

Building inclusive products for all South Africans

By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Building inclusive products for all South Africans is the motivation for several new developments and commitments recently made by Google South Africa at the first Google South Africa conference held in Johannesburg.



Google for South Africa event. Image source: Danette Breitenbach.

Inclusiveness

Being inclusive is not just a local goal but a global goal for Google. Annie Jean-Baptise, head of product inclusion Google, says they are building for all users across the world.

“ It is Google’s mission to create more opportunities for people to truly experience equity outcomes by building inclusivity with an inclusive lens taking into account the diversity of users. ”

The goal is to create products that are without bias related to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientations, or disabilities.



#GoogleforSouthAfrica: Contributing to connectivity

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Diversity leads to better decisions and Google wants a culture that everyone can thrive in. “This is core to the business, for example, research has shown that a business is 33% more likely to outperform on profitability if it is diverse.”

The work has been running for two years. “It looks at dimensions such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. and its intersection across the entire product range.

In a country where data is expensive, the company also launched two products to help South Africans learn and do things faster.

Google Go

Launched last year, Google Go was designed utilising local research. “It allows slow connections to work faster, using up to 40% less data,” explains Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda, Head of Public Policy Google sub-Saharan Africa.



Google Go now available locally

Ilse van den Berg 12 Apr 2018



Bolo

“617 million youth lack basic maths and literacy skills and half of the children not enrolled in school in the world live in sub-Saharan Africa. Google cares about this problem and came up with Bolo, an app that helps children to learn to read,” he says.

Launched in India, and available in Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya, it is now available in South Africa for free. Designed for primary grade children, Bolo helps to improve their English reading skills, by encouraging them to read aloud and giving them instant feedback - even when completely offline.



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Since launching in other African countries, over 800,000 children in over 28,000 towns and villages have read three million stories. “Over 60% of the children who used the app improved their reading skills,” he adds.

Bolo helps to harness what the child is already doing. “It is listening to the child reading and helping them along. We have seen great outcomes in other countries where we have launched this in,” says Nitin Gajria who leads the sub-Saharan Africa region at Google.

Bolo comes with a fun and helpful reading tutor, “Diya”, which is powered by the same speech technology that is in the Google Assistant

He adds they are conscious that different people have different accents and context and we are working on this actively.

Once the app is downloaded it works offline. It is secure as it is designed for children.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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