

ACP MEDIA WORKSHOP

PRESENTATION BY DAVID LARSEN, DIRECTOR OF AFRICA MEDIA ONLINE

MARKETING OF COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS

[© David Larsen, 2003, All Rights Reserved]

Introduction

Thank you:

Mr Seydou Sarr and Ms Eva O’Rielly of the ACP General Secretariate
The European Commission
The Belgium Federal Government Ministry of Cooperation for Development
The International Organisation of Francophonie
The Commonwealth Secretariate
Frederich Ebert Foundation

How I came to be involved

About AMO

My name is David Larsen. I am managing director of Africa Media Online.com. AMO is a media marketplace providing technology for marketing media products from Africa to the world. We have create and operate technology that allows individual journalists and photographers, as well as whole media agencies access to world media markets.

Based in South Africa, AMO was developed with very few resources and a lot of passion. The driving passion behind AMO is - “Africans Telling Africa’s Story” - affording Africans the opportunity to tell Africa’s story on the world stage. During this workshop I hope we will discover together why this is so important - that the South should be telling each other and the rest of the world their story.

Development on the AMO system began in March 2000. It took about a year and a half to develop the database driven e-commerce technology we need for gathering, archiving, selling and delivering pictures and articles, and in a few short years God has been gracious to us. We have gathered a number of the top photographic agencies in Africa and we have well over 100 journalists and photographers from all over Africa on our books. We have attracted the interest of some large players in the world market and we are the only organisation to have been twice nominated for the Highway Africa awards for the innovative use of new media in African journalism. We are currently developing a system that will enable the holding company, Media Market Technologies to serve media agencies in regions beyond Africa, and we will soon be looking for partners elsewhere in the South to build with,

Yet in spite of these victories, we feel there is a long way to go. Although I have been touted as an expert, I do feel that I am only just beginning on the journey of discovering what it is to effectively market communication products to the world.

My context:

In the US they speak about African Americans. I am not an African American but a

© David Larsen, 2003, All Rights Reserved

European African (fifth generation).

Speaking from an African context
Speaking from the context of the English-speaking world
My experience thus far very much in the print media

Because of my somewhat limited context I really want us to workshop this subject.
Believe there is collective wisdom here.

What is marketing?

Marketing is really about opportunities. Business is not just about making money. Or it shouldn't be. It is about serving people, serving a market if you like. And if you are never given an opportunity to serve your market, you may have the best product in the world, you will still have no business. If you never get the opportunity you have no business. No opportunity, no business.

So marketing is the hard work of creating and sustaining opportunities. It is, therefore, more than merely sales. It is everything that promotes opportunities for one. This involves everything from sourcing products to delivery, from branding to client care. Marketing is about opportunities to serve the market, about creating in the marketplace the desire to be served by you.

The Global Context

In thinking about marketing media products to the world, however, we need to bear in mind that we live in a world where opportunities are not equally distributed. Not everyone has a fair shot.

We live in a world where a few have massive opportunities and billions have very few:

Not so long ago Nike paid a famous basketball star \$100million a year to promote their product. Their entire staff in SE Asian workers collectively earn \$40million a year. Even the fact that I don't have to explain who Nike is says something about the concentration of wealth and power we are experiencing in the post-Cold War era. This is a world in which, according to a recent report, the three richest men on earth have assets equal to the collective GDP of the bottom 47 nations.

Globalisation, which was supposed to bring prosperity to all nations has actually increased the disparity between rich and poor. According to Paul Kingsnorth, author of "One No, Many Yeses", in 1960 20% of the world's population in the developed world had 30 times the income of the poorest 20% of the global community. Today they have 74 times as much. According to the World Bank 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 per day, 10% higher than in the 1980s.

All of us here would have experienced this hard reality in attempting to create opportunities for serving the market with our media products. Our world is dominated by powerful brands from the North who mediate the world's news. Africa gets news about itself from the West.

At a recent online editors forum in Southern Africa about 90% of participants said their major source for news on Africa is www.bbc.co.uk. There are over 300 staff working full time on www.bbc.co.uk. On news web sites in Southern Africa one company

www.iafrica.com is fortunate enough to have five staff, cut a year or so ago from 20, and most have just one person working on them. How can they hope to compete?

I was speaking to an editor of a Malawian newspaper a year ago and he was saying they have no budget for buying news from fellow Africans because they pay for a Western wire service. By far the highest overhead carried by most African newspapers is for foreign wire services - AP, AFP, Reuters etc. Freelance journalists in Africa struggle to sell stories to their own regional newspapers because those newspapers are deeply dependent on Western wires. The net effect is that money generated in Africa flows out to the West. The rich get richer and the poor, poorer.

This is not just a problem of the West or North, it is a problem in us, in our self perception. As African freelance journalists why is it that we have really made it, not when we are published in the South Africa's Argus or Zimbabwe's Daily News, but when we are published in the New York Times, Time magazine, or London's Guardian newspaper? If you are a geographic writer in Geo or National Geographic rather than Africa Geographic or Getaway magazine? If you are a news broadcaster it is such channels as CNN, NBC and the BBC that dominate the English speaking world, not the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

The reason is obvious - these organisations are the world's most powerful media brands and being represented in them is the road to fortune. That is where the competition is most stiff, so if you make it, you have really made it. The global reach of these organisations is immense. If we are honest, in Africa we have to concede that most of the time Western news organisations report on Africa better than African news organisations.

The West, however, is not only telling us our own story, they are also mediating the whole world's story to us. The only way I know about what is happening in the Caribbean or in the Pacific, or South America, or Africa for that matter, is when the West is involved. And what most concerns the West then, is, by default, what most concerns us. So even in Africa we hear far more about the terror of 9/11 in which several thousand died, than the horrors of Rwanda or Sierra Leone in which tens of thousands and millions were murdered.

Ultimately, I have no problem with the West getting the stories they are. They have their perspective, and we can't expect them to be interested in stories that don't affect them - in fact, good for them, many are interested in much of what goes on in the world that does not directly affect them. What I do have a problem with though, is our intense dependence on the West, that in a sense, on a macro-scale there is only one perspective out there, only one telling of the global story.

So the reality of a globalised world is not what we are all hoping for, and this is true of many in the North as well as in the South. For us, opportunities are not just there for the taking.

SWOT

With that global context in mind I want us to workshop a marketing strategy. I trust that what will emerge won't just get us more opportunities but will also be part of changing the current reality as we know it. In doing this we are going to do a SWOT analysis keeping the global context in mind.

STRENGTHS

So the question here is, what do we have to market? What do we have that the North or other regions in the world apart from our own, need to know? What do we have that the North, or other regions in the world aren't already getting themselves?

FEEDBACK

Transition:

Case Studies:

- New York Times and photo shoot - photographer Neal Slavin (Donald Trump, Rap Artists, military tanks)
- Newsweek and Chissano

WEAKNESSES

What are the hinderances to our marketing media products from the South and from ACP countries in particular?

FEEDBACK

Perceptions of Reality

- Perception in the world, and this is not just in the West, that what is really going on is in the West, in the wealthy nations, in the centres of economic power. Marketing of products reinforce this - perfume bottles that say New York, Paris, London, Tokyo - when last did you see one that said Kinshasa, Jakarta, Pot-au-Prince

Geography

- May be far from the markets - who you know, not what you know

Discriminatory travel systems

- Flights so much more expensive than in the West eg. internal flights in Africa

Lack of Resources

- Lack of financial resources for marketing, creating opportunities
- Lack of equipment

Discriminatory financial systems

- Challenge of paying an African journalist or paying for advertising in foreign publications

© David Larsen, 2003, All Rights Reserved

Infrastructure

- Poor telecommunications infrastructure
- Many newsrooms in Africa not even having internet/e-mail access
- most african journalists and photographers have yahoo or hotmail accounts

Discriminatory telecommunications systems

- Exorbitant cost of communications in the South -story of Linda's of trying to get Luis' brother online (US\$40)
- Much of Africa's communication infrastructure is either owned by Western companies or is charged a premium for piggy backing on Western international connections - Approximately 80% of Africa's inter-country telecoms revenue used to flow out of the continent each year because of this routing via Europe

Language

- Global culture forcing us to produce media in languages that are foreign to us - immediately at a major disadvantage. Our media production is on Western terms and we are dependent on first language editors

Political instability and lack of freedom of speech

- Challenge to run a communications business in a politically and economically unstable environment (eg. Zimbabwe)
- Suppression of freedom of expression (eg. Zimbabwe)

Personal discrimination or racism

- Superiority - would rather fly an American photographer/journalist out to cover an event than use a local - reinforced by poor performance often related to other challenges
- Assumption by foreign editors that we don't know what they want, that our training not up to scratch, they don't have the right equipment etc.
- Also that Africans will be biased - yet who reports on America?

Biase

- covering up things to put on a good face - Sorious Samura and "Cry Freetown."

Poor quality of product

- Lack of human resources and training

Competition

- From giant news organisations that dominate the world
- This competition is felt not just in the North but in our own back yard

OPPORTUNITIES

Given our context, our strengths and weaknesses, what opportunities exist for marketing our products?

FEEDBACK

Here are some of the opportunities that I recorded. To give you some insight into how they are practically applied I'm also going to tell you some of the ways in which AMO is

making the most of them:

Internet and E-mail

- Can now gather and deliver as effectively as big agencies - recent move by Reuters to be internet rather than satellite based
- Helps to minimise the geographic distance

AMO

- internet marketing - AMO no. 2 on google for "African Pictures"
 - www.sitesell.com - offers helpful courses and material on building site traffic.
 - Search Engine Watch <http://searchenginewatch.com/> - numerous others.
 - No point in having a website if you don't market it on the web. Need to have a "key word" or "key phrase" that you target. eg Senegalese news - sitesell courses teach you how to build sites that "get the click" for the key phrase that you are targeting - making sure that you have the best wording for your meta-tags
 - Need to be registered with all the big search engines
 - Need to word the text on your site correctly
 - Need to have some way of capturing your visitor's details - eg buyer sign-up forms - send them informative information

- marketing newsletters

- gathering, payment and delivery systems

- currently building a wire service system - it can be as powerful as those employed by AP, AFP, Reuters - can easily have a server sitting in New York or Brussels or Mumbai

Telecommunications networks

- SAT3/WASC/SAFE - US\$600 million project which will be largely owned and operated by African governments. Southern African - West African Submarine Cable links the West coast of Africa with Europe via a 15,000km long cable. The South Africa Far East cable is 13,500km cord linking Africa with Malaysia and India via Reunion and Mauritius
- South African power giant Eskom is creating an electricity grid right across the continent and wherever they lay power cables, they are also putting fibreoptic cables in the ground for Telecoms

Funding for Equipment and Marketing tools

- Are investors prepared to invest in equipment needs as they see it as an investment in global information democracy

AMO

- Setting up trust fund
- Want to identify African media entrepreneurs giving interest free loans to create reliable media hubs throughout Africa
- Also want to raise funds for set-up costs of web sites for individual photographers and for whole photographic and news agencies - about US\$280 set up, and monthly hosting fee is covered by a single picture sale (sustainable model)

Open Source Revolution

© David Larsen, 2003, All Rights Reserved

- Giving access to software and systems that make creation and delivery of media products possible
- Open source also has the potential of dealing with language barriers. A friend, Dwayne Bailey is founder and director of the Zuza Software Foundation, whose translate.org.za project translates software into local languages, making the leap into the cyber world less daunting, says: "Opensource is the future for Africa – it's the first truly altruistic thing that the developed world has ever done for the developing world – it means we can take opensource and develop software around our needs and wants without any strings attached ... ever."

AMO

- New AMO being built in PHP a highly effective open source database language that operates on Linux servers - more stable, effective, efficient, faster

World Standards

- Standard protocols being developed for the transfer of data which are open source

AMO

- New system creating which is being built to integrate with NewsML the new standard for the transfer of media developed by the International Press and Telecommunications Council

Geopolitics and Perceptions of Reality

- Post-modernity and openness to other view points - World Music genre
- Geopolitics - non-aligned movement, anti-war movement, anti-globalisation movement
- American press losing credibility - Iraq war and "embedded" journalists, "weapons of mass destruction"
- Mood change against big business, including communications oligarchies- saw a slogan the other day "Don't trust the corporate media"
- SA government set up agency to promote media diversity (SA media dominated by four giants)

The emergence of alternative markets

- In many ways the West is glutted with communication. They have effective systems in place feeding them the information they want, but there are other markets that are emerging - China, India, South America
- Even in this room there are markets, if only we weren't so locked into Western agencies
- Migrations - large movements of our people to foreign places and who want in-depth news about home from their perspective

AMO

- We want to go for opportunities in the developing world, not only because that is where they primarily are at present, but also because want to contribute to global media democracy
- We are building another level on to Media Marketplace Technologies - getting South media online

Travel Subsidies

- Using government programmes that help to promote your products
- In South Africa the DTI has Export Marketing and Investment Assistance - in order to travel to trade shows and visit clients

THREATS

Feedback

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if we are going to have Africans telling Africa's story to the world, Caribbeans telling the Caribbean story, and those from the Pacific telling their story, I believe there are a few pointers for the way ahead:

1. Join hands across Africa and across the South - build genuine relationships and working partnerships

- Across the colonial/language divides - we need to be more connected to each other than we are to Europe (news sharing)
- E-mails
- Learn from small businesses surviving in competitive environment (continental advertising sales?)
- ACP's role is to facilitate such relationships

2. Build solid, sustainable business models

- All needs to be on a commercially viable foundation
- Business models that avoid high overheads and debt - freelance forces competitiveness
- No hand outs - it reinforces our slavery
- Rather interest free loans as part of restitution - forces commercial viability - ACP can assist here

3. Lobbying for structural change

- Deal with structural discrimination - financial systems, travel systems etc.
- Put systems in place that facilitate our working together
- ACP can assist us in lobbying world structures

© David Larsen, 2003, All Rights Reserved

© David Larsen, 2003, All Rights Reserved