

Uganda newspapers go mobile

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Banks, matchmakers, advertisers, marketers and a host of other businesses, are using phones to deliver their services. Now it is the newspapers' time.

Kampala - Uganda's leading private newspaper *Daily Monitor* has launched its mobile phone news service to deliver unrivalled local and international news content to the text-messaging users in the country.

The new service, *Monitor Mobile*, was the first to hit the local market when it went live a few weeks ago.

"The service was initiated to offer readers more by breaking the stories as they come and concentrate the next edition on the follow-up story," said Ms Aggie Assimwe Konde, the marketing and circulation manager Monitor Publications.

To access the service, mobile phone users send an alert message to mobile phone service providers MTN's 197 service for registration. The customers enjoy a week's free service before they start paying.

Konde said the paper chose to go mobile this year because the mobile phone service providers now have the capacity to pull off reverse billing "in which we send out the broadcast but the receiver pays for it when they have airtime on their phones only," she said. Users of Monitor Mobile will pay the normal sms charged by MTN, and Celtel Uganda. The duo charges an average of Ushs130 per sms.

Konde said that over 2000 readers have already subscribed to the network and the company hopes to have close to a million subscribers this year. "We are targeting four million readers," she revealed.

Richard Ogwang, 37, a text message user and an ardent up-country reader of the newspaper said the service is an excellent innovation: "It's a good idea, and a very convenient way of getting news, especially for us who live in the rural areas," said the Gulu resident.

Ogwang will probably be among the lucky Ugandans who will soon receive Monitor Publications' package of KFM, Nation television and the newspaper's content by mobile phone.

"If we get broadband services, we intend to have the first multimedia outlet in East Africa where by we shall integrate pix, story ideas, feedback et al as one unit intertwined with KFM and TV," said Konde.

Meanwhile, *The New Vision* newspaper, *Daily Monitor's* main competitor, has introduced *Say it With sms*, a new mobile service that allows readers to comment on newspaper articles or send it story tips.

Both services are similar in cost so even though Uganda is reputed to have the highest telephone charges in the world, people will still find it cheaper to pay about shs130 for an sms than buy a copy of the newspaper at shs1000.

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