**The Venue**

This time round Google chose not to use Strathmore like last year. The event was held at Westgate Shopping Mall. They hired all the Nu Media cinema halls (4 in total) and each hall had a separate agenda. This was far much better than last year where we sat in one hall the whole time. You had the option of going for your topic of interest.

**The Welcome Address by Linda**

The power connection was proving to be a problem but finally Linda was able to welcome developers to this year’s iteration of GKenya.

Linda started off by informing the audience that a recent research had established that there 10.2 million internet users in Kenya. This accounts for 25% of the total population which is pretty impressive in Africa.

The key enablers for this are

* Reduced cost of mobile devices
* Cheaper data bundles
* Speed and ease of access
* Online government services such as KRA pin registration

The key trends established so far are

* Social networks – a majority o f the people online spend their time on Facebook and Twitter
* Search, email and general browsing
* Entertainment
* Shopping companion
* Local content

Linda then went ahead and reminded the audience of Google’s strategy in Africa which is to get users online by developing an accessible, relevant, and sustainable Internet ecosystem. Google wants to make the internet an integral part of African life. To do this Google needs to overcome three main obstacles; accessibility, relevance and sustainability. In Kenya they have approached these challenges as follows

1. Accessibility – Google are running a pilot project which aims to bring down the cost of broadband internet. The project named WaziWifi has been piloted around the Junction area.
2. Relevance
   * Getting Kenyan businesses online – [www.kbo.co.ke](http://www.kbo.co.ke)
   * Assisted towards the launch of the Open Data Portal – [www.opendata.go.ke](http://www.opendata.go.ke)
   * Mapping efforts aimed at keeping map information relevant and detailed as possible
3. Sustainability
   * Working with KIE to train primary and secondary school teachers so that they can introduce the internet to the students as early as possible
   * Academic scholarships
   * Developer outreach such as the just concluded Google Android Developer challenge

Before stepping off the stage Linda introduced the rest of the Googlers. I was not able to capture all their names but they were from all over the world from Tel Aviv, Ghana, Paris, Nairobi, and London to Dakar.

**The Keynote by Nelson**

The welcome address pretty much covered most of the keynote. Nelson pointed out that Africa’s GDP is going steadily up mainly due to the increase in population with the effect of increasing mobile penetration.

Nelson the expounded on the points raised during the welcoming speech. To improve internet access Google has taken the following measures

* Created three direct links between Africa and the rest of the world. These cables have landed in West Africa (Nigeria), Southern Africa (South Africa) and Eastern Africa (Kenya).
* Google caches – Several countries in Africa now have Google caches which have helped improve loading speeds
* University access program – under this program Google has improved bandwidth amounts for selected universities
* Wi-Fi trials (WaziWifi) geared towards addressing the “last mile”

Towards achieving relevant products Google has done the following

* Helped attain the Open Data portal as stated earlier
* Bringing local content online – you will now find local businesses appearing in search, maps have been improved and you can get details about these businesses
* Getting Kenyan Businesses Online - Google is providing a free website builder. The site works both on desktop and mobile without any tweaking
* Products such as Google Trader, Google Baraza, Chrome OS and Google+

The winners of the Android Developer Challenge for the SubSaharan region were then announced. Among the winners were two Kenyans and one Nigerian. Way to go Kenyan developers!!!! The winning applications were

* Afrinolly (Nigeria) – movie listing for African movies. You can view trailers of the same movies.
* Olalashe (Kenya) – Olalashe means brother in Maasai. This application enables a person to track crime
* Shoppers Delight (Kenya) – This application enables a person to do price comparison for various commodities in various supermarkets. You can also compare brands, nutritional content e.t.c

I think you can find the applications on Android Market Place, I haven’t tried yet but I am very interested in Shoppers Delight. Each of the winners walked away with 25,000 US Dollars (approximately 2.3 million Kenya shillings).

**Innovation @ Google – Ahmed Hamzawi**

To me this was far the most interesting session the whole day. Ahmed took the audience through the five principles Google use which has separated them from their competitors. The five principles are

1. Innovation is not perfection

Focus on what is the best for the user, learn quickly --> publish early then perfect over time, dog fooding (test internally), fail fast, fail gracefully (be able to revert to older versions).

1. Hire the right people

Attract top talent, create a culture of innovation

1. Ideas come from anywhere

Acquisitions (Google has been doing a lot), employees ---> the concept of 20% time whereby you use 20% of your time to work on any project you want to

1. Flattening the management structure

No need to have four vice presidents, x directors e.t.c. A lean structure is used by Google

1. Share everything

You have an idea? Share with the rest of your colleagues. Good ideas tend to aggregate to the top while bad ones sink to the bottom of the pile

**The Snacks, Lunch and the afternoon session**

With that we went for the coffee break. Pete’s Coffee was in the house and I loved the snacks offered :) After the snack I proceeded to the Google App Engine room. The session was more hands on and we actually got our hands dirty coding.

For lunch we were given vouchers worth a thousand shillings valid anywhere within the Westgate Shopping Mall. The first thing that crossed my mind was to head to Uchumi to get myself a few kilos of sugar (now that sugar is so expensive!) but unfortunately some of my friends didn’t get vouchers. We headed to Galitos for Pizza and soda. Abel and Charles you now owe me lunch now that I “***bought***” you guys pizza :) I don’t know if it was a coincidence or part of the plan that the event fell on “Terrific Tuesday” but the timing could have not been better.

With my stomach full I headed to the Android room. I was so sure I was going to sleep but the session was pretty interesting. We did a simple Android application though the internet connection was so faulty I could not even download the resource file containing the images we were using. After the Android session was a demo on how to use the YouTube API. At this point I went outside to connect with some of my long lost friends and so I missed it entirely.

**Entrepreneurs and Developers Panel**

The panel was composed of

* Kariuki from Zege Technologies
* Samuel Kamochu from Sakanya Network
* Ahmed Hamzawi from Google
* Kirubi Onesmus from Mobile Interactive
* David Lamayan
* Lina from Books To Schools

I could totally relate with the panel as it consisted of very young people who have already made a mark in their respective fields. For once there were people I know personally and so I guess by “Modus Ponens” or “association” I am actually going somewhere.

The questions asked by the moderator were as follows

* How do you know when you have a good idea?

When people who are not your family or friends understand and appreciate it. As the originator we always think our ideas are the best and our friends fear hurting our feelings so they will never say the truth. Ahmed uses what he calls the “mother test” (Reminds me of the “Cleaner Lady Test” but that is a story for another day). If his mother can understand what the idea is then it is a good idea.

* How do you differentiate an idea which has already been implemented?

The general conclusion was that you have to find your competitive advantage. What are you doing that the others haven’t done?

* How do you build momentum, get resources and funding?

Most of the initial funding is from you. How do you expect people to fund your idea yet you haven’t even put your own money into it? You have to believe in your idea before you can convince others to.

* How do you know when to stop coding and show the product to people?

This is something many developers do; we always say that we are going to add just one more feature then release it then one feature becomes two and so on and so forth. Kamochu was of the opinion that as soon as you have the fundamental functionalities working, you need to release the project. This had been discussed earlier by Ahmed during his speech on innovation @ Google; publish early then perfect over time.

* How do you make sure you don’t starve while doing your million-dollar idea?

You don’t need to make money straight away from your million-dollar idea. Do side jobs and utilize tools that make this easier so that you will still have time for your main project. Doing websites still gives a person some cash. Lina outsources projects to colleagues and at the end of the day she is still able to make some cash.

* How do you get customers?

Most people would want to do a big splash when launching but as Kariuki aptly put it a big splash means that if you fail it is going to be a big fail. Kamochu pointed out that most start ups don’t have that kind of money to do a big splash. What they did is they started with a small focus group then expanded. With this you are also able to fix bugs without negatively affecting acceptance.

Ahmed informed the audience that before you launch you need to know your target market and your platform (Ovi Store, Android Market Place e.t.c.). You should use catchy descriptions and name to describe your application to increase the chances of discovery. You also need to create a website that captures what your product does, be active on forums and make use of social media.

* How do you know when you have succeeded?

Customer satisfaction is one of the measures to successes. Ahmed went further and identified other metrics used to measure success; sign ups per day, rate of growth, number of requests for enhancements, amount of time spent by users on the application, how many times a user comes back (7 day, 30 day measure).

* How do you deal with failure?

Most people don’t like admitting failure but sometimes ideas just never take off as expected. Lina attributed this mainly to the fact that as developers we do applications for ourselves. The general verdict for this was that you just need to let go, count your losses and think of another idea. This might sound harsh but there is no point retrying something you have already seen that it is not working. Failure is a very good teacher so you will actually learn from it.

Parting Shot

The event was far much better than last year; I learned more and networked more and can’t wait for the next one. They should however get a reliable internet connection next time and plan ahead on power issues as there were so many disruptions. Some of the developers also did not get vouchers yet they registered for the event and there were issues with the t-shirts. At the end of it all it was a day well spent.