

MTN Publicom Booth at Madudu Catholic Diocese Headquarters, Uganda

Introduction

Description of case Study

There is a tradition of the diocese acting as a communication centre for the community, in as much as other members of the community, such as the schools, the dispensary, traders and villagers, use their post box. The MTN Publicom phone booth was installed at MCD headquarters in 1992. It is operated by a contractual relationship between the diocese and MTN Publicom. MTN own the booth and are responsible for all maintenance e.g. emptying coins, faults. The diocese have no responsibilities on except that it is in their interests to protect asset as they receive revenue from service. The diocese also run an informal system whereby diocese worker verbally deliver messages.

It is unclear where exactly the original idea came from for the diocese to host a booth, but it was the initiative of one of the fathers, without any formal involvement of the community. There is no obligation on the diocese to provide an attendant, so when there is nobody in the adjacent office, it is usually possible for users to find somebody in the compound to assist.

Aim of Project

No specific aim as it is not a formal development project. Justified as part of their overall service to the community

Role of ICT

Hosting of an MTN Publicom phone booth in the premises of the Catholic headquarters.

The headquarters also offer a mobile phone charging service based on their solar system (not extensively used).

Sources of Funding

Diocese paid approx. 200,000/- (\$130) contribution towards the cost of installing the booth. The fee for charging a mobile phone is 500/-, which does not seem prohibitive, but the inconvenience of travelling from a remote area to a charging service may be more of a constraint (only around 3 charges / week).

The diocese asks users for a commission of 200/- to make a call, irrespective of duration of call. Incoming calls, and the message delivery service, are free of charge. Some people prefer to come at night and avoid paying this commission.

The diocese receives a percentage of the revenue taken by the booth (approx. 5%), but this is paid by MTN in the form of phone cards.

Project process

Attendant delivers messages (from incoming calls) within the village (approx. 2 km radius). She can write a small note to give to students (at school on same site). People who phone tend to know a pupil at the school to whom a message can be given. The attendant estimates 30 - 40% of users require some form of assistance with using the booth; examples of problems include:

- put coins in and don't lift receiver;

- don't understand computer messages;
- don't know how to dial - If done slowly, get computer message.

Views from other attendants put this percentage considerably higher, which emphasises the value of the attendant. However, they also state that only a low level of education is required i.e. people only have to be shown once. Nevertheless, there are certain users who prefer to have an intermediary make the call, and are prepared to pay for this service.

Points of Interest

Principal users are people who have moved in to the area (e.g. police, teachers, timber workers), traders and businesses, students, and farmers. High migrant population, who phone to Rwanda.

There is no electricity in Madudu, so the booth is powered by the centre's solar power system. Extra load on the system means this is no longer reliable. MTN wanted to remove the booth.

MTN most often enter into arrangements with local entrepreneurs to act as attendants. The installation at Madudu is interesting in that it involves an NGO, but a consequence of this is that it denies a local entrepreneur of a revenue stream. It is not clear how many booths can be supported by a community (a community in the same district had 4 booths installed within roughly a 5 km radius).