

Africa's communications evolution

By [Jessica Hope](#)

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Whether you're a multinational or a tech startup in Africa, comms is no longer a nice-to-have - it's a necessity. Stories are constantly travelling across the globe and if you want them to have the right impact, there needs to be a nuanced understanding of different cultures. Now, I realise this might sound like common knowledge but trust me, this hasn't always been the case.



Jessica Hope, Wimbart PR founder and managing director.

I've been in comms for 13 years and I still remember the days when the words "Nigeria" and "internet" drew serious scepticism from international journalists. These were the type of scenarios that slotted in perfectly with Africa's stereotype as a poverty-stricken continent that could only dream of a business-savvy generation.

Fast forward to 2019 and my African tech PR agency, [Wimbart](#), was featured in [PRWeek's 2019 UK Powerbook](#), the definitive guide for the most influential PR names in the UK. It's not only a huge milestone for us, but also shows a huge shift for comms in Africa.

So what's changed?

Well, the attitude of African companies towards PR definitely has. With growth rates slowing in other parts of the world, Africa is the next hotbed for international investment which has especially been the case for its tech scene. There's a crop of leading startups who recognised the importance of building an international profile to court investors, and their results have strengthened the internal case for PR in African companies.

And then there's the widening of Africa's narrative from journalists. Take BBC Africa for example. They've opened up an entirely new business unit, headed up by Kenya's Larry Madowo, to cover stories on African enterprise and innovation, which will be critical to countering the negative stereotypes we constantly see in the press.

At Wimbart, I'm proud to say that we work with top entrepreneurs based in some of the world's more challenging business conditions. It's about time they were given the international platforms they deserve.

What still needs to change?

As much as the nature of the stories told is important, the cultural understanding of the storytellers themselves is just as key. Representation is critical amongst journalists as you need people who truly grasp Africa's business landscape to accurately present its stories. The more this happens, the easier it will be to challenge misconceptions.

It's the same case for PR too. There are founders who struggle to tell their stories to domestic media let alone international outlets. There's a need for people who can bridge the gap, which is why I never take for granted the value of having a team of African Diasporans at Wimbart. They're a group who not only understand Africa's business context, but know the best strategies for engaging with international media, and can speak to their journalist counterparts in a familiar way.

African comms has made major strides over the years, but there's still a lot that needs to change. As much as reporting on Africa needs improvement, companies need a better understanding of what constitutes a newsworthy story, which only comes by monitoring the outlets they want to be published in. Change in both of these areas holds huge benefits for the Africa Rising narrative however, there's no doubt comms will be a pivotal part of the process.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wimbart PR founder and Managing Director, Jessica Hope, has been named as one of the UK's leading communications professionals, having been recognised for her work in the African market. She is the only professional from an Africa-focussed agency to make PRWeek's UK Powerbook 2019, the definitive list of the UK's top PR practitioners.