

Google unveils SMS service for Africa

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A visitor walks past the logo of internet search engine giant Google at a trade fair. Google on Monday unveiled a new service designed to provide information via SMS text message to mobile phone users in Africa, where cell phones are prevalent but Internet penetration is low.

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"At Google we seek to serve a broad base of people -- not only those who can afford to access the Internet from the convenience of their workplace or with a computer at home," the Mountain View, California, company said in a blog post.

"It's important to reach users wherever they are, with the information they need, in areas with the greatest information poverty," Google said.

The Internet search and advertising giant noted that Africa has the world's highest [mobile phone](#) growth rate and that mobile use on the

continent is six times higher than Internet penetration.

"Most mobile devices in Africa only have voice and [SMS](#) capabilities, and so we are focusing our technological efforts in that continent on SMS," it said.

Google said Google SMS, which will be available first in Uganda, would provide information, via SMS, on a number of topics including health and agriculture tips, news, local weather and sports.

Google also said that it is also launching a service called Google Trader, an SMS-based application that helps bring together buyers and sellers of product or services, from used cars to livestock to jobs.

Google said another service, Google SMS Tips, enables a mobile phone user to have a Web search-like experience. A user enters a text query and Google returns relevant answers after searching a database.

Google said Google SMS Tips and [Google](#) Trader were developed in partnership with several organizations, including the Grameen Foundation, an offshoot of the pioneering Grameen bank founded by Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus.

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