BiNu expands into Africa

BiNu, an application aimed at emerging markets and feature phone users, has opened its first office in Africa, in Cape Town.

By Nafisa Akabor

Cloud-based mobile specialist biNu, which develops a product aimed at feature phone users in emerging markets, has established a presence in Africa for the first time, opening an office in Cape Town.

The company's application, also called biNu, is aimed at Android- and Java-based feature phones and provides users with compressed and pared down Web content — text only, using the least amount of data possible — making downloads quicker and cheaper.

The company claims that its experience is 10 times faster than standard mobile browsers, while using 10 times less bandwidth.

The app provides content from a wide range of services, including Google, YouTube, Wikipedia and Facebook, and includes other websites that cover news, sport, health information, weather and classifieds. There's even an e-books category.

Registered biNu users are also able to interact with each other on the platform through a messaging service.

BiNu is headquartered in Sydney, Australia and is headed by CEO Gour Lentell, a Zimbabwean national. The company has offices around the world and opened its Cape Town branch earlier this month. The local office is run by technical director Tim Wightman.

Wightman says biNu has expanded its operations into Africa because it needed more developers — it is currently hiring — and wanted to operate in a time zone

similar to those in Europe. It's main market research base is already on the continent.

The company hopes to have built a team of eight people in Cape Town by March.

BiNu's main revenue stream is market research for its large clients. Users are able to fill in surveys through the app and they earn biNu credits for doing so to spend on virtual goods like airtime, explains Wightman.

The company has partnered with about 60 network operators globally to offer users airtime value, which is redeemed instantly through the app using credits earned from filling out surveys.

Africa makes up a large part of biNu's user base, with the majority coming from Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Wightman says South Africa already has more than 50 000 registered users — those that signed up to fill out surveys — but there are unregistered users who also make use of the app.

The most popular handsets are Nokia feature phones like the X2, Asha handsets and low-end Samsung Android phones, says Wightman.

Although the app does serve sports-betting ads, it is currently used for internal market research purposes and an ad revenue model will be introduced for fantasy league apps.

Anyone who wishes to access the service can visit m.binu.com from an Android or Java-based feature phone. — *(c) 2014 NewsCentral Media*