

Google urges journos to go digital to thrive



By [Walter Wafula](#)

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At the recent Google's gUganda conference held in Kampala, Ugandan journalists were urged to embrace digital tools such as smartphones and tablet computers to secure their future as content providers.

Justin Arenstein a media consultant at Google, a global technology firm, told a group of journalists in Kampala that they need to acquire new tools of communication to align their services with today's consumer needs. This is because device software innovators are responding to consumer needs by designing trendy mobile applications and as such journalists must make the relevant content available on the channels.

"You need to save and get one of these because the future of journalism is on smartphones and tablets. If you don't get these things, you are going to end up unemployed or working for someone who is more junior than you. Find a way of affording or sharing one," Arenstein said at the G-Uganda conference recently.

Unlike most Ugandan journalists, he explained, journalists in developed countries like the United States of America have already started exploiting new tools of delivering their content to fit in today's digital world.

Embrace new channels of communication

Arenstein also cited podcasts, blogs and YouTube, as some of the new channels that Western journalists are using to remain relevant in the media industry. The expert warned of massive retrenchment, pay cuts and no pay rises for journalists who remain conservative in the wake of new media.

"The changes are coming and the tipping point is when enough people have access to cheap and fast media," he noted while putting *Newsweek's* into perspective. Amidst the media meltdown in the US, *Newsweek*, one of the world's most popular news magazines was sold for US\$1 to tycoon Sidney Harman last year, resulting into many job losses.

While there's interest in the adoption of new media and communication devices such as tablet computers among Ugandan journalists, affordability remains a challenge for most of them.

A tablet computer in Uganda costs between \$700 and \$1000 yet most journalists in the country are paid a gross of between \$140 and \$800 a month. Smartphones however cost between \$90 and \$800 each, and therefore are the most ideal tools for most journalists under the current circumstances.

Make use of Google's tools

Arenstein who doubles as a book publisher also rallied Ugandan journalists to exploit some of Google's tools such books, to start publishing electronic books that can be sold across the world. He noted that most books about Uganda or events in the country are "historical" necessitating the need for new content that local journalists can provide.

With e-publishing, he said journalists don't need to go through the traditional procedures to publish because ebooks can be published instantly at no cost as long as they have good content. With up to 2 billion internet users on the internet, he said, there's a potential market of US\$2 billion to be tapped into by book publishers.

"Write your books and sell them for \$1 or \$2. Don't be greedy in fact sell your books for US.50 cents."

"If you have got a good idea and you got access to good content, you can make good money," he said.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

Walter Wafula is a seasoned journalist who has reported for the *Daily Monitor* newspaper in Kampala-Uganda. He is also a contributor on Bizcommunity.com website. Email Walter at wafwalt@yahoo.com and connect on LinkedIn.

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