Google website to promote her community upliftment project, which celebrates African women who are doing significant things to give back to their community. Her site shares successful African women's stories via blog posts, audio clips, and videos.
- Eunice Namirembe, Uganda, [The Medical Concierge Group](#). Namirembe has built a 24-hour accessible ambulance call centre to improve access to health care services, by using the Google API dashboard and Google Maps to record patient information and track patient location.

- Lamine Mbengue, Senegal, [SenegalTV](#). Mbengue believes in taking African culture to the rest of the world, and that the Internet is the lifeblood to support his mission. YouTube and AdSense has helped SenegalTV to share their unique content around the world.
- Megan Makhosazana Ngiba, South Africa, [Makhophila Training](#). Makhosazana Ngiba runs a computer skills training business using Google products to educate students about the internet, including setting up Gmail accounts for each user, using Google Search for various searches and building Google Sites.
- Barbara Mallinson, South Africa, [Obami](#). Mallinson uses YouTube and Google Maps on her social learning platform which aims to empower teachers, as well as facilitate learning and teaching for anyone in the education space.
- Timothy Maguire, South Africa, [Grace Communion International](#). English-speaking Maguire uses Google Translate while providing humanitarian relief in northern Mozambique so that he can communicate with project members who speak only Portuguese. He also uses Google Search and Google Maps which assist with projects in remote locations.
- Mbekezeli Khumalo, South Africa, [Trees and Rhinos](#). Khumalo is a co-creator of Trees and Rhinos, an anti-rhino poaching project which was initially introduced to the public via an animated YouTube video. Now the project uses YouTube to promote the initiative, as well as other Google products to widen its influence.
- Johann du Toit, South Africa, [Curriculum Vitae](#). Du Toit created a website which allows users to easily create a CV - interestingly, most users enter his site through their Google+ accounts.
- Theunis Hanekom, South Africa, [RedFish](#). Hanekom uses Google products to communicate with the international team at RedFish, an online marketplace connecting customers and tradesmen, which ensures their content is up to date and useful.
- Nqobizitha Mlilo, Zimbabwe, [Nafuna TV](#). Mlilo uses YouTube to post all his new animation and HD video content to reach his targeted audience. He is self-taught, based on information found with Google Search.
- Emmanuel Gamor, Ghana, [Mpwr](#). The Mpwr team uses Google Drive to create show outlines, upload audio snippets and recordings, as well as engage with listeners outside the studio via Google+ Hangouts.
- Christopher Panford, Ghana, Technol Services. Panford uses Google Maps in his vehicle tracking devices to record the location of their vehicles at any point in time.
- Eric Obuh, Nigeria, [Vocal Slender](#). Obuh has used Google+ and YouTube to raise awareness about underprivileged youngsters in the slums of Lagos, thereby raising financial aid for the scholars and encouraging school attendance.
- Eseoghene Odiete, Nigeria, [Hesey Designs](#). Odiete used Google Products to promote his brand as a young entrepreneur, creating international awareness for his fashion label.
- Mayowa Adegbile, Nigeria, [Ashake Foundation](#). Adegbile initially used YouTube to post an appeal to raise funds for her initiative, a business school for widows and mothers, giving them the tools to make a living and support their families. Since then, she has identified AdSense as an important part of their business curriculum.

The 20 semi-finalists were selected from initial entries to take part in an interview and to produce a short promotional video. A judging panel, made up of Googlers and external judges, will now determine the 10 finalists. The five winners, in whose lives the web and Google have played a pivotal role, will then be selected by the online voting public. The winners will be announced on 1 April at an event in Nairobi, Kenya.

The partner judges for Africa Connected include:

- Adiel A. Akplogan, CEO, African Network Information Centre (AfriNIC), Mauritius
- Nardos Bekele Thomas, Resident Coordinator, United Nations Development Program, Kenya
- Dr. Towela Nyirenda Jere, Programmes Manager, NEPAD e-Africa Programme, New Partnerships for African Development (NEPAD), South Africa
- Temilola Balogun, Radio personality, fashion photographer and artist, Cool FM, Nigeria
- Adv. Leslie Sedibe, CEO, Proudly South African, South Africa
- Wallace Kantai, Editor, NTV, Nation Media Group, Kenya
- Franklin Leonard, Founder, The Black List, USA
- MI Abaga, Artist and UN Ambassador, Chocolate City Music, Nigeria
- Ory Okolloh, Director of Investments, Omidyar Network, South Africa
- Doha Marzouk, Head, Marketing, Sub-Saharan Africa, Google, Egypt

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