

Africa's under-the-radar B&Bs become overnight e-businesses with Realm Digital

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South African and African travel sites - guesthouses in particular - have been given a major visibility and commercial boost with the free availability of [withPlatform.com](#), the e-business package from Realm Digital.

[www.withPlatform.com](#) hit the market as a free site builder this month to increase the typically poor or non-existent Web presence of these entities. It will stay free to accelerate Web adoption in the tech-poor, often deeply rural travel segment, says [Wesley Lynch](#), CEO of Realm Digital.

Decade of e-enablement

The product's launch coincides with [Digital.co.za/ Realm Digital](#) celebrating 10 years of e-enabling iconic South African brands in travel, retail and other industries, including Avusa Retail (incorporating Exclusive Books), SAA, Naspers, Die Burger, Media 24, Ford and MiX Telematics (Matrix Vehicle Tracking).

In the course of a decade the company has amassed rock-solid expertise in lead-developing and programme-managing the technology, digital strategy and creative pillars of top e-business projects.

Core functionality

It is this essential expertise that it has packaged in *withPlatform.com*. Lynch says the product crystallises Realm Digital's experience in e-business enablement in a simplified form factor for the low end of the market.

He says the platform offers the same core functions that all Realm Digital's clients enjoy (online reservation, newsrooms and newsletters, galleries etc), and is limited only in volumes.

"We think we've found the perfect mix of the most frequently requested functions, as well as great ease-of-deployment and ease-of-use to suit businesses that have no prior experience with building websites. We will track user requests as the product adoption increases, to see where else we'll take it."

Advanced functionality

"Obviously if a little guesthouse becomes a big enterprise and starts putting through high business volumes, *withPlatform.com* is no longer the appropriate vehicle and our service will attract a fee," continues Lynch. "It is our job to first make our customers money, and then share in their success."

Advanced functionality such as a credit card payment facility and multi-currency support will be added later.

Big need

Lynch says purpose-modified versions of the tool will soon debut in other verticals too, but adds that the need in the guesthouse market was the greatest. "Tour operators also stand to benefit from building a site quickly and easily at [www.withplatform.com](#)."

Should the retired couple that typically owns a B&B not want to brave *withPlatform.com* themselves, Realm Digital offers another option of assisted deployment, says Lynch.

"You don't need to set your site up or update it yourself," says Lynch. "Nor do you need Internet at your guesthouse. We'll also offer it to local developers, whose service may attract a fee."

Future

withPlatform.com already offers real-time booking powered by nightsbridge (Africa's biggest online accommodation reservation system for guesthouses), but the future holds great additional promise for B&Bs, says Lynch.

"We will integrate with travel super-platforms, such as online travel hubs, but it has to make sense for the establishment in question. We are also considering ways to syndicate images of rooms and establishments with various other platforms, as well as new means of online settlement not involving credit cards, including mobile payments."

For now, build your online B&B store-front at www.withplatform.com. And watch this space!

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