

Making face-to-face research mobile to better tackle African HIV research

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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Africa, HIV, and research have long been bedfellows - but what happens if you add mobile methodology to the mix? Alastair Hill, co-founder of OnDevice Research, shares The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's findings on whether mobile market research methods are more effective in conducting HIV awareness research across Africa...

In the US summer of 2013, making it the heart of South Africa's winter, the [and Melinda Gates Foundation Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) moved a portion of their multi-country study of HIV awareness to mobile in five countries. This was done to help the NGO better plan its communication across Africa.



Alastair Hill, co-founder of OnDevice Research, shared his experience in doing so at the first day of the first African #MRMW conference held at the Doubletree Hilton in Upper Woodstock. Hill said "It is possible but not without its challenges." He also explained how they effectively moved an hour-long face-to-face survey to mobile, got respondents to answer all the questions, and what they'd do differently next time. In the end, he says, mobile worked hand-in-hand with f2f and qualitative group interviews.

Hill explained that OnDevice Research is four years old and works across 74 countries, backed by a venture capitalist. He said so much of the overall 'research dollar' is spent on face-to-face that some of this spend will move across to mobile. His own company used technology on feature phones and smartphones alike in order to gain access to the widest possible sample through profiled survey respondents that's as representative as possible.

Three of the main challenges of moving face to face to mobile...

Hill explained it's hard to get a truly representative sample in Africa at the moment. Of that, it's particularly difficult to access rural females, young and old alike, as there's usually a male gatekeeper in charge of the communal mobile phone, making it hard to access this crucial demographic. Lastly, Hill noted that survey length often poses a challenge, as many surveys include 100-plus questions that don't necessarily translate to mobile.

Interestingly, Hill revealed that research on market research data shows in 2012 there was twice the level of drop off after 15 questions globally, but between question 20 and 40 this levels out.



Alastair Hill of OnDemand Research

It's also been found that splitting a survey into two works better as a form of chunking methodology, especially over mobile if you don't provide a deadline for submission. Hill said this applies to Africa, even in markets where smartphones are becoming more prevalent, such as Nigeria. When asked "what's changed?", Hill says of course there's better feature phone technology available now, but it's also about keeping a more focused eye on what works and what doesn't. Added to this, he says clients are getting better at writing mobile surveys and at following best practice. A member of the audience interjected that it's more about the total time taken to complete the survey rather than the overall amount of questions asked, as well as question quality and relevance.

Next, Hill explained the actual research undertaken by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This included insights from radio, TV, mobile and social media usage, as a project combined with traditional face-to-face findings. Hill said the Africa-specific problem of sample size means they needed very good media planning due to the continent's fragmented media landscape. They took a deep dive into the female 16- to 34-year-old age group to raise HIV awareness, as this is the demographic often identified as being at the highest risk. Hill says mobile drastically sped up the process with field work wrapping up in a week or two. While mobile internet usage shot up as expected, radio remained the dominant medium in rural areas, with steep declines noted for magazines in the sample of approximately 6,000. Northern Nigeria alone had 46 radio stations listened to, with a huge proportion of that pirated, and much of it accessed through mobile internet and WAP.

Through the data, they created a film called [Inside Story](#) to create awareness of HIV and used the data to better plan the film's distribution through pre- and post-campaign interviews.

Specific ways mobile is improving lives in Africa

Hill mentioned a free report on mobile internet released a few weeks ago by [Research. Tech Moran](#) says 500 people were surveyed in South Africa, with another 500 in the UK, Nigeria and Kenya.

It was found that mobile internet is a power for good as it has improved lives. Interestingly, a higher rate of satisfaction is reported from the African respondents, with 41% in the UK, 61% in South Africa, 62% in Nigeria and 68% in Kenya. Delving deeper, Africa's top mobile activity that led to improvement in lives was better access to education and online learning in the form of work-related information as well as health and medical-themed apps. This was followed closely by being more connected to the world, making it easier to connect with friends and family, as well as access to entertainment, and making it easier to pay bills. These were the top 5 responses from a total of 20 options. In the UK, only access to maps and keeping in touch with friends and family had the same response to level to these African mobile life improvements.

[Click here](#) to follow the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on Twitter, [here](#) to become a fan on Facebook, and press 'play' below to view a TED Talk from March 2014 in which Bill and Melinda Gates talk about how they've been giving their Microsoft wealth back to society through their work at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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