

Two ways for Africa to grow exponentially (Part 1)

By  Tiisetso Maloma

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One way to define Africa's challenge is a lot of us do not know how to embed ourselves in the world economy, provide innovatively and freely without trying to rope in perceived gatekeepers.



Online shipping system that quotes buyers instantly to anywhere in the world

At the backdrop of the South African Post Office having 'going concern' challenges, there are a number of local courier companies mushrooming. Interesting!

I am still not over the pain SAPO cost my book business last year when they went on strike for months.

We do not have bookstore distribution for my books in South Africa or across Africa. We use SAPO to ship. The post office is relatively cheaper. I so wish they had an instant online shipment-quoting-system, instead of having to go to them every time. Even better, a shopper instructed quoting system you can plug into web stores.

It got me thinking that the ability to sell online via an online store, where the customers, anywhere in the world, can instantly get a shipping quote, can be exponential for Africa's growth.

We did some research of what is available out there as I have a book coming up - [The Anxious Entrepreneur](#). Plus we would like to promote and sell it to African countries buzzing with startup entrepreneurs: SADEC countries, Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria, Ghana and others.

There is Shopify. Anyone can setup an online store instantly with it. Then we discovered a courier company called Dawn Wing, they have a free Shopify plugin. Anyone can set up a store there with capabilities to give instant shipping quotes to anywhere in the world.

Imagine this power that any creator of products in Africa can setup an online store instantly and have automatic international shipping. This is what free markets are about.

It won't matter whom their marketing reaches. They can get it to them.

Think of this point as a metaphor for 'freedom to access'. These days we do not have to buy billboards (expensive and unaffordable to startups) to access markets. There is Facebook Ads, where for R10 a day, you can advertise to your selected niche and reach over a 500 people.

Teaching coding to primary school kids

My generation of high scholars (I am 28), I suspect even the current generation, cannot readily identify how their subjects work into their lives now and in future careers.

Back in high school I could not figure how to apply geometry, accounting or science to my life situation - then and in future.

Many years later as an entrepreneur, I find myself learning things with a purpose. I read marketing articles so I can know effective ways of promoting products. The only way maths applied to my life then was for learning at school and practicing at home - nothing outside.

There is something about coding (computer programming). I do not, cannot and do not want to code. But I can readily understand the purpose it serves in most things I use daily: mobile phone, DSTV decoder (I possess one but do not have a television), Buffer App (for scheduling tweets), printer, ebook reader, etc. It basically runs most things in life today and more so in the future. The beer we drink is made with programmed machines. The cars we drive. Robots. Microwaves.

If kids in primary and high schools can be taught basic programming and its possible uses, as they go through their days, they will realise most things are programmed: electric toys, music players, games, etc.

The thing which will stand out is the different purposes for which programming is used for and can be used for.

Their basic understanding of programming will always connect with workings of different products and their purposes. They will see deficiencies in workings of programmed products and get a sense they can improve them. Then they will get ideas of what uses they program for.

I read a story of two kid brothers in Nigeria (Osine - 13 and Anesi Ikhianosime - 15) who taught themselves coding and created a web browser enhanced for feature and low end phones because they were "fed up with Google Chrome". They saw a deficiency that international web browsers aren't enhanced for Africa's slow internet. The web browser is called Crocodile Browser Lite and is available on the Google Play store.

I believe the leading drive for learning coding wasn't necessarily to just have the skill but the perceived purposes (ideas) for which they can use it for. The internet is abundant with free coding lessons and shortcuts.

When people understand the purpose for which a skill can serve, they are be motivated to self teach. If African kids can be introduced coding in primary and high school, the world then has millions of coders who will contribute to newer uses of coding, improve deficiencies in workings of products and do so at their own driven will - which is entrepreneurial.

I think of Wordpress (open source website creation and hosting tool/application) and the thousands of plugins (add-on software component that adds specific features to an existing software application) it has, created by private individuals. They offer them partially free but you have to purchase to get their full use. Even Shopify has private coders for profit.

There are plugins for website sign-up forms, product order forms, video display, shopping carts, etc. Imagine if African kids were up in there competing and contributing. The rest of Africa (and the world) would be up in there benefitting. Jobs would be self created.

Kids of 10 years could independently be able to contribute economically by 17 years and prior tertiary. This is how the next Mark Shuttleworths will come out. He knew coding and coded for a purpose. Look where it got him.

ABOUT TISETSO MALOMA

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