# Going for fame, attention and a big name

BY KUI KINYANJUI

It was the stock boom of 2007. Against backdrop of frenzied trading on the Nairobi Stock Exchange, a Kenyan with ties to the financial hub of the City of London launched an online portal. Rich.co.ke has since grown into a respected industry information site analysing the events of the day for their implications for stock market performance.

“I call it guerrilla marketing. For me, the content was something I was already doing and which I decided to share with a wider audience – its uptake has been surprising,” said Aly Khan Satchu of Rich Management.

The success of Mr Satchu’s website and mailing list speak to the marketing opportunities the internet provides. From a handful of followers in 2006 when unique users with about 400 visitors on the website everyday. The Rich.co.ke mailing list now has 1,200 subscribers including CEOs, financial executives, local policy makers and: four African presidents and around the world.

“We live in an accelerated world that is flatter – you can use the internet to reach more people in new ways. Twitter, blogs and websites have this stickiness that can attract people like no other media. And it’s instant,” said Mr Satchu.

For Mr Satchu, who arrived in Nairobi in August 2006 and published his book “Anyone Can Be Rich” based on the NSE and the Kenyan economy after working in finance in the City of London for 20 years, the Internet has been a platform for fame.But many Kenyan companies and individuals are yet to wake up to the ‘online marketing’ power, and reach, of the net.

According to analysts, five years ago, just three companies were us ing the web to extend their brand presence and most were multinationals, such as Coca-Cola. Today, that figure has risen more than ten-fold, but it’s a sum that remains tiny compared to the opportunity.

The new media, encompassing social networking websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, blogs, online news services and mailing lists,offers companies the ability to communicate in a more intimate fashion than more traditional media, such as newspaper advertising or television broadcasts.

It is a reach that is slowly attracting Kenyan companies. Last year, when it was launching its Yu services in Kenya, mobile service provider Essar picked the internet to entice users to its network. Potential subscribers were asked to go onine to book their phone numbers on the new network, in a deliberate pitch for a younger and more internet-savvy target market.“We were able to measure the campaigns matrix almost in real time - something whichis impossible with analogue media. During the ‘Reserve your number campaign’ we were giving Yu daily reports on registrations, hits and unique visitors on the portal,” said Ali Hussein, CEO of direct marketing house Wunderman.
Mr Hussein said the unique campaign also equipped Essar with information on over 80,000 potential subscribers to the network, including demographics and the mobile net work they were already using. The ability to segment markets, and reach consumers only in a particular city, or with specific interests is one of the greatest powers of the net, as is the ability to precisely measure consumer response - and therefore the Return On Investment.

In the local scene, an increasing number of 'digital pioneers' are emerging from large multinationals such as Coca-Cola, through Nation Media Group and Safaricom, to small entrepreneurial export businesses like Sandstorm Kenya and high-end tourism offerings.

Coca-Cola now uses the Web as an extension for its branding activities, as with its Life In Red and Bamboocha campaigns, while Nation Group uses social media websites, such as Facebook and YouTube, to deliver news content in new ways to users. But the medium has yet to make it into the mainstream due to the high dependence by Kenyan firms on more traditional media to communicate with customers. "Why? Firstly because learning a new science is always hard work. Secondly because no one in the middle ground of business wants to be first – they are more comfortable with doing the 'same old'," said Chris Harrison, chairman of Wunderman.

Industry watchers say the arrival of cheaper internet connectivity will see more companies adopt online marketing, with its offer of more effective marketing for lesser budgets.

Kenyan brands will also have the chance to extend their presence beyond Kenya's borders, Mr Harrison said. Already, many local travel agents, hotels and airlines have gone online to market deals to people outside Kenya. And ways of marketing online are evolving, globally as well as locally. This year's Adobe Systems online marketing survey shows companies now focusing on the delivery of rich media and merchandising features, as well as social networking, mobile, and personalization applications.

"Web marketing continues to be an area of investment and innovation because in challenging economic times it can deliver high-impact marketing programs that can be easily and immediately measured," said

Doug Mack, vice president of consumer and hosted solutions at Adobe. "Over 90 per cent of our survey's respondents are planning to invest in new rich media and social networking technologies to ensure their brands and products stand out on the Web," said Mr Mack.

The survey reveals that the top ways of reaching customers online planned for 2009 include blogs (32 per cent); user ratings, rankings, comments (31 per cent); 360-degree spin (29 per cent); catalogues and circulars (28 per cent); podcasts or live video feed (28 per cent); product comparisons (27 per cent);and videos (27 per cent).