

Umuntu to launch 19 internet portals in Africa

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

14 Jan 2011

Former Naspers digital media executive Johan Nel says his group Umuntu Media is to launch 19 internet portals across Africa between 2011 and 2012, with the Zambian portal having gone live on 1 January.

Nel said he wanted to create relevant online content to attract traffic into the continent. Online media players have blamed the lack of local content for the high cost of internet in most African countries. This is largely due to the fact that Africa-based internet service providers (ISPs) have to pay to link to the internet in the rest of the world due to little internet content stored locally.

Create African media companies

ISPs from abroad rarely link to African countries because their domestic internet users rely on local traffic to surf the internet and there is little internet content from the continent that is in high demand in the rest of the world.

"Gone are the days when African traffic goes to just international websites. We need to stand up and be counted; we need to create African media companies. We need to create online communities, make relevant information available for the masses; we need to educate, create marketing opportunities and empower the man on the street," Nel told Bizcommunity.

"The cost and connection speed issue for most of the African countries are still very present, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. The growth in numbers is already there, the cables are coming and more connections will need more relevant local content," said Nel.

New portals to be launched

Five internet portals will be launched this year one for each of the following countries: Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Angola and Mozambique will also be translated into Portuguese for relevance, Nel said.

"We are about people, information and connections. We are African and we are going to change the way Africa communicates (and) accesses information, stays informed and transacts online. It's our reason for being," he said.

He said all the portals would be branded with the "i" brand and have a local URL extension. For example, iNamibia.co.na, iGhana.com. The Zambian portal is www.izambia.co.zm.

Umuntu Media was launched by Nel and is actively supported and funded by eVentures Africa Fund, one of the first venture capital companies active in digital media in sub-saharan Africa.

Nel said eType would handle the media sales on the sites in the different countries on behalf of Umuntu.

Explaining the feasibility of the project, Nel said: "63 million people, 3.2 million internet users and no similar offering in the selected countries bring a big opportunity to the table. Africa is also rapidly expanding with more broadband connectivity, lower costs and higher speeds constantly being offered in the continent. Africa makes up about 15% of the world's population but currently has only 4.8% of the world's internet users."

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk

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