

# Publisher partners with Google to market books

EAEP turns to online sales and promotions amid rising competition from new players in the industry and rush for visibility

BY MWENDA WA MICHENI

The previously dull book market industry could be waking up to a new reality that the market is getting more competitive.

In the last five years or thereabout, Kwani? Trust, with its variety of Kenyan books has been stirring the imagination of the reader. They have consistently organised readings, poetry sessions and other public engagements around the book—boosting the sales of their titles.

Story Moja, another young and exciting book publisher, has also joined the fray to break the old monotony and cartels around the traditional publisher. Story Moja organises readings and an annual book festival where literary discussions are held.

Apparently, the traditional publisher is also waking up to a new dawn; other fresh players are joining with activities around reading. Two new developments in the Kenyan book market best illustrate this.

The East African Educational Pub-

lishers plans to go bigger on online book marketing— thanks to a forthcoming partnership with online giant Google books. Whispers Book Den on the other hand has attracted the attention of Chora Bizna and won Sh500,000 to enter the business of exciting Kenyans about books.

Chora Bizna is a Ministry of Youth Affairs initiative that offers young enterprising minds a chance to craft a concept and possibly win seed capital from the youth fund, with prospects of employing other youth and earning money.

The yet to be publicly announced East African/Google partnership is a milestone for the industry. Publishers had for years been rooted in the traditional school text market; no book marketer would spare a minute strategising on marketing. Online book marketing sounded distant and like a complete waste of resources. But it is finally here.

The amazing argument throughout the years from these publishers and other players in the book market has been that credible knowledge or



A young reader browses at city book store: Publishers are diversifying from the traditional school text market. FILE

books should not be hawked. Instead, it should be able to generate interest to itself without being pushed too hard by marketers. But they have been all wrong, at least going by exciting activities around books that have gone ahead to post successful returns.

With the East African/Google partnership, thousands of titles already published by East African Educational Publishers will be digitised and indexed on Google's search engine for readers to sample before making a decision on what to buy.

In other words, this will be a virtual bookshelf, allowing readers from different parts of the globe to sample sections of the books online. Just like the case of other international online booksellers like Amazon.com, the books will also be on sale, thanks to an online book supermarket that will be offering the complete books.

This is visibility for Kenyan books. Already, many publishers across the world see online book sales as the next growth frontier, with several of them entering the space to broaden their mar-

ket share. For East African Educational publishers, this offers an opportunity to showcase their books to readers looking for African and Kenyan literature.

Back to the Whispers Book Den that enters the book market as a freshman. It has plunged into the market with the vision of inviting Kenyans to appreciate culture, literature, art and books.

Offering book lending services, the Book Den, named after the late Wahome Mutahi—author, playwright, actor, columnist and journalist—plans to stock a variety of books with an emphasis on African literature and those that Wahome penned. For researchers, there are serious scholarly papers and books that are currently out of print, including; reviews and other exclusive materials for perusal.

To sustain the business, Whispers Book Den has adopted the membership system where outsiders are locked out. There are different categories of membership named after characters in Whispers (*Sunday Nation's* popular column penned by Mutahi until his death).

To sustain interest in the book business and other activities around it, Whispers Den will also host comedies, music and art cafes to keep readers coming.

mmicheni@nation.co.ke

## Drive your business with better communication skills



RICKY'S MYTHS  
RICHARD GITONGA



Better the world suspect you are a fool than to open your mouth and prove the matter beyond doubt". These were the wise words that were uttered centuries ago by a military general in response to a question about his thinking on a proposed military strategic approach to an ongoing conquest.

Last week, parents at a certain private school in the city were invited to a session facilitated by the headmaster to brief them on what to expect during the transition of their primary graduating children to high school. The briefing went fairly well until the point when the headmaster indicated that literature would be introduced as a mandatory subject in the school's A-Level syllabus.

At this point, some parents who were attentive but quiet throughout the briefing shot their arms up in the air with a view to querying the headmaster on this proposed strategy. Their apparent concern was that there was

no need to introduce literature in senior high school bearing in mind that the schools' primary focus was in the sciences. The headmaster's response to their genuine concerns was that there was no need in churning out students with "A" grades, but who unfortunately would be ill prepared to communicate and articulate themselves in the business world. No more questions were raised by the parents.

While strong leadership is fundamental to business success, an organisation can only succeed when employees at every level clearly understand where the business is going, and they support and do what is required to achieve business goals. Effective leaders communicate strategically, translate important business objectives into terms through which employees can understand "what's in it for me?" In response, employees are engaged, align their actions accordingly and work towards propelling an organisation to success. Poor communication is repeatedly cited as a key contributor in



Strong leadership is vital to business success, but an organisation can only grow if employees clearly understand where the business is going. FREDRICK ONYANGO

the failure of major change efforts. Not surprisingly, communication skills are increasingly regarded as a critical skill set for leaders, particularly in situations where the leader is an instrumental driver of change.

In this regard, it is quite embarrassing when some leaders suffer from a condition called "conversational mitigation". This is a condition where some leaders have a tendency to use grammatical breaks such as "um", "er", "eh" or "ati?" in every sentence in their conversation. This condition normally arises when leaders speak before they think. They are not familiar with the

fact that in order to speak short on any subject, they need to think long. Is it no wonder that they keep on saying that they have been misquoted time and time again?

They need to be advised that it is better to slip with the foot than with the tongue. If you keep your mouth shut, you will never put your foot in it.

Superficially, communication appears to be deceptively simple. In fact, it is a complex process that must be addressed from many angles to achieve the best results. Leaders must understand all components of the communication process to apply them effectively.

To have impact, careful communication planning and management, and clarity and consistency of messages are key factors. Unfortunately, many communication efforts focus only on the delivery of the message, and neglect the vital planning and management of the process. The speed and volume offered by technology through such channels as email and intranet, are often erroneously equated to effective communication.

Reflecting back on the parents-teachers meeting, the headmaster had a profound point. In this day and age when "sheng" has become the vogue and mobile telephony platforms such short messaging service, or SMS, have become the order of the day, the importance of communication skills and articulation should not only be emphasised, but embedded in core curricular at the primary, secondary and tertiary stages. At the corporate level, senior business leaders should be inducted through a "communication 101" course to help them project a positive image of the organizations that they represent.

As it is said, communication is depositing a part of yourself in another person. The English language has approximately 60,000 words but we use an average of only 300 in day to day communication. Leverage this large pool of communication symbols to have the greatest impact in your business endeavours.