

**Electronic Commerce Strategies for Development:  
Promoting an International Dialogue**

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**MAGICALKENYA.COM**

A PRESENTATION BY  
THE KENYA TOURIST BOARD

**Summary:**

***The Kenya Tourist Board has become a regional leader in embracing and using ICT in the promotion of tourism. Through a major joint project with the European Union, they developed and launched one of the continents largest and most detailed destination websites- [Magicalkenya.com](http://Magicalkenya.com)- which has since gone on to in several awards and become the world's most popular online resource for Kenyan travel. The creation of the site was a challenging process, and it has presented further challenges in terms of maintenance, funding and development. As the site continues to grow and adapt to the dynamic demands of global tourism, Kenya is now looking towards creating its first portal for online business and product delivery.***

I would like to firstly take the opportunity to thank UNCTAD and the organizers, for giving Kenya the opportunity to take part in this Forum.

The great value of these forums is undeniable as it is important in our modern changing Africa, and especially in the dynamic tourism sector to meet and to share our collective experiences and thoughts.

For the international travel market, Africa is a unique destination, a place with very special qualities and attractions unlike any other. For those of us in the African tourism sector, it is a place that also presents unique challenges.

We are now facing one that presents us with equal challenges and rewards- The Information Technology Revolution.

In Kenya, we have seen ICT change the way we live, the way we work, and the way we do business.

Our Tourism sector is our second highest foreign exchange earner and one of our strongest and fastest income generators- and it stands to gain inestimable benefit from accessibility to ICT.

As the new millennium arrived, Kenya did not have an official destination website and had not fully embraced the use of ICT in tourism. As a result, the Kenya Tourist Board identified future use of the web and ICT as one of its most important tools in tourist promotion of the destination.

To some extent, being so technologically disadvantaged actually served us well in the early stage of our ICT development. Being able to start from a clean slate meant that we did not have to slowly progress through the ICT learning curve that the Western world has undergone. We could learn from their mistakes without having to make them- and benefit from starting out with the best available technologies.

We could plan strategically and establish clear and focused objectives.

We see tourism as an international exchange. Not just a financial one, but also a global exchange of cultures and ideas. People travel to gain the benefit and insight of experiencing the world beyond their own shores.

This is what the Internet offers us, access to the world far beyond our shores. For the tourist industry, the Internet is now one of our greatest resources. It is nothing less than the world at our fingertips. The Internet has created a world of business without borders.

Kenya looked to this new world, and had to evaluate the many hurdles that stood in its way.

As is often the case in the developing world, one of the initial hurdles we have faced was cost. Embracing new technologies is a costly enterprise, as is keeping abreast and up to date in the ever changing tech world.

The adoption of modern information technology systems comes at a price. Bringing ourselves into line with global standards of IT involves not just purchase and installation of hardware and software, but personnel training, implementation of systems and most importantly, the upgrading of the physical infrastructure required to support these systems.

Which leads directly to another challenge. Our telecommunication infrastructure must be developed in an appropriate manner to support bandwidth and connectivity that will deliver us the best possible access to the Internet.

Making such infrastructure development a priority means creating social value for ICT. To build a society that takes the greatest advantage of ICT, we need a society with a great ICT knowledge and literacy. Accessibility, awareness and understanding of technology on the part of a new generation of Kenyans is required.

Fortunately, the recent democratic election of a new Government in Kenya has seen renewed and committed interest in creating a more E-literate and accessible society.

The provision of multiple ISP's to the Kenyan market, has reduced monopolization of the Internet. Competition between several leading ISPs has lead to a steady and continued improvement in service and price.

The end result of this is increased accessibility to the Internet and the spread of IT awareness. Computer training and literacy among Kenyans is one of the highest on the continent. Combine this with a steady decrease in the costs of hardware and increased availability of software, and you have an inevitable recipe for a more technologically aware society.

As in the Western world, the spread of Internet usage has lead to a rapid revolution in understanding and acceptance of these technologies into everyday life. The Kenyan business community has embraced these new technologies and we now see, for example, Kenyan agricultural companies using remote rural cyber cafés to communicate with farmers and conduct online orders.

Our Tourist industry is one of Africa's strongest, and like our destination itself, it is one of the most diverse. We have an unparalleled range of attractions and services, a great wealth of cultural and natural wonders and opportunities for unique experiences. Our industry reflects this wealth of diversity, and Kenya offers a wide range of options to the traveller, covering an equally wide range of budgets.

This too was a challenge we faced. Our large scale industry approaches ICT and the web in many different ways, and each of our many operators have their own promotional and business interests.

The Kenya Tourist Board set out to provide a central focus point for online promotion by creating an official destination website-MagicalKenya.com.

In order to tackle our financial barriers, this project was a joint funded project between the Kenyan Government and the European Union, and development began early in 2001.

To build a site that could accurately encapsulate the scope and diversity of our entire destination, a specialized team of developers was gathered.

Our aim was to create a definitive interactive guide to Kenya. From a marketing standpoint, this was an opportunity to increase awareness of the destination, and to move Kenya beyond its common perception of a purely wildlife and beach destination.

For seven months we worked to build the website. Our programmers, writers, graphic designers and photographers all worked closely together, building the site in gradual stages.

To ensure that this was the most comprehensive guide to Kenya, we fully involved many local and governmental institutions to access the most up to date information.

This was one of the most challenging aspects of the site development. We had to work closely with the tourist industry to access the most accurate destination information. Kenya Wildlife services worked alongside the developers to ensure that information on our Parks, Reserves and wildlife were all represented in fine detail. The National Museums worked to build a large database of cultural information.

This required a great deal of cooperation, diplomacy and sharing of information, but in the end result was beneficial to all involved. The site has become an important resource for all of these participating organizations. The individual databases of information have remained the property and responsibility of each contributing organization, and they will retain ownership and use of these valuable electronic resources.

The completed site was launched at the 2001 World Travel Market in London. The site comprised over 1900 pages of text information and over 500 original photographs by some of Kenya's leading photographers. We also incorporated 100 360 degree Ipix images. This made it the largest destination website in Africa, and one of the most comprehensive single destination sites.

The final product realized our desire to create a fully interactive guide to our country.

We had assumed that the visitor had little or no knowledge of the country, and rather than bombard the visitor with lists of attractions and destinations at entry level, developed an entry that encourages the visitor to explore based on personal interest.

The developers felt that consumers approached a destination with an interest in visiting a particular environment, or in having a particular experience and created an information matrix that can be entered through either a geographic or activity based interest.

The guide is backed up with full databases of practical travel information, along with detailed information all aspects of the destination- including recipes, traditional artifacts, history, music Swahili lessons, and much more.

We believed that the best qualified people to promote the destination were the consumers themselves, and developed a "Traveller's Tales" area, where a diverse collection of travellers present their own very different experiences of travelling through Kenya, offering practical advice and links to relevant sections of the site along the way.

The site has a front-page newsroom, and each month features a new destination within Kenya.

The site has received a highly positive response. It has been heavily trafficked, and now receives visits from over 2000 individuals daily. Most significantly, within 3 months of launch, 6% of our polled visitors had used the site in the planning of their trip.

We have since received several awards- IBM called the site the "best reference site in Africa", CNN featured the site on their Hot Spots Travel segment and PC World Magazine declared MagicalKenya.com "Africa's Best Tourism Website".

While this project has been a success story in many ways, it still presents its own unique challenges. We are aware that a website of this size and complexity is a living and breathing entity that requires constant maintenance and support.

Maintenance of such a large site requires a great deal of technical and financial resources, and presents a major cost implication. We have faced this problem by turning to the private sector, and through sales of banner advertisements alone have managed to make the site, its hosting and daily maintenance completely self-supporting within one year. For our funding body, this was a great example of sustainable development in action.

We are now exploring ways to not just maintain, but to expand and develop the site. We plan to introduce a range of new features and multimedia elements, but most importantly, to introduce a national portal for our tourist sector.

At the African IT Forum held in Berlin this year, the WTO projected that any tourist player not doing business online in 5 years will not exist- and that for the developing world National and Regional Portals are the best hope of achieving an online market presence.

We are now creating an online directory of industry operators within the site. The structure of the site will mean that traffic can be directed to operators in a highly focused manner. Visitors will be able to use the guide to contact operators who suit their own individual needs.

Making this site accessible to the industry is mutually advantageous. Not only does it directly assist the tourism sector but greatly improves the functionality of the site, creates further revenue potential, and takes us beyond the realms of simple information provision and into actual business and product delivery. Once again we are planning this project to become rapidly financially self-sustaining and developing.

We are working on this project with the newly formed Tourism Trust Fund of the European Union. They see this as an excellent opportunity for them to support Small to Medium tourist enterprises by co-funding their presence in this portal.

We share a common view that ICT holds great potential for economic development in Africa. In cyberspace, we find an opportunity to move beyond geographical and developmental limitations.

The power of the web lies in the sharing of information and the exchange of ideas among a global community. This is the same notion that lies at the heart of the international tourist industry.

It is also the real purpose of our Forum here today.

In the same spirit, I would like to thank you all for your time, and for sharing our experiences.

