BIZCOMMUNITY

The opportunity that is the small screen

By Mike Laws

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Those of us who work in South Africa's 'traditional' corporate sector are often surprised by some of the work practices and technology habits outside of the upstairs corner office.



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Many of us don't appreciate the ready access we have to enviable resources so we gape in wonder when we're exposed to the technological realities of life working from home, the gym, coffee shops or anywhere with (free) Wi-Fi. Advantages to being self-employed there certainly are, but all-you-can-eat broadband isn't usually one of them.

To illustrate, a friend of mine who started a small business was genuinely annoyed to find that the IT support she had previously easily reached via her office desk phone was nowhere to be found on day one of being an entrepreneur. Never mind having to assemble her own flatpack desk bought at Makro.

The small screen coffee shop dwellers

I was reminded of this story recently when I spotted at least half a dozen young people crowding out a local coffee shop at 7.30am one morning. They were clearly not corporate types on their way to the office - judging by the way they relished the free Wi-Fi connection. What surprised me is that every single one of them was accessing the web on their mobile phones.

Now, this may sound a bit ridiculous for a long-time mobile marketing guy such as myself, but it's quite astonishing not to have a laptop in sight and people very happily doing whatever they are doing, using only their cell phones. And none were 7-inch to 10-inch monsters - the phones, I mean...

Web browsing, content downloads

So what were they doing, exactly? I wondered about that as almost all of these valuable couch space occupiers had a set of earphones plugged into the appendages they ostensibly do use for occasional listening over talking. After quizzing one of them, it seems web browsing does take first place, with content simultaneously downloaded over Wi-Fi in the background to enjoy at home or in whatever place they were going to next.

What's becoming clear from watching coffee shop patrons, in particular, is that mobile technology is stepping in to fill certain voids and it's doing so at an extremely reasonable cost.

You would expect state-of-the-art technology to cost a fortune but it's looking like the opposite is true. Ancient satellite TV, for example, is about to hit the R1000 mark for a decent selection of channels. On the other hand, if you have access to free Wi-Fi like our coffee shop dwellers, all-you-can-eat movies and series will cost you a paltry R99 a month using a local video-on-demand service. That's an insanely good deal.

Implication for brands

All of the above has huge implications for brands. You just really need to be on the small screen.

This one morning at the local coffee shop perfectly brought home the reality of this line about mobile marketing I read in the Huffington Post: "The majority of users, across all industries, tend to use mobile devices as their ‘go-to’/primary device for searches, purchases, and social media."

They really do!

ABOUT MIKE LAWS

Michael is the CEO of Imaginatrix.mobi. He has over 23 years' experience in the ICT industry, has worked in multiple mobile network operators across Africa. These include Econet Wireless and Vodacom South Africa where he was instrumental in establishing the mobile advertising division. Michael was responsible for commercialising the successful Please Call Me service, as well as the tagged-on advertising messaging propositions.

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