

Mmegi online

PROVIDING NEWS TO A GREATER POPULATION WITH TEXT TO SPEECH

“TEXT TO SPEECH IN AFRICAN REGIONAL DIALECTS AND LANGUAGES CAN HELP PRESERVE THE CULTURAL RICHNESS THAT COMES WITH LANGUAGE. IT CAN ALSO HELP TARGET AUDIENCES IN RURAL AREAS WHO ARE LIMITED TO ACCESSING INFORMATION AND CONTENT IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN THEIR OWN.”

- REBAONE MKANDLA, WEBMASTER, MMEGI

Mmegi is Botswana’s leading independent source of breaking news, the latest news, current affairs, politics, entertainment news, and more. Founded in 1968, Mmegi faced many challenges throughout its early years. These challenges were due to its beginnings as a not-for-profit and its anti-apartheid stance. In 2003, Mmegi became the first private newspaper in Botswana to become a daily production, consolidating its dominance in the market.

In Botswana, the reach of technology has been growing, soon to be available to every individual, and the use of digital platforms has been increasing. But when the pandemic began in 2019, Mmegi was required to switch from printing news to publishing news online. With this change, Mmegi had an opportunity to target a greater population, such as those with literacy difficulties, learning disabilities, reduced vision, and those learning in a different language.



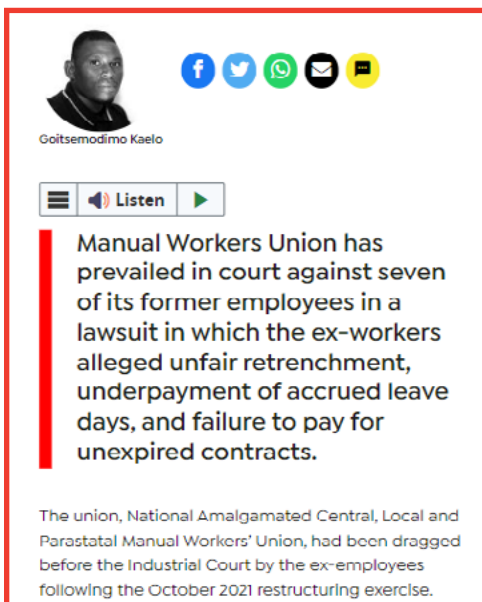
Growing the Audience with Text to Speech

With the addition of text to speech (TTS) to their website, Mmegi could reach these users. In addition, in an unforeseen advantage, Mmegi found that using TTS also opens doors to anyone else looking for easier ways to access digital content, such as rural populations and those who do not have easy access to in person education. With TTS, Mmegi can reach a larger audience than before.

“AS A NEWS COMPANY, WE WISHED NOT TO DISCRIMINATE, BUT RATHER ACCOMODATE ALL GROUPS OF PEOPLE SO THAT THEY CAN ACCESS OUR NEWS.”

- REBAONE MKANDLA

Finding a Solution that Works



The screenshot shows a news article snippet. At the top left is a profile picture of Goitsemodimo Kaelo. To the right are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Email, and Messenger. Below these is a 'Listen' button with a speaker icon and a play button. The main text of the snippet reads: 'Manual Workers Union has prevailed in court against seven of its former employees in a lawsuit in which the ex-workers alleged unfair retrenchment, underpayment of accrued leave days, and failure to pay for unexpired contracts.' At the bottom, a smaller line of text states: 'The union, National Amalgamated Central, Local and Parastatal Manual Workers' Union, had been dragged before the Industrial Court by the ex-employees following the October 2021 restructuring exercise.'

When looking for a text to speech option that would work for them, Mmegi found ReadSpeaker. ReadSpeaker was easily accessible online, and the TTS implementation process was simple. Moreover, even with the high standard of services, ReadSpeaker TTS was still more affordable than other options.

Since adding TTS to their website, Mmegi's usage statistics indicate a growing number of website visitors utilising the tool. Mmegi

believes that while visuals are a big part of what makes the content interesting, presenting content in both audio and visual formats makes it more inclusive. Audio helps make it more engaging for everyone, while the use of visuals helps a lot of users get through the content. The combination of both makes communication more effective, as hearing and seeing content simultaneously make it easier to grasp and understand the content.

“WHEN WE MOVED TO A DIGITAL PLATFORM, WE AIMED TO TARGET A GREATER POPULATION, SUCH AS THOSE WITH LITERACY DIFFICULTIES, LEARNING DISABILITIES, REDUCED VISION, AND THOSE LEARNING IN A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE. WITH TTS, WE COULD ACHIEVE THIS.”

- REBAONE MKANDLA

The Future of Text to Speech in Africa

With the development of ReadSpeaker TTS voices in African languages and dialects, Mmegi believes that TTS in African regional dialects and languages can help preserve the cultural richness of language. Regional TTS can also help target audiences in rural areas who are limited to accessing information and content in languages other than their own. Language is essential to history and culture, and TTS can help target users who otherwise couldn't be reached.



“WE ARE PLEASED TO BE SUPPORTING INCLUSION IN AFRICA, AND ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO ADDING MORE AFRICAN VOICES TO FURTHER HELP SUPPORT AFRICAN COMMUNITIES.”

- PAUL WALSTRA, READSPEAKER

Challenge	Results
<p>Continue reaching audience during the 2019 pandemic.</p> <p>Accommodate all groups of people so that they can access our news.</p>	<p>With TTS, Mmegi can now reach an even larger audience than they could pre-pandemic.</p> <p>Mmegi can now reach users with literacy difficulties, learning disabilities, reduced vision and those learning in a different language. Statistics indicate a growing number of users utilising the TTS tool.</p>

An Interview with Rebaone Mkandla of Mmegi

Q. How long have you been aware of text to speech technology?

A. It is a technology that we have been aware of for a long time, but it is only just now starting to slowly expand into the media industry.

Q. You are our first customer in Botswana. Do you think there is a growing awareness and need for accessibility tools, such as TTS, in your region?

A. Technology is starting to reach the fingertips of every individual, and so is the growing use of digital platforms. This is our new future, and humans will do what they can to make life easier. The idea of implementing TTS as a company was not really based on wanting to be a leader in technology in our region. As a news company, we wished not to discriminate, but rather accommodate all groups of people so that they can access our news. This includes people who have reading difficulties or have any kind of disability.

Q. What were the challenges you faced, or the reasons you had, that made you consider getting a text-to-speech tool?

A. The outbreak of the pandemic in 2019 resulted in the company having to switch from print to publishing news online. When we moved to a digital platform, our aim was to target a greater population, such as those with literacy difficulties, learning disabilities, reduced vision and those learning in a different language. With TTS, we could achieve this. Just as important, and a nice addition, is that using TTS also opens doors to anyone else looking for easier ways to access digital content.

Q. Once you started the process of finding a TTS tool, what made you decide to go with ReadSpeaker?

A. Readspeaker was easily accessible online and the implementation process was simple. Moreover, Readspeaker is more affordable than other options, with great services.

Q. How has adding ReadSpeaker TTS to your website helped? What were the results?

A. Our ReadSpeaker TTS usage statistics indicate a growing number of people utilising the tool. This has broadened our audience, as users who are disabled or have difficulties with reading now can take part of our news as well.

Q. Have you had any feedback from users visiting your site?

A. We have seen an increase in usage since implementation. We are pleased with the addition of TTS to our website, and that we are now able to reach an audience we previously couldn't.

Q. Is there anything you would recommend to other organisations when it comes to TTS?

A. TTS enhances literacy skills in educational institutions. By reading along with your preferred text-to-speech device, you're participating in a worthwhile shared experience

Q. What benefits do you see in having content being presented in visual and audio formats at the same time?

A. Visuals tend to be one of the most compelling parts of a presentation, as they make the content more interesting.



Presenting content in both visual and audio formats makes it more inclusive. Audio helps make it more engaging for everyone, while the use of visuals help a lot of users get through the content. The combination of both makes communication more effective, as hearing and seeing at the same time makes it easier to grasp and understand content.

Q. We are currently working on developing more languages, such as South African English, Zulu and Afrikaans. How do you think African countries, such as Botswana, will benefit from having TTS in their regional dialect or language?


A. TTS in African regional dialects and languages can help preserve the cultural richness that comes with language. It can also help target audiences in rural areas who are limited to accessing information and content in languages other than their own. Language is an essential part of history and culture.

Thank you!

For over 20 years, ReadSpeaker has been giving a humanlike synthetic voice to more than 10,000 education and industry applications in 70 countries. ReadSpeaker creates custom digital voices and offers more than 200 expressive off-the-shelf voices in over 50 languages to enhance the User Experience through engaging voice interactions. At colleges and universities, K-12 schools, and businesses, ReadSpeaker brings voice to websites and learning content. Learn more at [ReadSpeaker.com](https://www.readspeaker.com) or on LinkedIn and Twitter (@ReadSpeaker).

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