



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/>

ccMixer

ccMixer South Africa was launched in September on the back of a competition sponsored by the Go OpenSource campaign to find Jozi's hottest remixers. ccMixer 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,

ccMixer aims at linking like-minded musicians, encouraging collaborations, evolving ideas and developing technical and creative skills. It is hoped that ccMixer 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 School-Net Namibia and Dreq 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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