Tsha Tsha!

Despite all predictions about Internet access, this website is a roaring success, says **Heather Ford**.

In 2004, the Riverbend Learning Solutions Group was asked to develop a website for an SABC 2 television programme called Tsha Tsha, a weekly television series focused on young people living in a world affected by HIV/Aids and other social problems. The television show reached in excess of two-million viewers per episode, but there was a comprehensive strategy for attracting post-broadcast discussion on radio talk shows (in nine languages), big-screen viewings with facilitated discussions in higher educational institutions and organisations involved in HIV/Aids training and education.

The brief to Riverbend Learning was to target the Tsha Tsha website at young black South Africans. The idea for the website was simple. Each week users would be asked to introduce new characters to Lubisi (the fictional rural town in which Tsha Tsha is based). Users would email scriptwriters (in either English or Sepedi) with a synopsis of their character, choosing one of a range of character photographs from the website to choose from. Each week, users would vote new characters in or out of the story, while scriptwriters wrote in the most popular characters. The person with the best entry was invited to be in the final episode of the series. Despite all predictions that users wouldn't have access to the website and that scriptwriters and other personnel wouldn't be able to integrate into the television timetable, the website was a roaring success.

In retrospect, the Tsha Tsha website had a number of winning ingredients that no predictions about low access levels could have stopped:
• audience engagement – the audience was actively involved in telling their own story;
• dedicated support – a full-time translator and scriptwriter;
• local language support – the website was fully translated into both English and Sepedi;
• medium integration and marketing profile – the website drew audiences from the television programme, from viewings outside of broadcast hours and from training programmes – all contributing towards a very high viewership of the main product.

The television programme advertised the website and television audiences were able to feed back through the website medium, which, in turn, fed back into the television programme (the winner got to be in the final show). This seamless integration of traditional and new media was vital to the success of the website, and required an open approach to copyright.

If content is relevant, immediate and powerful, audiences will find a way to get to it – and even interact with it in powerful ways as this example shows.

Collaborative development

Open content philosophies, such as collaborative development of content presented by projects such as Wikipedia, are critical tools for the development of African content industries.

If one considers the need for relevant content in schools, business, media and popular culture, one realises just how important it is for us to find new ways of producing content more quickly and efficiently. Open content is an important tool, not only to help source the raw materials with which we can build locally-relevant content, but also in order to decrease the time to development of content projects by employing collaborative, community-based efforts

of producing knowledge. But how does the idea of open content fit into local content development?

I believe that the priority for open content should be shared equally for local content if we are to see any real benefits to the local economy. Open content from international sources needs to be adapted by local creators, developers, authors and producers to make it relevant to our own needs.

Open content, in this sense, doesn't have to be something that local publishers are afraid of. We need, now more than ever, the local creative industries in order to repurpose textbooks, learning materials and films.

Local open content doesn't necessarily mean cheaper content. The production of local content in the television industry costs more to produce, but because the materials are relevant, local programming is now the most popular, attracts the greatest advertising revenue and has grown a burgeoning film and television production industry in South Africa.

Open content should therefore be seen as "free" only in the sense of freedom from many of copyright's constraints.

The Shuttleworth Foundation, for example, is investing money into projects to develop free, open, local content aligned specifically to the South African national education curriculum. Although some free sources are being used, the materials in the "Copyright, copyleft and everything in between" project had to be developed from scratch.

But because the project applied the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 licence to the material, and because the raw source files are going to be supplied to the public with the finished movies, thousands of commercial and non-commercial uses could come out of these materials in the future. This means that a product with a nominal cost can go on to be used and re-used thousands more times.

Open content licensing, therefore, needs to be integrated into policies such as local content quotas in the broadcasting industries and the Black Economic Empowerment charter in the technology industry.

By compelling those who produce local content to make that content accessible under open content licences, we will soon see the investments made by the government and by major publishing companies multiply as others are able to re-use that material.

Prioritise open and local

If we don't prioritise the local and the open at the same time, open content will continue to be as irrelevant as the majority of content is currently for African users in education, culture and science.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the tools for open content (ie: licences) are still not sufficient to guarantee this development. Open content licences are just one piece of a puzzle that is fraught with challenges. If our goal is to enhance the presence of Africans on the Internet then one needs to look at the issue holistically in order to arrive at a solution that makes use of a myriad different tools. New media infrastructure, local applications, supportive, open, local content policy, and an awareness of branding and new legal and development models all need to be considered if we are to see the emergence of Africa as a significant presence in the global digital information commons. ■

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Chris Kirchhoff

"Open content should be seen as 'free' only in the sense of freedom from many of copyright's constraints."

Deconstruct the geek-speek

by Kerryn Mackay

Open content

The phrase "open content", referring to "freely available and usable", was coined by David Wiley, a graduate from Brigham Young University in the United States. Wiley co-founded the Open Content project and put together the first licence specifically for content (versus the existing licence for software) in 1998. As its name implies, open content refers to material (academic, educational, creative and media) that is free from the restrictions of default copyright. In order for it to be accessible for people to copy, download, share, make derivatives and redistribute, open content often applies a licence that tells others what they can do with the material. This licence specifies the default uses that are allowed without the permission of the copyright holder. If users wish to make other use of the material, they must ask permission of the copyright holder. This could involve monetary compensation.
● The most contentious issue around open content is whether it should only encompass content that allows derivatives and/or commercial use.

Building the African Commons

Only a few months after the launch of Creative Commons South Africa there are already a number of exciting projects that make use of open content licences, says **Heather Ford**.

The media's contribution to the digital commons can be tremendous. Take, for example, the Rhodes New Media Lab's coverage of the 2005 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Because of their use of the Creative Commons attribution non-commercial share alike licence, 3 400 items of video, photography and reporting can now be re-used by others. According to site editor Vincent Maher the open content model works well since all non-commercial uses are permitted by default and commercial contracts can be entered into with permission from the copyright-holders. http://fest.ru.ac.za/

Highway Africa News Agency

Another example is the Highway Africa News Agency's use of Creative Commons licences to distribute their content. HANA is funded by international donors with the aim of improving the quality of African ICT journalism. Their website explicitly encourages users to re-publish stories on their own website using a simple three-step process. This user-friendly approach to re-use of content is exciting because, by anticipating copying by other sites, HANA can ensure that they are attributed properly. Since attribution is their main requirement and distributing their materials as far as possible is the goal, the open content model has been very relevant and hopefully will prove highly successful. http://www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za/hana/

Laugh It Off

Laugh It Off, the company that recently won a freedom of expression case against South African Breweries in the Constitutional Court, is another licensee. Laugh It Off's 2005 Annual is licenced under a Creative Commons non-commercial licence which enables free copying, sharing and "re-mixing" of the South African voices of youth culture. Laugh It Off has prided itself in remixing local brands in order to make important socio-political statements. The Annual is full of remixes of South African culture, and so it seemed fitting that the pages should be used as fodder to fuel even more creative output. http://www.laughitoff.co.za/publications/publications.htm

M&G Online

M&G Online has been the first major news company in the South Africa to make use of the Creative Commons licences – if only for their blogging portal Blogmark. Blogmark started off as an experiment in sizing up the blogging phenomenon – it was offered as a free weblogging service where both professional and citizen journalists could publish unlimited views, opinions and reportage in an open, unrestricted format.

According to M&G Online editor Matthew Buckland, the reason for using the Creative Commons licence was twofold: "The cc licence is a perfect way to enable individual artists and writers to add a level of protection to their intellectual property but at the same time allow for the sharing and swapping of creative material on the web." With more than 1 500 users per day and almost a thousand registered bloggers, it's definitely not a relegation.

As the media experiments with more interactive forms of journalism – where commentary from the public doesn't necessarily require strict copyright restrictions – we are bound to see more of this in the future. http://blogspot.mg.co.za/

ccMixter

ccMixter South Africa was launched in September on the back of a competition sponsored by the Go OpenSource campaign to find Jozi's hottest remixers. ccMixter SA is a community music sharing site featuring songs licenced under Creative Commons, where you can listen to, sample, mash-up, or interact with music in whatever way you want. A project of Creative Commons South Africa, ccMixter aims at linking like-minded musicians, encouraging collaborations, evolving ideas and developing technical and creative skills. It is hoped that ccMixter will soon become a platform for new musical talent, a breeding ground for new production ideas and a growing archive of high-quality music from Africa.http://ccmixter.org/

Schools and artists

There are new projects being licenced under Creative Commons in Africa every day. From SchoolNet Namibia and Direq International's "Hai Ti!" comic, to almost every educational technology provider in South Africa – including the recent licencing of the International Computer Driver's Licence (ICDL) materials. From books of poetry by AJ Venter and Netanye Naude, to artists like Roy Blumenthal and Victor Geere – Creative Commons has had an incredible response, especially in South Africa. http://www.schoolnet.na/news/stories/introduction.html; http://www.schoolnetafrica.net/

The guardians

Although response has been good, many of the "guardians" of African culture and knowledge remain distinctly out of this fray. It is the archivists and the leaders of public institutions around Africa who hold the key to making these valuable works accessible.

In the next phase of the African Digital Commons, it is to these key institutions that we must turn. Our local pioneers have led the way. They've shown us how experimentation with new, open approaches can reap great rewards. In this time of change only one thing is certain: those on the cutting edge of intellectual property will perhaps be able to see changes to their industry before they happen.

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- Open content licences allow for certain rights to be reserved, compared to default copyright which states that all rights are reserved in terms of copying, distributing or making derivatives.

Floss – Free/Libre Open Source Software.

Richard Stallman, a computer programmer from New York, first developed the Gnu-GPL licence and the Free Software Foundation. The movement began in the mid 1990s and was largely a response against large proprietary companies "hiding" their code in order to sell software for profit. The "libre" part of the acronym was added to distinguish between "free as in freedom" and "free as in free beer". Free software has made the world five promises:
1. The freedom to run the program for any purpose
2. The freedom to study how the program works and adapt it to your needs
3. The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbour
4. The freedom to improve the program and release your improvement to the public so that the whole community benefits
5. The ability to have absolute access to the source code of the program

Digital commons

Digital resources which have been recognised as "public". In the same way that the transport system requires a set of road networks maintained by the government, so too does the technology industry require a set of resources held in common in order for innovators to prosper.

The African digital commons

To assist the growth of an African digital commons, key cultural and knowledge products must be made accessible in order to inject shared resources into the development of a culture of innovation. Free and open source software and content which is open are key ingredients in this vision.

What is Creative Commons?

A US-based non-profit organisation working in 31 countries which offers an alternative to default copyright that allows creators of cultural products to both retain control over their works and make explicit how they may be used by a wide community. Creative Commons has created digital licences that can be attached to creative works whereby the author of the work may choose to reserve some rights, rather than the blanket-notion of copyright which states that *all rights are reserved*. The kinds of rights that can be reserved through the use of a Creative Commons' licence are:
- Attribution
- Attribution with non-commercial usage
- Attribution with non-commercial usage and no derivatives allowed
- Attribution with non-commercial usage and share-alike (meaning if any derivative work is made from the original, the same licence must be attached to the new work)
- Attribution and share alike

Creative Commons ZA

South Africa is a recent addition to a growing list of countries that have imported the Creative Commons licences into national jurisdiction. Creative Commons South Africa is a web portal dedicated to showcasing the work of local creators, educators and administrators who use Creative Commons licences. http://za.creativecommons.org/

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