

Connected cars, IoT and the data revolution

 By Leigh Andrews

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Ever wish you could locate your car in a packed parking lot by checking on your phone? With the Internet of Things, everyday household products are about to become a whole lot smarter...

The third and final day of AfricaCom kicked off at the CTICC with Bradley Shaw, founder of Continuum Consulting and conference chairman, showing a quick video recap of the previous night's AfricaCom award ceremony.

“ A warm congratulations to each of the winners at last night's 2014 AfricaCom Awards [#AfricaCom](#)
<http://t.co/hhlQja8o5K> - PMT (@patternmatched) [November 13, 2014](#) ”

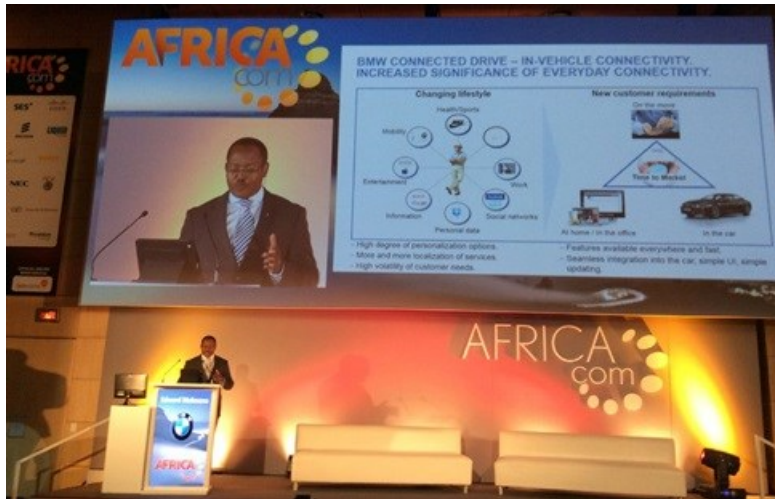
Shaw then introduced a future product keynote on the connected car for Africa by Edward Makwana, group communications manager for BMW, on the connected car.

Makwana went into detail on the BMW ConnectedDrive, as discussed from an 'Internet of Things' perspective at [FutureTech](#). He says what's revolutionary about it is that it puts the tech-savvy driver in control, in a different way to what you're used to. Simply put, it connects you seamlessly to who and what you love digitally, letting you disconnect when you feel like it. But those big on road safety need not panic and picture people perusing at screens instead of the road.

BMW's ConnectedDrive is anything but scary

It's all about simplifying your life, and the technology is installed as a service or software on the one hand, and as assistance hardware, like with the park assist feature as demonstrated in the below video, on the other.

Makwana says reorientation of the product means the vehicles are always up-to-date and targeted at consumer needs, especially with the local launch of the BMW-i range in March 2015. The ConnectedDrive apps can be updated at anytime, anywhere and everything is possible but nothing is obligatory.



Edward Makwana, group communications manager for BMW, on the ConnectedDrive features

That's because consumers can order vehicle-specific services through the app store, but the best bit is that you no longer need to use your own data, as an integrated sim card is provided to access the internet. He explained that much of the automated features are potentially life-saving, such as the intelligent emergency call that sends out your location if you're involved in an accident, or your car automatically sending message to the service dealer saying it needs an oil change - this isn't all done behind-the-scenes though, as the dealer calls you back to let you know what your car's been saying.

In closing, Makwana pointed out that the majority of BMW drivers have access to smartphones, which can now be integrated through IOS or the Android Play store to control the climate in your car or - even better - determine where you left it in a radius of 1.5km through the app, dependent on network activity in area. You can even control the hooter remotely, if you so desire...

There's also a real-time traffic information service that provides alternative routes if you're stuck in traffic, a web radio so

that you can listen to your favourite station wherever you are in the world, and new mobility services that'll let you locate your nearest charging services as these are non-petrol vehicles. Makwana concluded, "Having seen all these features, it's clear that even in Africa we are adaptive and highly connected."

What to expect as the Internet of Things hits Africa

Next, Shaw introduced a panel on the [Internet of Things](#) explained what this means for African markets. The panel featured Makwana, group automotive communication manager at BMW in a continuation of his earlier session; as well as Simon de Haan, chief engineer of Praekelt; Tony Smallwood, executive head of Vodacom; Arnaud Blondet, VP of marketing, products and innovations of Orange; and Brett St Clair, enterprise country manager of Google.

Each explained what the Internet of Things means for Africa over THE next 18 months. St Clair said it's still very early days, but from a network point of view we need to think out the box and make the data meaningful. He also spoke of alternative business models driven around efficiency in the Internet of Things space, with Google focusing on its Android component so that it extends from phone to vehicles, for any device - he recommends the Android platform as it is open source. Makwana added to this that as a South African BMW driver, using a sim card to simplify roaming services makes travelling across the continent much more accessible.

Then De Haan spoke of Praekelt's MomConnect programme as he did at [Mobile360](#), saying the previous panel members' points around data apply the same way when you're working with an NGO.

“ [@smn](#) from [@praekeltfound](#) - Focused on solving maternal health challenges in rural environments. [#AfricaCom](#) [pic.twitter.com/IYUsgNm8SZ](#) - Alan Haarhoff (@AlanHaarhoff) [November 13, 2014](#) ”

The more you know about your subscribers, the better value you can offer them, for example you can tie into those systems to send a reminder that you've forgotten to take your chronic medication.

The Internet of things refers to anything or device that can connect to internet, and the concept is growing in leaps and bounds in Europe, like the possibility of a toothbrush letting you know that your children have used it, says Blondet. The only downside is price, with one of these [smartphone-connected toothbrushes retailing for \\$200](#). Smallwood says do look at machine-to-machine as a commercial model, you can't get too hung up on data costs as this is the way of the future.

Mobile, music, money... how they come together

Next, Arun Nagar of Spice VAS Africa gave a talk on the next game-changing service in African markets, including Spice VAS Africa's free music-streaming service, Mziiki, which lets users download content to listen to offline and share with friends. When asked why anyone should buy music when we can listen to it anytime, wherever we want, Nagar says not to forget that music, like water, creates a bigger market. Just think of how profitable Perrier is, and water is technically a free commodity. Nagar pointed out that only 80% of Mziiki's usage is coming from the supposed 20% smartphone penetration in Africa, highlighting the importance of the handset challenge being addressed with cheaper models becoming available, but high speed data is also needed at more affordable prices. Nagar concluded that a focus on yield per megabyte may change this, and said that the final hurdle is payment, as there is low credit card penetration in Africa, so they instead use premium SMSes, airtime balance as well as mobile money to overcome it, but this is a definite opportunity for operators as [Visa, Mastercard and the like](#) focus more on the African market.

Warning to publishers: Monetise content or face extinction

“ [#Africacom](#) Day3 in a few words: [#IoT](#) first steps on the continent, Telcos need to choose between being a data company or a content company- Max Bayen (@MaxBayen) [November 13, 2014](#) ”

In the last keynote session of the morning, Russell Southwood, CEO of Balancing Act, introduced a panel comprising panelists Dave Coles, in executive business development at Platco; Neeraj Gala, head of content and alliances at Airtel

Africa; Will Green, in business development at Apurimac Media; Herman Singh, managing executive of mobile commerce at Vodacom; and Justin Zehmke, head of publishing at Ole Media Group. Southwood spoke of the changing role of data as some say it is too expensive, but he says "you have to get all in, as you can't be half-pregnant."

Coles said that without monetising content, publishers will soon be extinct, which is why in East Africa, there's lots of investment in setting up studios. He adds that in another five to ten years broadcasting will be all about data and apps. In the last 50 years the industry's seen very little change, but it's about to go through a revolution, so we have to strategise and future-think things. It's always been about donating content to the continent, but suddenly Africa has become a greenfield for the rest of the globe.

Based on this, Gala said we need to look to build a seamless ecosystem for consumers, where it's easy for content producers to come onboard, and that the first form of entertainment device any consumer has in Africa is a cellphone, so this needs to be optimised. Green stepped in to say we need a radical shift in business models, as from a content perspective we can see what the consumer is doing in real-time, and remember to come up with a strategy for each market, it's dangerous to treat Africa as one country. We need to provide consumers with what they want at the price they want or they will simply get it somewhere else, he warns. Up to now consumers haven't had freedom of choice, they have had freedom from choice.

Zehmke concluded that audience is key and hard to come by, which is why it's crucial for publishers to look at partnering with mobile network operators, but network operators need to wake up to the fact that they're in danger of missing the boat themselves if they don't go into publishing, as they already hold the holy grail of big data for advertisers.

Seems the industry's in for an exciting time...

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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