

# Unlocking Africa's digital potential

International Telecommunications Week earlier this month brought together Africa's leading wholesale carriers, mobile network operators, a host of global service providers and content distribution companies at the annual global gathering of telecommunications companies, in Chicago.



(L-R) Mke van den Bergh, FCCW Global; Funke Opeke, MainOne; Chris Wood, WIOCC; Willem Marais, Liquid Telecom SA; Russell Southwood, Balancing Act

Telecoms services and network solutions provider, [MainOne](#), hosted a session on unlocking Africa's digital potential and highlighting its untapped potential, at the Africa Panel Session. It was an occasion for these industry leaders to share perspectives with a global audience on the recent developments in the region as well as opportunities and challenges being faced across the region towards the wide-spread proliferation of broadband services access.

It was equally a gathering for discussing the needed impetus for getting the continent ready for the global information explosion already taking place in select parts of the continent, where internet consumption by individuals is beginning to compare favourably with consumption patterns in advanced economies.

Focus areas of discussion included the need for the adoption of shared infrastructure models in order to reduce the cost of retail broadband services in comparison to reductions that have taken place in wholesale pricing over the years to within less than 5% of retail broadband prices.

The expert panel strongly advocated the view that the adoption of new business and regulatory models for shared

infrastructure would foster the pervasive digital explosion much needed on the African continent, rather than depend on proprietary network infrastructure built by mobile companies with thin pipes, to deliver voice services.

Discussants also engaged on the need to support the growth of local content as a means for growing intra-continent traffic and eliminate cross-border barriers to the exchange of information. It was equally stressed that liberalisation would continue to play a major role in the development of internet proliferation in Africa, with countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, used as models of advances being made in connecting more people on the continent.

Speakers at the event included executives from a diverse set of players including MainOne, Google, PCCW Global, WIOCC, and Liquid Telecom, with an in-depth analyst presentation reviewing developments on the continent by Russell Southwood of Balancing Act Africa.

Various participants highlighted infrastructure deployments such as MainOne's metro fibre builds in Lagos, Nigeria; Liquid Telecom's fibre backhaul across East and Southern Africa, and Google's fibre last mile projects in Uganda and Ghana, to demonstrate what can be achieved with the availability of shared infrastructure offering uncapped and reliable bandwidth services.

MainOne has remained at the forefront of the broadband initiative in West Africa with investments in telecoms infrastructure across the region and sponsorships of major fora such as [International Telecommunications Week](#), to advance broadband activities in the region such as this Africa Panel Session.

The company has continued to extend its network reach organically and through partnerships and has coverage in eight West African countries including Nigeria and Ghana.

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