

# Web 2.0 startups to look for

E-commerce is fast becoming the industry norm overseas but has South African's cottoned on to the idea? Charl Norman looks at ten of South Africa's Web startups to watch out for

It seems the tech boom is back, servers are cheap, broadband prices are slowly dropping, software is open-source, and venture capitalists are once again flooding Silicon Valley ready with cash. Driven by the hype of the Web 2.0 craze and the success of new startups such as Facebook, Myspace, YouTube and Digg the Internet business has once again stepped up a gear. But it is not only stateside, locally entrepreneurs have also been launching startups based on popular Web 2.0 concepts. The widespread penetration

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

[www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

[www.digg.com](http://www.digg.com)

of broadband in South Africa has served up a decent local Internet audience for Web entrepreneurs to build for. With new concepts going up almost each day the bar for startups has been set even higher, although a clear and well-defined pack of startups have emerged in the local market with quality offerings. There is always a new generation of fresh companies waiting to emerge and take the Internet by storm. As with any such list, whether it be; Five Favourite Films, Top Ten Terrible TV Shows, or even Most Corrupt CEOs of the Millennium So Far, the selection will no doubt elicit excited praise, genuine curiosity and messages questioning the accuracy of the list. We have tried to find services that might hit the big time in the next year or

two but of course, no list is definitive and there will always be new surprises.

So who are South Africa's best dotcoms? We took some time to look at the independent Internet companies making a noise in the .co.za name space, and came up with a list of ten startups to watch. Some of them you may have heard of already, while others may be new to you. But all of the companies on the list have one thing in common: They are the movers and shakers in their industry and are establishing themselves as innovative or interesting in their respective fields. Here is the pick of the litter in categories such as video sharing, content aggregators, blogging platforms and online networking:



## amatomu.com the south african blogosphere, sorted

With the craze of blogging fully emerged in South Africa there was a call for a blog aggregator to sort through all the independent publishers and find those who mattered. Amatomu.com is one such aggregator and is one of two on our list. The startup, funded by Mail & Guardian, aggregates South African blogs with a ranking system based on page views and inbound links to see where your blog measures up against the rest. Amatomu also features various widgets which integrate into your blog helping your content become more visible in the blogging community.

Co-founder, Matthew Buckland, wanted to build a centralised buzz for all the blogger activities - "We saw a gap in the market for a local Technorati-type site that brought all the blogs together

at a central meeting point allowing users to track the buzz in the sphere. Also in much the same way the online media industry has a centralised ranking system, we thought we would create one for the local blogosphere." - Matthew co-founded the project with Vincent Maher in April of this year. According to Matthew they have some exciting future plans including creating revenue for bloggers via a network advertising model launched off the back of Amatomu. They are also looking into a niche social networking element, tailored to bloggers and built around the aggregator. With their slogan - "South African blogs - sorted, bru" - they have indeed embraced the local blogosphere and enjoyed wide spread success throughout the blogging community.



iJol.co.za can be described as an events listing resource, for the community, by the community. One of the smaller startups featured on our list, iJol is a social network focussed on the events niche. The sites homepage allows you to scan through a summary of all kinds of events happening in your area, and even to see which

events your friends are planning on attending. The site allows you to plan and post events while creating a profile, called 'myJol', featuring events you will/have attended. The man behind iJol, Jon Alport, thought there was a lack of awareness around local events and set out to provide a tool by which the public can stay informed: "No doubt that there was always stuff happening, as I would often hear about it after the fact - the great gig, the hilarious comedian, the sold out show - but the problem seemed to be keeping the public in the know. It came to me that the ideal gig guide should be central, concise, accessible and most importantly it could not be compiled by a single authority." iJol has been online since June this year and has some pretty big plans to expand its functionality. Offering artists and venues the opportunity to create profiles, event video uploading & streaming, SMS notifications for events you plan to attend and an online ticketing system to reserve your event passes online.

## SynthaSite

Web Publishing for Everyone!

Synthasite.com is a browser based AJAX Web site construction tool that allows you to assemble your Web site from any PC. The application features many widgets and templates to choose from enabling any novice Web designer to create professional Web properties through a browser interface. Founded by local Internet celebrity, Vinny Lingham, Synthasite is one of the more unique startups on our list. The project is currently in alpha mode and will be released in beta in November this year. With 7 500 sign-ups already, the buzz seems to be good, I asked founder Vinny why he launched the site: "It was born out of necessity. We needed an easier way to build Web sites that were integrated into 3rd party services. With the growth of API's & Web Services, Synthasite was an obvious application that the world needs." Synthasite also has some innovative future plans leveraging their developer community to create more products and widgets for the application. They also plan to allow multiple user collaboration, which allows users to simultaneously build a Web site.



## muti

One of the first social media startups to come out of South Africa, Muti.co.za is a quirky social news filtering site inspired by Reddit.com and Digg.com. Dedicated to content of interest to Africans or those interested in Africa, Muti hands over the editor capabilities to their users leveraging the 'wisdom of crowds' theory. Muti's members submit, vote and discuss news, enabling them to determine which news hits the homepage by voting stories up (if their good) or down (if their bad). Stories voted down will eventually disappear off the new list and into the archives. Founded by Neville Neway in January 06 and managed by local marketing guru David Duarte, they saw a gap in the market to filter the burgeoning amounts of news, particularly citizen journalism. International social news filters like Digg mostly filter American content which makes it nearly impossible for local content authors to hit the front page. With 3 000 members signed up to date and a steady flow of 25 new signups per day Muti is gaining popularity with the tech savvy crowd.

# blueworld



Blueworld.co.za is a social network which allows users to create their own profile and share media across the network such as blogs, videos and photos which aggregates on the user's profile and in various sub areas of the network. Sort of South Africa's Myspace, Blueworld also features clubbing photos from around South Africa including foreign destinations such as London and Germany. Founded by three young twenty something entrepreneurs from Cape Town, Blueworld has accumulated 130 000 members since their launch early in 2005. The site enables you to create content on the fly and share what you are doing with your friends at the press of a button with their cellphone MMS technology. Users can MMS media such as photos or video from their cellphones onto their Blueworld profile and automatically notify your friends.

Future plans for Blueworld include creating more sub areas for their users to network on, such as a dedicated bands area where musicians and producers can share their music, job listings and user driven classifieds.

Blueworld has also expanded to create super-niche networks focussed on specific markets. The ever increasing popularity of social networking has created the mass awareness to open the door for a new opportunity for startups to build networks targeted at smaller audiences. With this in mind they launched an automotive social network called, Zoopedup.com, where users maintain a profile about their cars life showcased through picture uploads, video sharing, blogging and battles which involves users profiles challenging each other in a 'online drag race'.



Zoopy.com is one of the first photo and video sharing networks to emerge in South Africa after the YouTube video sharing boom in the US. With its own unique identity Zoopy does a good take on video sharing in a market where broadband is only now becoming widely available to anyone. On Zoopy anyone can be a rock star, news reporter or comedian submitting their own films to be published on the site for other members to rate and discuss. Zoopy was launched March this year and is currently in beta. They plan to emerge out of beta "with a new look and feel, improved technology across the board and streamlined code," says Jason Elk who founded the project with a few friends. Some of the current features include social networking tools such as being able to embed your videos in a blog or a MySpace page, marketing your content virally.



Afrigator.com is the second media aggregator on this list but has a unique hook focusing on blogs in the African Internet name space. They are Africa's first social media aggregator with content channels from Nigeria to Uganda. Providing a platform for African citizens to publish their news and help get African content into the spot light. Social media has become an integral part of day-to-day life and often Africa is forgotten in this mix. Focusing on helping Africans find their audience has resulted in Afrigator receiving international acclaim, being featured at an African tech conference and in Business 2.0 magazine's review of non-US startups to watch. With 1 400 blogs signed up to the service their beta release is doing really well. The project was never officially launched but was leaked by bloggers who were a part of the beta program. Since the 'launch' five months back they have released two major versions and a third one is on its way.

"At the moment we are in the final stages



of our beta version and once done we will officially be launching our product to the market. We've been working hard on this major release and I think we're finally getting to where we want to be," says Justin Hartman, one of the founders. He also noted that Afrigator on average sends 12 000 visits to social media sites daily.



## iBlog.co.za

Blogging has been one of the prominent Internet activities to achieve world wide popularity with millions of bloggers on the Internet. With broadband becoming more accessible to each South African more are choosing to publish their thoughts online. Showcasing thousands of bloggers, iBlog.co.za is a blogging community where anyone can register and create their own free blog and join one of South Africa's biggest independent blogging communities. iBlog was launched because founder, Mark Garbers, wanted each and every South African to have a voice on the Internet: "We saw the popularity of blogs in the overseas market and realised that there was a big gap for a locally-flavoured blogging site in SA." The blogging platform was launched in March 06 and has since signed up 7 000 bloggers.



MyGenius.com allows users to promote themselves, build relationships and possibly collaborate with others. The focus of MyGenius is to give individuals a space to showcase their skills, brand themselves and share their ideas. The site started in 2006 and is principally a South African community at present, with over 5000 business owners networking in local and global communities. Users maintain a profile to share ideas, collaborate with other business owners in a supportive, intimate and learning environment. Founders John Raath and Doug Timberlake encourage users to share their ideas openly so as to get the support from backers, supporters and clients: "It is more important to raise your flag and attract attention than to be concerned about others grabbing your ideas." MyGenius has expanded abroad to Europe and the United States in the light of a growing demand for South Africans to showcase their services abroad and to collaborate with individuals internationally. Their



MyGenius



## vottle

FREE CLASSIFIEDS ★ YOUR COMMUNITY

With many ad listings in numerous categories and a useful SMS service Vottle.com has become one of the leading online classifieds destinations in SA. Based on the iconic classifieds giant, Craglist.com, Vottle aggregates classifieds from a few third party sources to create a centralised classifieds directory covering all categories. Vottle launched in April 06 which makes it one of the older startups in the list. "We have always been very bullish about the online potential of South Africa," says Ronnie Apteker, one of Vottle's founders. Betting on slashed broadband prices due to technology advancements Vottle would eventually gain a huge audience of users buying and selling goods. The classifieds listed are either posted directly to the site by users or aggregated from third party sources. This means a lot of classified adverts inventory hopefully resulting in the visitor finding what they looking for. Sellers are also notified by SMS when there is activity on their ad listing so they can keep track of possible buyers.

Vottle is also experimenting with an exciting concept of becoming an online classifieds engine to niche communities and Web sites in South Africa. The concept is to 'white-label' a Vottle.com engine which will allow community members, of say a trading community, to buy and sell items amongst each other and to contribute to the greater Vottle community.

future goal is to create an international network for business owners who you can collaborate with to support your business interests.

The listed startups have been instrumental in generating buzz around our local Internet space. The quality of Web site execution has been on par with first world Internet startups. This will hopefully aid in getting funding for your Web business in SA which has been non-existent in the past compared to the Web venture capital flowing in Silicon Valley. The quality of startups to emerge this year has proven that our Internet market has life and that foreign investors could look else where to invest their capital. ■

*Charl Norman is a Web entrepreneur, blogger and freelance journalist. He blogs at [www.bandwidthblog.com](http://www.bandwidthblog.com)*