

Moving African internet content back to Africa

By  Mark Tinka

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African internet users are starting to enjoy the benefits of faster access to key web resources as well as lower latencies, as telecom providers step up the roll out of content delivery networks (CDNs). The next phase in the development of Africa's internet infrastructure will see more content and services brought closer to end-users. This in turn, will spur growth in demand for these services.

Over the past six years, we have seen a great deal of activity in Africa's telecom market as providers have invested in infrastructure such as carrier-neutral data centers, open peering internet exchange points, national and regional fibre links and submarine cables. The next step will be to host more content within Africa, rather than in Europe and the U.S. - 90% of African internet content is hosted outside the continent today. We'd like to see that figure reversed so that 80% or 90% of content is hosted within Africa.



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Bringing content closer to end-user

CDN's such as Akamai Technologies, Level 3, CDNetworks, Limelight, Google Global Cache, etc. deploy content and caching nodes that store copies of popular websites and content. SEACOM, for example, offers operators and networks the ability to use these content and caching nodes. The result is that the content can be brought closer to the end-user - great news for African consumers who want better performance when accessing web applications, services and content.

CDN's accelerate and optimise file downloads, video and music playback, software updates and other web content requested for by operators and internet service providers connected to a telecom network. For end-users, this translates into lower latency, faster speeds and more reliable service when accessing popular web services and content from around the world.

In addition to bringing content from American and European content owners closer to end-users, CDN's will make it more viable for African content owners to host their content within the continent.

Bring it back to Africa

Many content owners currently host their content in Europe or the U.S because regional links between many African countries are of relatively poor quality. Now they can bring it back to Africa. For example, a South African content provider could then host its content in South Africa and allow it to be cached on a CDN node in Uganda to provide East African users with faster access. This is a major boost for African internet users and content producers and will improve the end-user experience.

There will be a marked performance in African websites for users who access them from countries outside the ones where they are hosted. This will support the many organisations striving to roll out services such as e-learning, e-health, entertainment, and more, for a pan-African audience.

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