



## Mobile and Development Intelligence

# YOUNG AFRICA LIVE

1



2

## YoungAfricaLive

Launched in December 2009, YoungAfricaLive is a mobile community platform that engages young people around the topics of Love, Sex and Relationships in the context of their social, cultural and economic situation. With a rapidly expanding user base, the service aims to promote healthy sexual behaviour in its users. The project was first conceived and funded by Praekelt Foundation. Through a partnership with Vodacom South Africa, the portal was hosted on Vodafone Live to provide a free service for users to access and surf the site. YoungAfricaLive has now been expanded across additional operators, been launched in Kenya and Tanzania, and looks to soon launch in further markets

**Year launched**  
2009

**Business model**  
Donor

**Targeted Device**  
Basic/ Feature Phone

**Primary Delivery Technology**  
WAP, Web

**Products & Services**  
Peer to Peer, Interactive content

**Markets deployed in**  
South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania

**Estimated number of users**  
1.3 million

### Background and opportunity:

What opportunity existed and how was it filled by the organisation?

YoungAfricaLive came about because the Praekelt Foundation noticed a distinct lack in accessible HIV/AIDS information in South Africa: a country with one of the biggest HIV problems in the world, and the highest mobile penetration rate in Africa. The service aims to promote healthy sexual behaviour change by encouraging daily engagement around topics that affect its users in everyday circumstances. This engagement is driven by use of social features, such as commenting and live chats. "We aim to create communities of aware and empowered young people whose sexual illiteracy does not end up in a trail of wrong choices – unsafe sex, STDs, unplanned pregnancy, illegal abortions or non-consensual sex." The content of the site consists of regularly updated stories, live chats, and a series of permanent content pieces. The permanent content covers the essential facts around HIV and AIDS; as well as helpline numbers and contact details for referral organisations that can support Young Africa Live-users in times of need. Daily articles on the platform inform and entertain while giving users the chance to engage around the topic through adding their own comments. Bloggers contribute to the daily articles which means that the content on the platform is written by people in the same target market as those whom use the service. Live Group Chats allow users to engage with experts as well as learn from the comments and questions posted by other community members.

### Progress since launch:

How have things gone so far?

The service was launched in South Africa on 1 December 2009 (World AIDS day), where it partnered with the Vodacom Live service and achieved a rapid uptake of users. In South

<sup>1</sup> <http://youngafricalive.com/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://in2eastfrica.net/award-winning-youngafricalive-youth-mobile-community-launches-in-tanzania/>

Africa, with over 1.28 million unique users, 2.8 million comments and 78.9 million page views, YoungAfricaLive has now reached a significant scale and continues to grow at a strong rate (with more than 20,000 new unique users joining in the past month – December 2012). More recently the team launched YoungAfricaLive Tanzania and YoungAfricaLive Kenya. These versions of the service use the same features and functionality as YoungAfricaLive South Africa but with content tailored to their local markets. The service in Tanzania was launched in partnership with Vodacom in December 2011, while the service in Kenya was launched in partnership with Safaricom in February 2012. “YoungAfricaLive has also attracted international attention and has been awarded the EMEA and Global award for Social Impact at the 2011 MMA Awards.”

### **Scalability:**

#### **How is the service being scaled to reach a larger audience?**

Having achieved a substantial user base in South Africa, YoungAfricaLive now looks to expand its presence in other African markets. “While we have already achieved good scale in South Africa, we aim to expand the reach of the service further by increasing the scale of the Tanzania and Kenya instances of YoungAfricaLive and by expanding to further regions.” One key aspect for expansion of the service is integration into the Network Operator Deck and provision of zero-rated (free) access for users. “Through our relationships with network operators we are able to offer this to users and this is definitely one of the reasons that YoungAfricaLive has seen such great results.” While the organisation believes that scale is achievable through mobile technology to an extent that is – as yet – unachievable through other media, they also underscore the importance of measuring the impact of their projects. “Impact should not be sacrificed for scale.”

### **User centric attitudes:**

#### **How does the organisation build itself around the end user?**

The Praekelt Foundation has conducted two Sex Surveys on the YoungAfricaLive portal in 2011 and 2012. These surveys use polls to collect feedback data on the practices and opinions of users. Additionally, the team have conducted focus groups with users. “The feedback was very positive and the users felt that generally YAL had had a positive effect on their lives.” Quizzes and polls, while transferring knowledge to users, also allow the team to collect vital information on the perceptions and knowledge of users. “These kinds of social feedback mechanisms mean that the service has evolved according to the needs of the users. This contributes greatly to the success of Young Africa Live.” At a more general level, the Praekelt Foundation attempts to launch products along the same basic guidelines: They first launch a minimally viable product; namely, a product that has the minimum functionality required to meet the initial objectives, but is also engaging enough for users. Secondly, feedback from users is gathered through polls and free-form submission, and users are encouraged to join focus groups where more in-depth feedback can be gathered. This is then analysed in conjunction with usage statistics to improve and expand functionality on an iterative basis. (Where applicable, A/B testing is used – i.e., testing in which two web pages are compared, where these are identical except for one variation that might impact a user's behaviour). Finally, a platform is never launched and then left, “we continually analyse and iterate on the platform”. Young Africa Live, like other Praekelt Foundation initiatives, has been developed along such guidelines.

### **Challenges:**

#### **What are the internal and external challenges currently faced?**

Key challenges for expansion of YoungAfricaLive span issues from maintaining free access to the service in all regions, finding content partners, various operational and technical challenges, as well as questions of assessing the service's social impact. For example, in an operational context, moderation and monitoring of large scale services like YoungAfricaLive are time and resource consuming. “Automatic and community moderation have gone a long way to reduce this, but this is an ongoing process and resources are still required.” From another point of view, a critical challenge arises in terms of measuring the social impact of the service. “While we can easily measure the service's reach, it is much harder to measure its effect on behaviour change... we are always interested in seeking partnerships which will help us to further the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).” This is an area of on-going interest to the organisation, which has already made a number of attempts to start this kind of measurement in the past, and has also planned future M&E projects in the pipeline.

### **Partnerships:**

#### **What is the value of partnerships, particularly with MNOs?**

MNO and content partners have been critical to the success of Young Africa Live, “without

them we would not have a viable product at all". MNO partners are critical to supply free access to users and to drive users to the service. "Without this we would not have achieved the scale and interaction levels we have currently." The Praekelt Foundation has a very good relationship with MNOs, where the team have learnt that constant and consistent communication with MNOs about their own requirements has been critical. "Key to the success of these partnerships is talking to the right people, making a valid business case to the MNO for any product you are looking to launch with their assistance, understanding what they are able to commit to and where other partners or funding need to be sourced". Elsewhere, content partners ensure that relevant, factually correct information is provided to users on an ongoing basis. "We are not content experts but rather supply the technology that enables the distribution of this content at scale."

### Looking back, looking forward:

What key lessons have been learnt, and what are the organisation's future objectives?

The Praekelt Foundation relay some of the following clear lessons learnt during the launch and expansion of Young Africa Live. In terms of delivering their service through an MNO, they have learnt that free access drives regular user engagement, placement on the MNO deck helps drives traffic, and that once a model has been proven it is much easier to expand and improve. In terms of the product's design and operation, they have learnt that simple functionality is often the most effective, social features are key to promote behaviour change, feedback from users is vital for improvement of the service, and that large scale initiatives like YoungAfricaLive require large numbers of man hours for moderation and response. Perhaps most important is that there is high demand for the service itself. "Users are hungry for interaction and information." In terms of the organisation's future objectives: they look to expand reach in SA by integrating into additional operator decks (MTN and 8ta), launch in West Africa on at least one operator deck, expand reach in East Africa by integrating into additional operator decks, as well as launch in North Africa and India. The organisation is also in discussion with phone manufacturers to incorporate a J2ME application (i.e., written on the Java 2 Platform Micro Edition platform often used in feature phones) on low end handsets which links to Young Africa Live. Finally, the Praekelt Foundation is planning further work to better understand the question of impact with a behaviour change study being planned for 2013

### Acknowledgements:

The Mobile and Development Intelligence team would like to thank **Debbie Rogers** (Praekelt Foundation, Lead Foundation Strategist) for assisting GSMA produce this case study.

#### About the GSMA Association

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide. Spanning 220 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators, as well as more than 200 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset makers, software companies, equipment providers, Internet companies, and media and entertainment organisations. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as the Mobile World Congress and Mobile Asia Congress.

#### About Mobile for Development - Serving the underserved through mobile

Mobile for Development brings together our mobile operator members, the wider mobile industry and the development community to drive commercial mobile services for underserved people in emerging markets. We identify opportunities for social, economic impact and stimulate the development of scalable, life-enhancing mobile services.

#### About Mobile and Development Intelligence

MDI is a freely available, online platform of market and impact data, analysis and access to an active community of practice. The mobile phone's ubiquity is uniquely well-placed to drive economic and social development in emerging markets. Investments in the mobile and development sectors are rising yet there is limited data on which to base these decisions. MDI is designed to bridge this information gap