

Uganda's telecom operators throw the money around



By [Walter Wafula](#)

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From serious business to showbiz and generosity, Uganda's telecom companies are walking a similar path. Celtel Uganda started it all with the Say Yes! and Win a House campaign in 2007 where it gave away seven houses in excess of one billion shillings.

Uganda Telecom put up four Toyota Hilux Pick-ups last December. The festive spirit campaign, which was shy of a billion shillings, came in as a perfect gift for the non-driving class who just had to buy airtime and talk, to win the cars.

Prior to that Celtel flew in Jonathan Butler, a famous South African but American-based musician. He helped Celtel Uganda raise part of the UGX200m it needed to start an education fund to help Ugandan youths achieve their dreams.

In January, Warid Telecom became the fourth operator with a spectacular launch that people still discuss.

MTN wasn't going to let the other operators steal the show, so they invited UB40 out for a show in Uganda and viola... They made front-page headlines, leaving our treasury with an incredible UGX300m as the organisers collected at least UGX3bn.

In what may be seen as shifting the telecom battle from reducing call rates and showbiz, MTN last week launched its first billion shilling campaign dubbed Kwata (get) Cash, with UGX1bn in prizes. New subscribers will participate by buying the low-cost Kabiriti phone or an MTN simpack while existing customers only need to load airtime.

Isaac Nsereko, MTN Uganda's Head of Marketing told journalists, "Every week, cash prizes ranging from UGX100,000 to UGX10m will be given out. At the end of the promotion, one lucky customer will walk away with UGX50m."

Immediately, Celtel unveiled its "Win and Live Like A Star" and the "Rock With Akon" campaign, in which subscribers will win a billion shillings in cash and prizes. UGX100m is the grand prize while some lucky participants will also get the chance to attend the April 26 Akon concert which is due in Kampala.

For the first time ordinary Ugandans will get a helicopter ride, stay in the same hotel with Senegalese-born musician Akon and a limo ride to his show. To be part of the events, the company's customers have to buy a Simpack or a Nokia 1200 or its airtime dial *555# or buy a ticket to the Akon concert, and then enter a draw to be one of the winners.

Small campaigns have had a ripple effect in the past -increasing the number of subscribers from less than 3.5 million last year, to more than 4.7 million now as well as increasing the revenues of the operators.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

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