

# Discover Digital rolls out African video on demand infrastructure

South African video on-demand solutions provider, Discover Digital, is building in-market caching, storage and video on demand (VOD) server technology in its new markets across Africa, paving the way for a world class streamed video experience for viewers across the continent.



Image by 123RF

“Discover Digital’s in-market content distribution networks (CDNs) and local caching support higher quality streaming without latency, at a competitive price,” says Discover Digital managing director, Stephen Watson.

“Africa has been under-served in terms of local CDNs,” adds Discover Digital’s executive head of technology, Leon van den Berg. “In mature markets, there are a number of CDN-as-a-service providers and high speed connectivity to ensure viewers enjoy the best possible VOD experience. But until recently, South Africa and the rest of the continent faced VOD network constraints. You had the SEACOM cable and touchpoints running around the edge of the continent, and very little going inland. And when the content is hosted abroad and not cached in-country, there is typically a degraded viewing experience. This is why you’re still likely to find more buffering on video hosted abroad than that coming from a local VOD service.”

Watson says Discover Digital is paving the way for a better experience for its own customers and those of other VOD services providers. He notes that with the new networks and CDNs in place, and the use of adaptive bitrate technology, consumers with a maximum line speed of 1Mbps will enjoy a good on-demand viewing experience with high quality visuals and no latency. “It’s a myth that you have to have fibre or even a minimum 2Mbps connection, particularly when you’re viewing on a monitor or mobile device,” says Watson.

Van den Berg concurs: “It’s our firm belief that in order to deliver the right experience to the consumer, you need to put a CDN in country so that your playout and stream is delivered closer to the consumer. An extension of that is, as you build capacity in your markets, to roll out multiple CDNs in one territory. Later, you can also deploy nano-CDNs to create ‘spiderwebs’ as growth takes place in the VOD market and the IPTV market, where you have greater concurrency. In every market where we are active, we first and foremost deploy a CDN in-market and add caching capability to store content, which basically means we build a cloud based storage environment.

“The added benefit of having an in country CDN for ISPs and consumers alike is that internet bandwidth is not used. This enables services providers to provide streaming bandwidth at a greatly reduced price or even zero-rating the charge.”

As a local pioneer in the broad on-demand services space locally, Discover Digital, in partnership with French CDN technology specialist Broadpeak, are implementing multi-tenanted CDN and cloud-based infrastructure, paving the way for other players to piggyback off this infrastructure. “We’re not building this highway for ourselves – we’re building it out of a current need for us and a future need for others,” says Watson.

Discover Digital currently has two CDNs in South Africa, a CDN and cloud service going into Zimbabwe, a CDN in Zambia, and CDN now being deployed into Nigeria. As Discover Digital expands across the continent, it will launch an in-market CDN in each new region.

Watson says Discover Digital’s fast-growing VOD services business offers a number of ancillary opportunities including CDN-as-a-Service, cloud-based storage and caching, digital rights management, application development and billing and system integration. “Our strategy is to support other players, including competitor VOD players, with solutions in every country,” says Watson.

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