Coca-Cola and BT connect communities with free internet access

Coca-Cola South Africa, bottling partner Coca-Cola Fortune and BT Global Services have collaborated to provide free internet access to impoverished communities in South Africa by setting up WiFi on Coca-Cola's refreshment dispensing coolers.

The pilot project has been launched in two key areas in Umtata in the Eastern Cape Province and Nelspruit, in the Mpumalanga province.

"The initiative forms part of Coca-Cola's commitment to building sustainable communities by empowering the members of these communities. We believe that by giving them access to free WiFi we will enable students and school children in the area to increase their knowledge through research while also giving entrepreneurs and small business owners in the community the opportunity to manage some of their business aspects online," says David Visser, Chief Information Officer of Coca-Cola South Africa.

Oliver Fortuin, MD of BT Global Services, sub-Saharan Africa, said: "We are delighted to collaborate with Coca-Cola and involved in a project that will give underserved communities much improved access to information and education opportunities. At BT, we have a vision for a Connected Society: to help improve society globally through the power of digital connections. As well as providing access, we want to help people use technology to apply their creativity and harness the possibilities of today's connected world."

The sites were strategically chosen for their accessibility

The project provides WiFi connectivity for community members of Nelspruit and Umtata. The sites were strategically chosen for their accessibility, so as to maximise usage of technology by the locals. The first site is Sasol Integrated Energy Centre (SIEC) in Qunu, Umtata. This is a popular spot for locals and is in close proximity to a taxi rank, attracting large numbers of people. Furthermore, SIEC is run by a predominantly women run co-operative which will benefit from the increased flow of people. The second site is located at Thokozane Fast Food situated in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga.

Both outlets are in the vicinity of shopping centres and schools, allowing members of the communities to combine their day-to-day activities with the opportunity to access the internet for business and educational purposes. Internet access is offered for free via WiFi, without any purchase requirement of any kind and is accessible for the duration of the time spent at the outlets.

Coca-Cola South Africa, Coca-Cola Fortune and BT Global Services aim to grow the project and install WiFi coolers in various parts of South Africa to help support and grow sustainable communities.