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Q1: Respondent details

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Q2: Country or Customs territory

NIGERIA

Q3: Organization

Private sector

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Q4: Title of case story

Facebook Express Wifi Empowering Entrepreneurs in Nigeria

Q5: Case story focus

E-commerce development and efforts to bridge the "digital divide".

Q6: Case story abstract

With Express Wifi, Facebook is working with carriers, internet service providers, and local entrepreneurs to help expand connectivity to under-served locations.

Express Wifi empowers local entrepreneurs to help provide quality internet access and make a steady income.

Working with local mobile operators and internet service providers, local entrepreneurs are able to use software provided by Facebook to connect their communities.

When people are able to purchase fast, affordable and reliable internet, they're able to explore the range of information it has to offer including news, education, health, job postings, entertainment, and communication tools like Facebook.

Facebook partnered with a local service provider to launch Express Wifi in Nigeria in 2016. The stories of 3 market traders operating at Alaba International Market in Lagos, (believed by some to be the biggest electronics market in Africa) and their experience using Facebook's Express Wifi service are discussed here.

Q7: Who provided funding?

Private sector

Q8: Project/Programme type*Respondent skipped this question***Q9: Your text case story**

1. Emmanuel Igbojekwe's Story

Emmanuel Igbojekwe is an animated and articulate speaker. The 29-year-old dealer in security and CCTV gadgets exudes confidence and passion when he talks about his business.

A relentless businessman, Emmanuel is always on the heels of his clients and suppliers, sending them quotations, confirming Emails, and negotiating deals to install security gadgets. He does all of this online.

That's why the Internet, and more recently, Express WiFi (XWF) are at the core of his business. A speedy hotspot helps ensure the needs of his customers are met.

As recently as three months ago, losing deals due to poor Internet connectivity would have been a regular occurrence for Emmanuel. Now, he says, because of XWF, deals no longer slip through his fingers. Business is better because he's got more online immediacy and can address his customers queries in real time. Timely customer service enabled by the Internet is Emmanuel's unique selling point, his point of difference in a crowded, competitive market. Unlike most businesses, he doesn't have to rush to a cyber café to send quotations via email to customers. Powered by XWF, Emmanuel can now sit in his office and respond to customers' demands, or queries, on his phone.

XWF has made communication easier too. Emmanuel uses his XWF data plan to Skype, communicate with suppliers and customers via Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, and to keep in touch with people who matter. As a direct result, he saves on travel, expensive international calls, and time.

Emmanuel is so happy with XWF he's stopped recharging his broadband service that he'd been using since 2010. He now consumes more than 1GB worth of XWF data every week and loves the freedom being online provides. As Emmanuel puts it, "Now, I pay less and get more."

There are fewer hassles too. Emmanuel says XWF is user friendly in that he doesn't have to install an antenna to get a connection and, as long as he purchases another data pack, he can roll over his unused data every month. With his traditional Internet Service Provider (ISP), these were real challenges.

As a child, Emmanuel was inquisitive. He liked to pry open his father's old electronics to fix faulty parts. He hasn't lost the desire to learn new ways of doing things. He realizes that being knowledgeable and up-to-date is the only way to stay ahead in a business that is constantly evolving. Thanks to XWF, he can now stay abreast of the latest innovations in products and installation techniques, something he wasn't able to do easily, earlier.

Emmanuel's need for a stable Internet connection is made more urgent by the fact that he doesn't want to be just another trader in Alaba International Market. He wants to trade with the world beyond and find new ways to grow his business and attract customers. With the help of XWF, Emmanuel now advertises his business on JiJi, an online classifieds platform. His Facebook page is also replete with details about his business, Great Empire Security Limited. Both these platforms have helped him get more business.

Emmanuel says apart from Chimezie, the owner of Wanaga Nigeria and the sole vendor of XWF, he is arguably the biggest XWF ambassador at Alaba International Market. He doesn't hesitate to tell anyone who cares to listen how fast, affordable, and reliable XWF is. He says he tells other traders to subscribe to the connection and make more of the opportunities online. XWF means that their usual excuse of the high cost of data no longer applies.

Emmanuel says with a chuckle that XWF is so popular in Alaba it's sometimes referred to as "Wanaga Internet", for Wanaga Nigeria.

This is a good time for Emmanuel. There's a sense of arrival, achievement, and hope. The hard, arduous days when he had to fend for himself and couldn't attend university like most of his peers from secondary school are behind him.

Emmanuel had to learn on his own and found his childhood inquisitiveness paying off. He picked up CCTV and security gadget installations by mere observation. His desire to do things better than what he saw others do, set him apart. From being an apprentice, he was soon able to get his own work and start a business.

He's not one to rest on laurels and that, too, has paid off.

Now Emmanuel owns two stores – one in Akwa, the capital of his home state, Anambra, and another in Alaba International Market in Lagos. He has six full-time employees to help him meet demand for his services.

He's even taken charge of his education, something he sorely missed growing up. Emmanuel's enrolled in online courses through the National Open University and is today a third-year student in Electrical and Electronic Engineering. He's convinced this is the right move for him, professionally. "A better education will place me several notches ahead of my semi-educated or uneducated business rivals," he says.

Emmanuel finds XWF to be of use here as well. He's always been willing to work hard and now with a dependable hotspot, he's working smartly as well. It's a combination that should keep him ahead.

2. Elder Dede's Story

At 35, Elder Dede is making the most of his life and passion, and the power of the Internet is helping him do this.

He designs shoes for the Nigerian market, selling them through a special Facebook page. After he receives an order based on a design he has posted, he goes to a cobbler and gets them sewn by hand. Then he sends the shoes to the buyer through the fastest means possible. Facebook is his window pane, allowing the world to look in and see his work.

His recent experiences with Express WiFi (XWF) have made him a fan of the service, as it allows him to stay online for longer, offers higher speeds and lower costs. And reliability of service sweetens the deal!

Designing shoes is a tough line of work. Not many may choose this line of business, but Dede, an educated man with a degree in mathematics, knows what it takes to survive and is willing to work for it.

He's had a hard life.

Within less than three weeks, Dede lost both his mother and father. He was an orphan in early 2001 and felt devastated. A fresh high school graduate, Dede was bereaved, and also facing the death of his dreams.

He decided to make something of himself, travelling over 800km to Port Harcourt in the South of Nigeria to be with his sister. He passed university entrance exams there and in 2005, Dede was admitted into the University of Lagos. Again he moved some 600km to the city, pursuing a degree in Mathematics. He graduated in 2009.

Dede could not find government employment and had to take up teaching jobs. While these were to his liking he could not make ends meet solely by teaching. After a while he began to look at other avenues. He became an exhibition assistant for a while, helping to set up art shows for the British council. But this too was a dead-end as far as Dede was concerned. He still wasn't earning enough to make ends meet.

Then one day, three years ago, a conversation with a close friend, Dapo Adetomi, made him think carefully about the choices he was making. Adetomi said Dede must stop trying to be what he is not and choose to pursue what gave him pleasure. He said to Dede that since he was creative, he should look to monetize his gift to make fine creative things. Dede agreed and began to consider the possibilities. Finally, he narrowed his choice down to designing shoes. In 2013, at the age of 32, Dede, a mathematics teacher by training, began to design shoes.

He recalls, "I tried designing a shoe and later took it to a cobbler in our neighborhood for some finishing touches; and that was how it came about."

Dede realised that people liked his designs. So he decided to make shoe design his profession.

Today, he sells his creations to clients through a Facebook page. He takes orders and works hard to deliver what he promises. From just 10-15 customers at first, Dede now has 70 regulars in just 3 years.

Part of this success has to do with Express WiFi (XWF). He first heard of the product from Ugwa Evaristus. And he was amazed.

XWF was a revolution.

It's everything his traditional telecom isn't. It is fast, reliable and best of all much cheaper. He now uses XWF every day. Sometimes, it's the 5Gb plan for just N1600 (5 USD) and at others, the 750 Mb plan for N270 (0.88 USD). XWF makes his business more profitable, by saving him money, time and effort.

He has no major overheads since he does not have to hire a store. His work is online and as a result, he can make a relatively comfortable living. If he'd been forced to open a store, the high commercial rents might have suffocated his

entrepreneurial spirit.

The important thing is his Internet connection.

He has to be online all the time. If his Facebook page goes down his business will suffer, so Dede had to maintain a near 24*7 presence to stay in touch with customers. His biggest challenge had been a good and reliable Internet connection. It's expensive as well. Buying data from traditional telecoms and ISPs cost him as much as N5000 (16 USD) for 5Gb data. In simple terms, that means Dede saves USD 11 every time he purchases his favourite 5Gb plan from XWF. The difference can then be saved for other investments and growing his business – such as by creating and hosting a website.

It's also easy for him to access XWF. Whenever he needs a top-up, he heads to Evaristus' store and buys one. It's less than 80 meters away. Then he gets online.

The positivity XWF has added to Dede's life is changing the way he thinks. Work is easier now.

As his work does better, his priorities and plans are changing too.

Dede hopes to marry his fiancée before the end of 2017. Mary Ohiza Audu works in a printing press in Kaduna, but will join him in the business when they are wed.

For the moment, it's a tough job and Dede begins work very early, even though his business is entirely online. He finishes his home chores and heads to his cobbler's shop to ensure work is going well and according to instructions. He's at the cobbler's almost the whole day but then heads off to spend time with friends or at church.

It's not all work though. XWF helps Dede pursue his personal agenda as well. He can socialise on the Internet, video call his fiancée, and not have to worry about the bill. Before XWF this would not have been easy for him. Dede says, "The video calls have helped our relationship get stronger despite our busy schedules and the distance."

He can see the numbers of people around him benefiting from XWF increasing all the time. He says they can all stay online for longer and chase individual interests and pursuits, if they please. It will enlighten people and make them more productive, he opines.

Dede's certainly one of them. He is more productive personally and socially today.

He's taken the chances he's been presented with, worked very hard at them, and made the best of them.

This success, although still limited, is making him more ambitious. He wants his business to become an online giant -- selling Nigeria-made products to Nigerians and the world. He thinks he can leave online stores like Jumia, Konga, and Jiji behind. He says, "Most of the online shops are not dedicated to a single product. Most of what they sell is foreign. My designs and shoes are 100% Nigerian."

This new found confidence is palpable. In four weeks' time when Dede launches his website, he also plans to link his Facebook page to it. This will drive business both ways, directing people to look at his designs, read reviews and find the details they need. Dede says, "I'm optimistic that XWF will play key role to my business expansion."

If all goes well, Elder Dede will become a well-known shoe designing brand. It will be part of the new economy, seeking profitability through a leaner online presence. More people will access his goods then.

Dede says there are others like him too. If XWF can improve its coverage across Nigeria, it will help him and others chase their dreams, more easily.

For now, he's happy strategising his next moves. Aided by his creativity and the benefits of XWF.

3. Chimezie Josiah Umendubisi's Story

At the heart of Alaba International Market, many 'small' traders are now thinking bigger. They have two things in common – one, they're all Express WiFi (XWF) users and two, their point of welcome to the service was one man.

This man has made a career of not blindly accepting his circumstances.

His name is Chimezie Josiah Umendubisi. He's 37-years-old and unassuming until you get to know him. Then you begin to realize that this man of rather petite stature is a dynamo of energy, creativity, business acumen, and foresight.

His business – Wanaga Nigeria – provides a range of services. Each of these makes a profit and is proof of Chimezie's keen eye for an opportunity. If there's a business opportunity for the taking, Chimezie will be the first to it.

For example, every day for as long as many can remember, traders and businessmen lined up to transact with their banks. This kept them from their businesses and was effectively a waste of their time.

Chimezie offered them a way to transact with their banks through him, by registering as an agent for e-payment platforms such as Paga and PocketMoney. Then, he added payment services for utility bills, for both businesses and individuals. He drove the cable TV business in the area, till he became the go-to guy for cable TV subscriptions. And when Chimezie noticed an increased demand for Internet services, he became a vendor for Yahlick, a satellite Internet service offered by Coolink.

Chimezie usually succeeds at whatever he does because of his can-do attitude. He won't take no for an answer. And he has a keen eye for a good deal.

So when Coolink presented Chimezie, one of their most successful sales agents, the chance to vend their new product in collaboration with Facebook, he didn't have to think twice. The product was XWF. In August 2016 he became a dealer for the hotspot service.

Remarking how the Facebook connection made it easy for him to make up his mind, Chimezie says, "XWF is cheap, fast, and doesn't lock customers into a fixed plan. Buyers get full value for money, as well."

He advertised it by hiring two men to go around the market to tell people about the service and sign up those who were interested. XWF was an immediate hit among Chimezie's customers.

Chimezie's manner also helped. He's quiet but makes people feel welcome. That's perhaps why XWF customers in Alaba International Market, call the service 'Wanaga Internet'. In their minds he's inseparable from the service.

Believed by many to be the biggest electronics market in Africa, Alaba International Market was a small street market in central Lagos. But in the late 1970s town planners moved the market to where it is today. The land was swampy then and houses were few and far between. Today, there's no sign of those beginnings anywhere. The market now envelops residential colonies as well, having outgrown its original boundary.

Chimezie's mother, 61-year-old Abigail Umendubisi, moved to the area in the late 1970s. Soon after she began selling traditional delicacies to the traders at the market, in 1982, she opened her eatery, Onyemaechi Restaurant.

She too was always looking for new income streams. Abigail began selling bottled water a long time back and today, supplies it to business all over the neighbourhood. Then she began to offer private catering services alongside the restaurant, to cater to weddings and other social events.

Abigail is still always busy and constantly tries to make the most of her time and opportunities.

Her son Chimezie is not very different.

Before he began his own business, Chimezie helped Abigail run the family restaurant. It was his responsibility to make sure the restaurant got the best supply of ingredients; a task he claims took him to several parts of Nigeria. All during this time, Chimezie kept his eyes and ears open, trying to learn all he could about trading.

It was then he realised he wanted to do more, and that he could do more.

Chimezie's family trusted him and so when he said they should incorporate the business, to help it grow, they agreed with him and let him have it his way. In 2004, the restaurant became a legal entity. Soon after, he pushed them to begin private outdoor catering services.

From being a small family-run business, the restaurant grew to its present size – with 21 employees and two standalone branches.

But this wasn't enough for Chimezie. He still wanted more.

So in 2009, when opportunity came knocking in the form of a man, named Karl Marx, Chimezie jumped at it. Marx was selling wireless Internet services and he suggested that Chimezie consider a side business, selling data plans and offering money transfers.

Chimezie thought about it and took the plunge. The business started small. Just two desks and chairs, a borrowed employee, and a rented space on the roof of the building hosting the family restaurant. His customers were walk-ins and regulars at the restaurant.

From those humble beginnings, Chimezie grew the business into what it is today – one of Nigeria’s biggest mobile money transfer vendors, Wanaga Nigeria.

It’s still there, on top of the restaurant.

Wanaga Nigeria is constantly abuzz with human activity. All day customers reach the orange walled office climbing two narrow precarious staircases. Wanaga employees sit behind three huge wooden desks on the left side of the office. On the right are benches reserved for waiting customers. Chimezie sits behind a glass-topped table facing the door. On a wall to his left, award, certificates, and recognition he’s received over the years.

It’s a nice place. Conversations are encouraged – everything feels informal and chatty. Humour is a must. And yet in all this, Chimezie says, “my employees know who the boss is and if the need arises for me to state my authority I do that. But I won’t make them work in a hostile environment.”

The numbers of customers has increased since he began offering XWF as part of his bouquet of services. Some come for the food and discover XWF. Others come for XWF and discover the food.

Chimezie says the 100Mb data pack at N 40 (USD 0.13) is Wanaga Nigeria’s most popular XWF offering among individuals. He has many businesses and offices buying larger XWF packs which they use as a backup for when their main Internet service is down.

What joins them all is the enabling power of XWF.

Promise Okoronta, an upcoming hip hop artist, sells cheaper Chinese made clothes by the roadside just outside Chimezie’s shops. When he’s not serving customers, he is online, thanks to XWF. Promise is a musician and uploads his creations to Facebook and to notjustok.com – a popular Nigerian music streaming website. The low cost and fast speeds of XWF are making Promise more ambitious.

For these traders, XWF is vital. It’s letting them dream, showing them new opportunities, and helping them find customers beyond their immediate vicinity. And the man making it all possible is Chimezie.

He feels like there may be many more people who could do with a faster Internet connection. And XWF can help by extending its footprint.

It’s not a philanthropic interest. Chimezie sees XWF as an income generator, whose potential is not yet being exploited fully. If the range would increase, so too would his profits and business.

Chimezie is planning to get married in the coming weeks. In the future, he aims to grow Wanaga Nigeria into a household name for e-payments and Internet services. He dreams of the day when he will be able to run the business remotely, leaving the day-to-day struggles to others.

His mother, Abigail, says Chimezie’s can-do spirit ensures that he seldom fails. XWF is widening Chimezie’s horizons, and opening up new possibilities for his entrepreneurial spirit.

Q10: Lessons learnt

Respondent skipped this question
