

Case study: Njorku

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Mobile Employment

Product summary

Year Launched: 2011

Business Model: B2B

Targeted Device: Basic phone

Primary Delivery Technology: SMS, Web

Products & Services: Job-matching service

Markets Deployed In: Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Egypt

Estimated Total Number of Users: 2500+ unique users per day; approx 1million per year

njorku



Njorku is a social business based in Cameroon and operating in a total of 7 African countries. Njorku is a recruitment service that matches job-seekers with suitable and relevant vacancies. It does this by providing aggregated and indexed vacancies on its online platform, which users can search through and filter according to their interests. Users are also able to upload their CV to the website and receive email and SMS alerts when a suitable vacancy arises. This way, skilled African professionals can be linked with recruiters seeking out their skillsets, thereby increasing employment rates and the efficiency of business. Njorku believes that by providing a job-seeking platform that is accessible, convenient and fast, it can bring considerable social benefits to the people of Africa.

1 Background

The founder of Njorku, Churchill Mambe Nanje, is the owner of a consultancy company in Cameroon named AfroVisioN Group Ltd. While recruiting new staff, Churchill was frustrated by the lack of a

single tool or platform that he could use to search for potential employees. He also saw that those searching for a job faced a similar problem - even those proficient on the Internet did not know where to go to find indexed and up-to-date vacancies online.

AfroVisioN is based in Buea, home to the largest English-speaking university in Cameroon. As a university town, it is home to many students and graduates who are in search of jobs. Since there was no other way for job-seekers to link up with organisations that may require employees with their skills, the job-seekers had to travel for hours handing out CVs to offices in the region in the hope that they were recruiting. Njorku was designed as a solution to these problems.

At the time - as today - Internet accessibility in Cameroon was fairly widespread but not ubiquitous. Mobile penetration, on the other hand, was considerably higher. As a result, the Njorku platform was designed to incorporate a strong mobile component in order to make it as accessible and convenient as possible to ordinary job-seekers. In response to similar problems elsewhere in Africa, the service has expanded to six other markets. Having launched simultaneously in Cameroon and Nigeria in March 2011, within months Njorku had spread to South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Egypt - all of which were seen as having the same existing problems and possible solutions as Cameroon.

Objective

There are 350 million people aged 15-35 across Africa, including 10 million entering this demographic anew each year. Njorku seeks to help all of these people to find suitable and sustainable work in a way that is convenient and accessible. Njorku also aims to make the recruitment process as straightforward and comfortable as possible for employers and recruitment agencies, Njorku very much prioritises current and future impact over short-term profit.

Results

- 2500+ users of the platform each day
- 5000 recruiters have used the service to date

Impact

In the past, those searching for a job had no single platform they could access in order to find vacancies. Through Njorku, the process is made much more accessible and convenient. Every day, jobseekers can search for the exact kind of job they want, and vacancies from recruiters and job websites across its seven markets will appear. Similarly, recruiters now have access to huge numbers of suitable prospective employees who have been suggested to them through the Njorku service. Overall, this has reduced average time taken for Njorku users to find a new job from 2 months to 2 weeks.

2 Lessons Learned

- **Don't simply try to copy things that you have seen working elsewhere** - especially if the conditions are completely different. Compared to the US and Europe, Internet penetration across Africa is still relatively low. As a result, a model that is working well in the US or Europe may not translate well if you try to implement a replica in Africa. Instead, you have to strike a balance between what you've seen work elsewhere and what you know about your surroundings.
- **Investors may be naturally drawn to initiatives in some regions, and less attracted to others.** In looking for outside investment, Njorku observed that its location in Cameroon seemed to lead to reduced interest in its service. Thus, the team deduced, made for a less appealing opportunity for investors than other initiatives in markets like Nigeria and Kenya. In Njorku's case, the fact that it was also operating in these countries and elsewhere in Africa made this less of an issue. However, the Njorku team did learn that the conditions in which your service exists are of similar importance to the service itself when attempting to attract investment.

3 Approach

In the design of the service, Njorku looked primarily to other similar services that already existed. It saw that many websites featuring classified ads and job vacancies were very popular in Cameroon and across Africa. Through this, Njorku was able to ascertain that there was a widespread demand for the kind of web-based service it was planning to offer, as many people were already accessing similar versions.

The service is designed around accessibility and convenience for end users. Initially, Njorku was intended as a simple vertical search engine for job vacancies. However, it soon evolved into its current system whereby jobseekers upload a full CV to Njorku online, a process which requires one-off Internet access for around five minutes (at present this feature requires a desktop). This CV is then processed and used to match the user with relevant jobs via a unique algorithm. Jobseekers then receive alerts via email or SMS regarding these matches, and have the option to save these with the intention of applying later when they have access to a desktop computer. The mobile component is particularly crucial to the service's accessibility: SMS brings benefits of speed, accessibility and scalability.

The websites are populated using an automatic crawler. This visits websites that advertise jobs and detects their job opportunities. It then adds these sites to the Njorku index and regularly fetches jobs from them. Vacancies are checked to ensure that they are relevant, accurate and up-to-date. These tools were developed in-house, allowing Njorku to source and aggregate jobs from all across Africa in the mutual interest of both the recruiters and jobseekers - both of whom benefit from a more accessible and navigable platform.

Njorku is a small company with a team of just six full-time employees and operates much like a lean start-up. It regularly updates and alters its service based on the team's observations on their service's ability to deploy these alterations with great speed. As such, its approach has evolved somewhat since it launched. The initial plan was to utilise a vertical search engine, but ultimately it has evolved into a platform populated by the profiles of jobseekers.

4 User Centric Attitudes

Njorku can be accessed worldwide by people looking for employment in any of the 7 African countries in which it operates. Whilst most users come from these countries, the service is also accessed by many users in such countries as India, Pakistan, the UK and the US. This reflects Njorku's aim of helping any user looking for work in Africa, regardless of their pre-existing situation. Additionally, the use of SMS is further reflective of the service's focus on positively impacting its users: the high penetration of featurephones in the areas in which it operates means that this approach makes the service more accessible to all.

5 The Use and Value of Data

Njorku's activity around analysing user data is still nascent. However, it does organically collect a lot of data. By uploading CVs to Njorku, users share personal information, location data, educational information, and other demographic data points. Currently, the main use of this for the service is to suggest vacancies based on the user area of interest and expertise, and preferred locations. However, as it stands, little is done in the way of analysing this data for the purpose of expansion and enhancement of the service.

That said, this is something that Njorku see as potentially very valuable and deserving of future action. The specifics of these plans are yet to be decided, but it will be based around mining the service's extensive collection of data to identify areas and ways in which Njorku can improve its user experience and increase accessibility. This is not something that Njorku prioritises at this moment while its focus is on expanding the service and widening its availability across Africa. As a result, the service itself remains somewhat minimalist and this is something that users demonstrably like, meaning that it will most likely remain the case until Njorku has the capacity and time to analyse its user data in a way that will highlight areas for improvement.

6 Success and Scalability

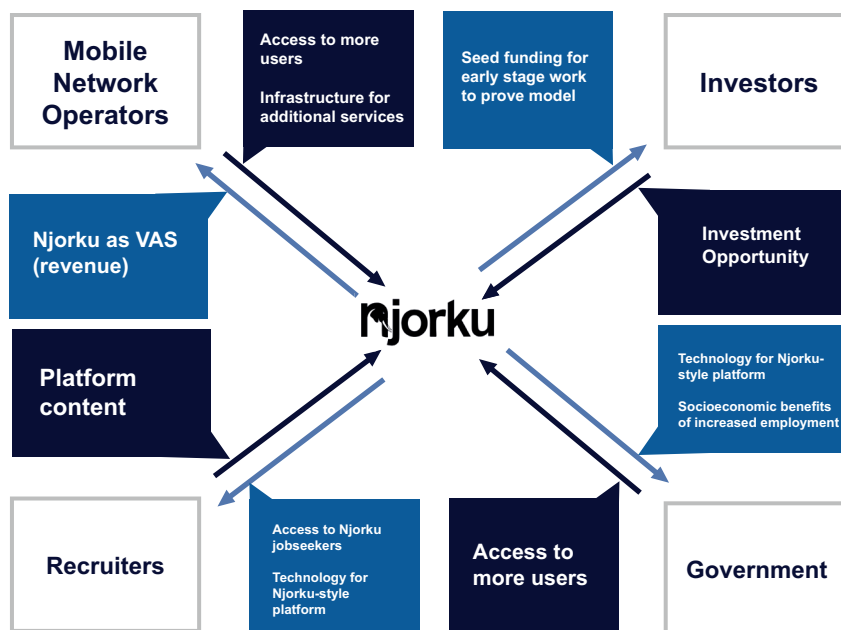
Njorku measures its success by how many people use the service to find employment in Africa each year. This metric best reflects the service's focus on impact: the more people who use the service, the more Njorku can contribute to enhancing their lives and careers. Specifically, Njorku aims to interact with 10 million people each year. Currently, the number of users reached annually stands at just under one million, based on the estimation that 2500 unique users access the service every day.

When considering areas for expansion and options for scale, Njorku makes its decisions based on regional data. When assessing markets for expansion potential, the team looks at internet penetration, employment rates, the competitive landscape, and the demographics of the population. Expansion into new markets will only be considered if conditions appear favourable for Njorku to have a significant impact. These decisions are made in collaboration with business partners and investors. Together, these parties assess the landscape and make decisions based on the potential impact. If the conditions suit Njorku, the model itself is largely replicable. Expansion is a key element of the Njorku outlook: the more areas in which it operates, the more people it can reach. Based on this model, the service is currently looking to lay the foundations for expansion into Senegal and

Cote d'Ivoire.

7 Partnerships

There are three primary categories of partnerships which Njorku leverages to support the effectiveness, sustainability and growth of the business since its launch. The first is employers and recruitment agencies. Currently, Njorku has around 5000 recruiters on its site. Their presence is essential to the value that the service holds for its users. Njorku therefore puts great effort into making the service easy for recruiters to use, so that more of them will want to use it more often. In the early days of Njorku, the team would have to approach recruiters, now recruiters recognise the value of Njorku and commonly ask to be featured on the platform. In order to maximise the accessibility and impact of the service, and to maintain these essential relationships in the long term, Njorku has decided not to charge recruiters' to post on its website. The second is partnerships with MNOs, to date these only existed in pilot form. Njorku is currently in discussion with MTN Cameroon about establishing a more formalised relationship. This could include co-branded and discounted services. Njorku would like to move its mobile component beyond SMS alerts. It hopes that the partnership with MTN will enable job applications to be submitted to employers via mobile, for example, taking the form of a joint service that is powered by Njorku and brought to customers by MTN Cameroon - who currently has over ten million subscribers.. The team hope that once this has been successfully established, it can act as a template for further partnerships with MNOs across Africa. The third categories is relationships with government bodies since they have far reaching influence, and many people could be impacted through partnerships with them. The nature of these partnerships could take a number of forms: for example a government could act as a channel for the Njorku service, or could be given the technology required to operate a government-sponsored Njorku-style platform. Njorku is currently in discussion with the National Employment Fund (NEF) in Cameroon about piloting some of Njorku's technology. Whilst any relationships with government bodies are not yet concrete, Njorku sees in such partnerships as holding potential for improving its impact.



*arrows represent direction of value-add

Figure 3 - Partnerships diagram

8 Challenges

Ironically for an employment service, one of the main challenges which Njorku has faced since its launch is finding the right staff to join its small team to further build its operations. Particularly during the service's earlier days, Njorku found it difficult to attract people with the very specific skill sets that it was seeking. This is somewhat easier now that the organisation has reached a certain prominence and has improved networks, including its own website, to spread word of vacancies and attract people working elsewhere in the sector. However, it remains a challenge for many organisations in Africa, and one which Njorku aims to help overcome.

The second key challenge that Njorku has faced is access to capital. As a relatively new company, Njorku require continuous outside investment in order to have sufficient capital to cover operational expenses and further develop the service. The organisation must therefore dedicate staff time to attracting such investment. This is made more difficult by the fact that Njorku is a social enterprise that explicitly prioritises impact over profit, and expects investors to respect this. The process of securing capital has therefore been a significant challenge over the years. Nonetheless, this has become easier for the organisation for two main reasons: the service has a gained higher profile and is therefore a more attractive investment opportunity, and investors generally are seeing Africa as a rich source of future return on their investments. This is especially true for investors who see the value in long-term impact and sustainability over short-term profit. As a result, Njorku now has a small number of minor donors and investors which enable the company to better sustain itself and seek further expansion.

9 Future Plans

Njorku plans to expand its service and enhance its impact, reach, and accessibility as wide as possible through new partnerships and continuous service development. In particular, a formalised partnership with MTN Cameroon could bring great value, as well as paving the way for future relationships with MNOs; such relationships have the ability to bring the Njorku service to many millions more jobseekers.

Njorku continues to assess and trial new ways to bring its service to the jobseekers in the 350 million Africans aged 15-35 in Africa, as well as many others around the world. Among other things, this will involve expansion into other African countries where Njorku could bring positive benefits for recruiters, employers, jobseekers, and for the wider population.

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