

“South Africa is alive with a lot of possibilities of creative and innovative electronic content”

How would you define the meaning of e-Content in your country in terms of its true meaning and practical implication?

Content in news, educational, cultural and entertainment programmemes, songs, games ... plays a pivotal role in the building of the Information Society. Therefore the creation, production and formulation of content must be encouraged at all levels, not only at the national level of all developing countries but, within the same nation, at the local and community levels, to ensure that developing nations do not remain information consumers of a content conceived by others.”

Thabo Mbeki

Beyond the status of an information technology user, industry and trade must encourage training, foster internal communication by using modern technologies, invest in long term initiatives, and assist schools and hospitals with communication and information equipment and systems. In turn, these actions benefit the people and the business community alike, making the people better and more educated workers, more powerful consumers, significant investors, better doctors, nurses, entrepreneurs and teachers, and increasing their numbers.”

Thabo Mbeki

factfile

Population of the country: 47.9 Million
Total no of Universities: 24
Total Number of Internet connections: 4,590,000 (2008)
Number of Individuals with Internet Access: 4,590,000
Number of broadband users: 1 Million (2008)
Internet hosts in South Africa: 1,297,000 (2008)
No. of individuals with computers: 2,700,000
Total number of household having TV/cable TV: 5,200,000
Literacy Rate: 81.8%
Total number of mobile connections: 44.51 Million (2009)
Percentage of literacy: 82% (2005)
Percentage of educated population: 86.4%

Sources:
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5 pillars

of e-Content development in South Africa

- ↳ Skill development
- ↳ Infrastructure rollout
- ↳ Broadband strategy
- ↳ Local content production
- ↳ Universal service and access obligations

Q What is the current status of e-Content in your country - across all industry and aspects?

South Africa is alive with a lot of possibilities of creative and innovative electronic content. This is demonstrated in a number of different websites and mobile technologies.

Q What area of e-Content is best developed in your country? For example, e-health, e-biz, e-culture, e-gov, e-entertainment, e-learning, e-science, or e-inclusion.

In South Africa, there is a number of content developed on the e-Health, e-Biz, e-Government, e-Learning and e-Inclusion.

Q Which sector in your country is more aggressive in developing e-Content? Business or Private Sector? Or Government? Or Civil Society? Any other category of significance you would like to mention, please do so.

The Government, Public sector and the Business/private sector does produce in different degrees e-Content.

Q Can you list the major initiatives, which influenced and aggravated the development of e-Content in your country?

Amongst others, the establishment of a preparatory team for the countries WSIS input, the annual Highway Africa Conference, the Information Society for Development Conference held from 1996, facilitated, encouraged and motivated the societies investment in e-Content.

Q How would you describe the major bottlenecks on the path of e-Content development in your country?

Access to broadband in the "second economy" of our country and the high costs of telecommunication do become a bottleneck. Similarly, the level of connectivity and lack of infrastructure in rural and semi-urban parts of the country.

South Africa is at a stage of its development where it already has an established ICT industry and has a reasonably well developed ICT infrastructure serving the more developed population. Even though there is room for improvement, the country's level of investment in ICT as a percentage of GDP appears to be reasonable. However, the challenge for the country is to build on this strength and incorporate it into a plan that supports broad involvement across the wider population.

South Africa's Information Society vision statement that is contained in the Information Society and Development Plan (ISAD Plan, 2007) was articulated by Minister, Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri during her delivery of the Budget Vote Speech on the 24th May 2007. She indicated that in the endeavour to advance the development of an inclusive Information Society locally, The Cabinet approved as the country's vision "the establishment of South Africa as an advanced Information Society in which ICT tools and information are key drivers of economic and societal development."

The Information Society and Development Plan (ISAD Plan, 2007) has been developed in an inclusive manner such that the plan serves as framework to generate skills, jobs, employment, new enterprises and new markets, as well as an enabler of a broad range of economically sustainable activities and projects. A significant challenge of the ISAD Plan is to facilitate the connections that will integrate economic opportunities into fulfilling social needs in local contexts. The opportunity for the ISAD plan is to focus on the development of the processes (ten pillars) for the application of ICTs in the priority focus areas as they relate to the needs of the country.

South Africa has a number of initiatives already underway that either directly or indirectly impact on the implementation of the ISAD plan. Examples of these initiatives include

the NEPAD Broadband Cable, Broadcasting Digital Migration, e-Government, e-Health, e-Education amongst other more specific projects such as eNATIS and HANIS. It becomes necessary, therefore, that the Plans processes evolve in the context of, and be consistent with, other e-strategy development initiatives across the country. A comprehensive programme of action that integrates government initiatives in such areas as education, health, government, SMMEs, tourism, national heritage and local content is being prepared, with special emphasis on women, children, disabled and the elderly. It is anticipated that ICTs and access to information on subjects that the targeted beneficiaries require, has the capacity to solve the practical and concrete challenges they face on a daily basis.

Q In majority of the countries, e-Content development is significantly dependent on ICT infrastructure and ICT facilities. But, in some countries that are quite developed, ICT has become part of daily life and e-Content development is primarily subjected to the initiatives of an individual/organization/government, etc. Whereas, in some countries, especially those, which are developing and under developed, e-Content development is largely dependent on ICT infrastructure. What is the situation in your country? Please explain in detail.

Indeed access to ICT infrastructure is fundamental to the growth of e-Content. Government is therefore committed to make technological advances accessible for the SA public as a whole.

Q How would you describe the ICT scenario in your country? Please describe in terms of infrastructure, penetration, acceptance and policies.

South Africa ranks 23rd in telecommunications development in the world. The country has approximately 4,92 million installed telephones

and 4,3 million installed exchange lines. This represents 39% of the total lines installed in Africa.

South Africa has a large transmission infrastructure, necessitated by the country's vast geographical area of 1,2 million km². Covering about 156 million circuit-kilometres, the transmission network constitutes the backbone of all telecommunications services. The network is almost wholly digital. Digital microwave and optical fibre serve as the main transmission media for the inter-primary network, inter-connecting all major centres.

South Africa, with the operators Vodacom, MTN and Cell C, is the fourth fastest growing GSM (Global Systems for Mobile Communications) market in the world and is growing at a rate of 50% per annum. Market size was 14,4 million users in February 2003 according to Cellular Online and this could grow to 19 million by 2006. Market Share is Vodacom (7,5 million), MTN (5,22 million) and Cell C (1 million). It says that the SA market is currently worth R23 billion and could reach R45 billion by 2004. Value-adding cellular growth rate network operators provide services such as Internet connectivity, electronic mail, protocol conversion, data processing and access to global databas-

es. Complemented by expertise in network design, implementation and management, this gives South Africa one of the most advanced telecommunication systems of all emerging markets.

The South African government continues to emphasise the importance of ICTs and their contribution to the country's economic growth, specifically in the broad framework for economic policy as set out in the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA). The World Economic Forum (WEF) presently ranks South Africa at 45th for overall economic competitiveness, having fallen from 40th position. The WEF also measures the "networked readiness" of countries, which is a measure of ICT capability. South Africa was ranked 37th in 2005, having fallen from 34th in 2004.

Q How do you see the future of e-Content development in your country? Please elaborate in detail.

With the launch of Digital Broadcasting in November 2008, extension of connectivity to rural schools and clinic through the obligations imposed onto the electronic communications network operators as they access and rollout third genera-

tion (3G) technology, the development of the broadband strategy, the interventions by the regulator with respect to the costs of telecommunications, the implementation of the opportunities provided by the new legislative framework provided through the Electronic Communications Act No. 36 of 2005, investments into local content production; it is hoped that a revolution will take place in the communications sector.

This will lead to universal service and access extended to all, and subsequently further add value to content development and the promotion of creativity and growth of local content.

Q Please explain which medium is the most preferred medium for e-content development? Print? Or TV? Or Internet/Web? Or Radio? Or Mobile/Wireless? Or a combination of some of these?

The Electronic Communication Act of 2005 promotes the convergence of technologies and therefore opportunities for growing the entire electronic communications sector, inclusive of radio, TV, mobile/wireless, etc. The reduction of costs of telecommunications will lead to an increased use of Internet and the web.