

the **POWER** is literally in our **POCKETS**

By Mich Atagana

In just a few years, the way we find information, communicate with the people we love, and how we get things done, has been transformed. This has all been down to the power of mobile technology. Having the world's information in our pockets is now second nature.

As Google we have already begun to see an increase in mobile searches, proving that users are favouring their mobile devices over desktop computers. And by some estimates, there are more mobile devices than there are people on the planet. According to data from digital analysts GSMA Intelligence, at the time of writing there are 7.5-billion active mobile devices, 500-million more than the 7-billion humans.

If you still need evidence to prove that we are living in a mobile-centric world, look no further than the growth of Android. In 2014 alone more than 1-billion Android devices were shipped across the world, taking Android's global market share to about 80%.

The mobile phone has evolved from being a communications tool to being a device which is increasingly relevant to developing economies. For instance, mobile innovations in Africa have opened up the financial system to countless people who'd previously been locked out of it. MPesa is an innovative mobile solution that has transformed the lives of millions, by enabling people without bank accounts to transfer funds as quickly and easily as sending an sms.

Many innovations have helped to work around the continent's infrastructure challenges. Those challenges are improving, in some regions, more Africans have a mobile phone than have access to electricity. From banking, agriculture, to telecoms, this has opened up never-before thought of opportunities and has changed the way business is done in many sectors on the continent.

In South Africa specifically, the internet economy contributed some 2% to gross domestic product in 2012. This was the key finding in our "Internet Matters - The

Quiet Engine of the South African Economy" report. The report also found that the internet's contribution to South Africa's GDP was rising by 0.1% a year, and as a result, the internet economy should account for 2.5% of GDP by 2016.

With so many innovations based on our adoption of mobile technology, the impact the internet economy has and continues to have, shows us what can be achieved when we look at our world through a mobile-centric eye.

Mobile isn't the panacea to all the continent's problems. Despite the mobile phone, increasing access to fixed-line, high-speed broadband networks is still a key component to unlocking the full economic power of the internet. However, as much as we look at increasing access to those networks, we must focus on what we can do right now with what we have.

Beyond economics, the widespread adoption of smartphones is also having effects on society. It has helped to increase transparency in politics as activists use mobile applications to monitor political violence and to fight against state control of free speech. For the non-profit sector, strategic uses of mobile technology can open the floodgates for millions, if not billions, of people contributing to rapidly scale campaigns and to engage the world in crisis moments.

For example, thanks to Twitter and the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls, the case of 276 girls abducted in Chibok by Boko Haram gained worldwide attention and forced the Nigerian government to publicly address what had happened. While debate still rages as to whether this action was clicktivism or activism, neither are invalid campaigning techniques.

One of the most famous use of mobile technology in social issues is, without doubt, Ushahidi. Ushahidi originally was a crowdsourcing app which mapped reports of upheavals submitted from all over Kenya during post-election violence in 2007-2008. Subsequently, Ushahidi has been deployed the world over – from crowdsourcing information on road closures following snowstorms in Washington DC in 2010, to assisting with relief efforts after New Zealand's earthquake in 2011.

With its impact on industry, to how we have deployed it when it comes social issues, looking at our world and considering our problems through a mobile-centric eye, the mobile phone has

helped to put the continent's development back into Africans' own hands.

More proof of the centrality of mobile technology in the world today, can be seen in the most recent additions to our web-giants. Many, from Uber, Instagram, and Rovio, are mobile-only, or at least, mobile-first.

At Google, a mobile-centric world has forced us to change our operations. Earlier this year, we rolled out our mobile-friendly update. This update boosted the ranking of mobile-friendly pages on mobile search results. It allows searchers to more easily find high-quality and relevant results that are clearly viewable on mobile devices.

Mobile is where we believe the future lies when it comes to computing, and it spreads the democratising power of the internet. The entire PC industry reached about 1.7-billion people, but with mobile, we are truly dealing with the first computing platform that has the capacity to get into the hands of almost all people on earth.

Sundar Pichai, Senior Vice President at Google (soon to become CEO), has been quoted as saying he can see a clear path to getting over 5-billion internet users one day. While true, the unstated and almost obvious fact that follows that statement is that the key to that 5-billion is mobile.

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In the past the internet managed to change just about every aspect of our lives. That was done mainly with the 1.7-billion people accessing the web via desktop. In tomorrow's world, thanks to the mobile revolution, we're looking to 5-billion people having access to the web.

When it was 1.7-billion, we irrevocably changed the world. Now imagine what we can achieve when 5-billion people are working together, sharing their local knowledge to come up with solutions to the world's problems?

And that's the other aspect of this new era of computing: more so than ever, it's an era where developing countries will be front and centre. With the

power of mobile, the internet no longer need be an overwhelmingly Western, Eurocentric space. This gives us the opportunity to extend the democratising powers of the internet. This has always been core to Google's mission, and is central to our work in emerging markets like Africa.

Google was founded in California, but as our "10 Things we know to be true" philosophy suggests, our mission is to facilitate access to information for the entire world, and in every language. This is why we have offices in more than 60 countries, offer Google's search interface in more than 130 languages, and offer translation tools that allow people to discover content written on the other side of the world in languages they don't speak.

Too often when we discuss how we should think and operate in this mobile-centric world, we focus on what apps we should be developing, or how we need to have the mobile experience top-of-mind. That is true. But we must also consider that this mobile-centric world is more than just another iteration of the digital age, it requires us to reimagine what is possible with the internet. More than ever, the mobile revolution has made the possibilities limitless, and the power to harness these possibilities is literally in our pockets.



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