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Furnishing Francophone Africa with Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg – CEO and founder of Facebook – recently flew to France to take part in the eG8 summit to discuss the future of the Internet. During his time in France the Facebook founder brushed up on the language, sampled some fine French food and even gave French President Nicolas Sarkozy a Facebook hooded sweatshirt.

Unfortunately for him, it looks like he didn't make a particularly good impression, as the French government swiftly banned the word 'Facebook' – along with the word 'Twitter' – from broadcast on television and radio. The names violate a 1992 decree outlawing the advertising or promotion of private business on programmes.

Christine Kelly, spokeswoman for the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), the government broadcasting authority, said: "Why give preference to Facebook, which is worth billions of dollars, when there are other social networks that are struggling for recognition?"

It is certainly true that as a private enterprise Facebook is peerless in social networking. The site has made Mark Zuckerberg the youngest ever billionaire and now has well over 500 million users around the world, yet in spite of this Facebook has struggled to make a significant impression in Africa. The social network has, according to ITU figures, only managed 2.7 per cent penetration across the continent.

This isn't to say that African people aren't eager to get involved in this social networking phenomenon. Facebook is in extremely high demand across the continent, particularly in the highly literate nations of Francophone Africa, where penetration of the social network is almost double the average of the continent as a whole at 5.0 percent. Nevertheless, this still means that only one in twenty people have access to the world's most popular social network.

Of Francophone Africa's 115 million people only 17.7 per cent have access to the Internet. The lack of fixed telephone lines, expensive prices of smartphones and data connections along with a lack of French language software are some of the reasons that Francophone Africans have had difficulty joining the rest of the world on Facebook

The answer to feeding the Francophone frenzy for Facebook lies in mobile access. The latest ITU figures show that there are 615 million mobile phone subscribers in Africa and the Arab States, compared to the 46 million fixed lines. This means the region now has 13 times more mobile phone subscribers than fixed telephone lines, the highest ratio of any region in the world.

Mobile operators across the continent have started enabling their customers to access Facebook, email and online chat, via any SMS-enabled mobile phone, without the need for Internet access. Using the Message Optimiser technology from ForgetMeNot Africa

operators have given 47.5 million people in Africa the chance to access the world's most popular social network in the past year alone. Having translated and localised the application into the French language, ForgetMeNot Africa began introducing Facebook access via SMS to French speaking Africans in the Republic of the Congo through Warid Congo's *WaridMessenger* service in November 2010.

WaridMessenger made Facebook available for more than 450,000 people. Previously only 7,500 people had been using the social network, and ForgetMeNot Africa technology has boosted Facebook access from a mere 0.7 percent of the state's population to more than one person in ten.

Warid Congo subscribers are now using their mobile phone to update their Facebook profiles, send messages on Facebook, comment on and 'like' their friends' Facebook statuses and send and receive Facebook Chat messages, all via their mobile phones, whatever make model or generation. The technology bypasses the need for PCs, laptops, fixed telephone lines, expensive smartphones and data connections

Message Optimiser has also enabled Warid Congo subscribers to send and receive emails and online chat messages with popular services such as Windows Live, Yahoo! and Gtalk, all via SMS on their existing handset, keeping Congolese people in touch with their friends and family all over the world.

Michel Elame, CEO of Warid Congo, said: "Deploying ForgetMeNot Africa software is a clear sign that Warid Congo intends to be the most innovative mobile phone network in Congo. Warid messenger opens up a world of internet messaging to the highly literate Congolese people. They can now use Facebook in French on their mobile phones, send and receive emails and have chat conversations with friends and family from all over the world anytime they like, be it from their armchair, while in the park with their friends or even while doing their shopping."

Jeremy George, Chief Operating Officer for ForgetMeNot Africa, said: "Our development work means that ForgetMeNot Africa technology can bring Facebook, email and online chat within the grasp of the 115 million Francophones on the continent. The launch of Warid messenger expands our usability and our footprint across Africa. We are giving millions of Africans access to Facebook and Internet messaging which otherwise, for economic, technical and cultural reasons, would be unavailable to them due to a severe lack of internet connectivity and language support. We will be customising Message Optimiser to more cultures soon."

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Notes To Editors

Internet access data sourced from the International Telecommunication Union (www.itu.int)

For further editorial information, images or to arrange interviews please contact fmn@pwkpr.com or call +44 20 7609 1900

About ForgetMeNot Africa

ForgetMeNot Africa Ltd. is a "software as a service" (SaaS) company specialising in unified messaging that supports seamless interoperability between SMS, email and Instant Messaging clients for telecommunications operators. The core product is Message Optimiser which allows telecom operators to immediately provide cost-effective comprehensive unified messaging services to all of their customers without any upgrades to the device or any need for downloading new applications onto the device. This opens up a range of previously inaccessible services to many of their customers including 2-way email and 2-way instant messaging communication capability. For more information call +44 203 176 0763 or visit www.fmnafrica.com

About Warid Congo

WARID Congo S.A is a mobile phone network in the Republic of the Congo. It launched in Congo in early 2008, becoming the country's third telecommunications operator. Warid Congo is an affiliate of Dhawi group that has diversified its business interests with a focus on emerging market opportunities in financial services, real estate and telecommunications. Warid Congo now has more than 450.000 active subscribers. The company offers a range of innovative products, including Warid Musik (Caller Ring Back Tone), MMS messaging