

Tracking corporate ownership, new data techniques can reveal secrets

Highly interconnected global companies have exploded in complexity and power and increasingly affect our lives for good and bad, yet in tandem with this growth, corporate governance has weakened, while the opacity and complexity of this corporate world is a key enabler of corruption, tax avoidance and organised crime.

Until now, painstaking manual investigation has been required to track even the most basic facts about a company, including whether it exists and who owns it.

Chris Taggart of OpenCorporates.com and an expert on the subject, says it's time to change that and is currently building an open access database with basic information on every corporate entity in the world (including 32 000 South African companies and counting), which can then be remixed and combined with other data, such as government contracts.

He will present 'Holding Companies and Their Directors to Account: An Open Data Solution' in both Cape Town and Johannesburg at HacksHackers, where he will unpack his techniques in a hands-on practical session about how journalists and concerned citizens can put them to work.

In the Cape Town meeting, a few of the finalists in the African News Innovation Challenge will be giving a short presentation on their entries that have made it through to the final round of 40 projects, out of 513 entries.

The event offers networking opportunities with techies, journalists, activists and other interest groups. In addition, Adi Eyal and Ray Joseph will be doing a short demo of the free tool, the Census 2011 they are building as a free resource to help journalists deepen their reporting on a wide range of issues, including service delivery, health and other subjects.

Venues, bookings

Johannesburg: Tuesday October 23 6.30-9pm at Praekelt Foundation, 44 Stanley, Stanley Rd Auckland Park

Cape Town: Saturday October 27 6-8.30pm at at Umbono Accelerator, Woodstock

Both events are free but attendees need to [sign up](#) for catering purposes.