THE NUMBER IN MY POCKET

The Power of Mobile Technology for the Exchange of Indigenous Knowledge

The Ulwazi Programme, eThekwini Municipal Library, Durban, South Africa

The rural and peri-urban areas around Durban account for 47% of the city's total population, translating into 1.36 million inhabitants and constituting a population of around 750,000 households. These areas are typically characterized by high levels of poverty, poor infrastructure, and lack of education. The rapid expansion of the cell phone industry has allowed grass-roots communities to gain access to this powerful communication technology. The Ulwazi Programme is running a local installation of MobilePRINQ, a mobile technology platform used by communities in South Africa. This project is the hub for the Ulwazi Programme's social media accounts. Ulwazi is the Zulu language for knowledge, and the programme is about sharing and promoting the local knowledge of the communities. The Ulwazi Programme is co-ordinated from a central programme office, where the programme is managed and coordinated.

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Oral histories are used to collect stories. Photographs are arranged with interesting members of the community and interviews carried out by the fieldworkers, with support from library staff. After interviews are concluded, the photographs are displayed on the website. Recordings and images are archived annually.

A closed-down interface was developed for mobile devices, with a simple hyperlinked access providing links to the main sections of the website. This appraised down version of the portal still has the main features and the ability to comment on blog posts. The mobile version of the Ulwazi portal was developed using the simplified mobile phones that are prevalent in the area.

Many people use their mobile phones to make calls, send text messages, take photographs, record voice, and send email. Email has become a powerful technology in most people's lives, allowing them to send an e-mail address and many using it every day. The WordPress platform allows for websites to be created and designed using a template. It is a powerful tool for creating websites. By setting up a unique email address and assigning it publishing rights in the WordPress database, all e-mails sent to this address can be converted into articles in the database. The subject of the email becomes the title of the page and any attachment images are inserted into the page.

For all approved and published submissions, the authors are credited with a URL and the e-mail is transferred to their phone.

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