

Kenya gets YouTube domain as internet users grow

By Carole Kimutai: @CaroleKimutai

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Online video sharing site YouTube, has announced the launch of a Kenyan domain, www.youtube.co.ke. YouTube Kenya will offer video content from around the world through a local interface that will promote the most relevant content to Kenyans. Already Kenyan broadcasters Nation Media Group, the Standard Group Limited, and Homeboyz Entertainment Limited are among the top YouTube channels viewed.



The announcement by YouTube comes when Kenya's online user numbers are growing. A recently released quarterly sector statistics report from the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) shows Kenya has 4.2 million internet subscriptions as at June 2011.

The CCK report says the total international internet bandwidth available in Kenya was 5 131 237.12Mbps at the end of the quarter under review. This is a 25-fold increase from the previous period attributed to additional capacity by the EASSy cable. Mobile operators continue to dominate the internet market with 4.1 million (more than 98%) of internet market share being through the mobile platform.

"We are thrilled to be launching YouTube in Kenya," said Olga Arara-Kimani, Google Kenya's country manager.

"We have remarkable reserves of information right here in Kenya, from music, educational clips, news, and self-help tips. With a new localized version of YouTube, Kenyans will be able to connect and use this information more easily."

According to Dr. Bitange Ndemo, Kenya's permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Kenya government remains committed to helping Kenyans connect with content that is most useful to them. YouTube Kenya will allow local users to find and view the videos most relevant to them by tuning search and discovery algorithms such as featured videos and homepage, as well as category spotlights. Content uploaded by users in Kenya will show up as "browse pages" on the YouTube Kenya site, creating a new virtual space for the national community and giving Kenyan users the opportunity to increase their exposure.

"The Internet is opening up new channels to market the wonders of Kenya to potential tourists all over the world," explained Najib Balala, Kenya's Minister for Tourism.

"Ours is a beautiful country; even with the highest number of tourists' arrivals ever recorded last year, a 15% growth compared to 2009, the sector has the potential to grow even stronger. Online video platforms like YouTube can help us achieve this potential." said Balala.

One of YouTube's key priorities, in addition to the making the platform a comprehensive destination, is ensuring that videos load and play quickly - even in places where bandwidth is at a premium.

Improving internet access remains a key priority for internet players across Africa. In addition to the standard YouTube experience, users have the option to watch videos with YouTube Feather. This "light" version only includes the site's most basic features, to help ensure that those with low-speed Internet connections are able to play videos play faster. YouTube Feather can be found in TestTube (www.youtube.com/testtube).

ABOUT CAROLE KIMUTAI: @CAROLEKIMUTAI

Carole Kimutai is a writer and editor based in Nairobi, Kenya. She is currently an MA student in New Media at the University of Leicester, UK. Follow her on Twitter at @CaroleKimutai.

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