

Blame poor internet for SA's lack of cutting-edge marketing

By  Leigh Andrews

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Know what'll happen if we don't make great strides with SA's internet growth? We'll lag even further behind the rest of the world, that's what, says Strategy Worx CEO Steven Ambrose...

Everyone who's anyone in the media or marketing sphere says [digital](#)'s the next big thing. That's why my first emotion was worry, on reading a release stating that Strategy Worx feels South Africa's digital outlook over the short-term based is bleak, particularly based on the back of [CEO Steven Ambrose](#)'s visit to CES 2015 earlier this month.



Steven Ambrose, Strategy Worx CEO

Some CES attendees spoke of new [product ranges](#), others waxed lyrical of the popularity of [selfie sticks](#). Ambrose, on the other hand, noticed that while we definitely have the passion and love of all things tech, South Africa's current internet and mobile growth trajectory just isn't on par to handle much of what was shown at the show.

And unless something big happens to change this, he says SA's digital future is in serious doubt, as we simply can't support the "exploding 'internet of everything' and the accompanying devices and digital services", most of which are expected to be mainstream in the next five years. I contacted Ambrose to find out more.

He said we simply can't escape the fact that we're living in an information age, which involves not just the [internet of things](#) but the 'internet of everything', where all devices are connected to the internet and multiple devices connect to one another, bringing technology into all areas of our lives, providing us with choice and the ability to customise environments and services based on what we want.

As a result of this, business will move online like it never has before. People will interact with companies digitally, with self-service and automation becoming key pillars of business in the near future. This change will be both internal, with operating systems and processes in the company, as well as external with how companies deal with their customers, suppliers and other stakeholders.

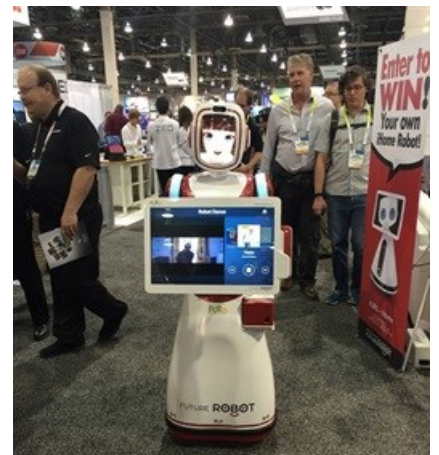
That's why our internet issues need to be addressed fast. We need high-speed, high quality, ubiquitous broadband, because it's actually "becoming the third utility in the first world after water and electricity". Ambrose shares other insights below...

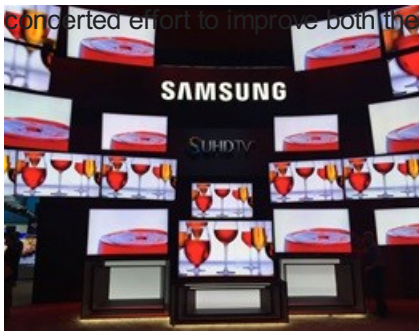
■ ***Firstly, what were your favourite things at the recent CES, and why?***

Ambrose: My favourite things were all the clever gadgets with connected apps, and the huge LG 8K TVs, which offer four times the resolution of the new 4K TVs. Wearable everything was also a high note.

■ ***How long do you estimate it will take for South Africa to truly be part of the digital wave and embrace these technologies?***

Ambrose: Well, that depends on how quickly South Africa's infrastructure is improved. There really needs to be a





Some of the products on display at CES

concerted effort to improve both the power supply to the country as well as the connectivity infrastructure required to increase broadband penetration.

There'll need to be pockets of comparability with the developed world and even some of the emerging markets, however broadly and in sufficient quantity, in order to make a massive change to society. We really are about five years behind.

■ ***OK, let's assume the right people are reading this to make a difference - what exactly do we need to turn this situation around?***

Ambrose: That's a simple and complex question, all at the same time. On the surface it comes down to increasing broadband infrastructure - fibre to the home and more cell phone towers that are LTE Advanced infrastructure. But there has to be the business case to support that, and that means we need to stimulate the economy and actively grow the size of the middle class in South Africa. In essence, it is a complex mix of policy, regulation and private sector involvement across all the key areas of the economy.

■ ***Give us the broader picture - how does the situation differ across the rest of the African continent?***

Ambrose: The rest of Africa faces not dissimilar issues to South Africa on this front, although it depends where you go in Africa. Kenya, for example, has an environment that is far better positioned for internet growth than Mozambique, for example. The key issues remain the same - economic and infrastructure development to support the participation in the information age. South Africa has the advantage of the most developed infrastructure in Africa for now. However, our policy and regulatory issues are hamstringing us with relation to some African countries, notably Kenya and Nigeria.

■ ***Let's delve into the impact of SA's digital delay on marketing, which is largely taking place online...***

Ambrose: Marketing is going mobile, and that does not mean merely mobile phones but all forms of mobile connectivity across all sorts of devices. The platforms and the systems that drive the intelligence necessary to make these new connected marketing initiatives work will find they are limited to a small segment of our society, which in turn will negate much of their impact. The net result is that cutting-edge marketing will not come to South Africa for a while.



Ambrose looking into the digital future...

South African businesses will then risk having less of an online presence than their international counterparts and, as a result, will become less competitive on a global scale. At the same time, international companies will begin to bypass South African companies and supply services to their customers directly because they are more geared to providing services to a global market through an online interface.

Scary stuff. Get on board, SA, before the digital age passes us by...

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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