

# New player joins networking game

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A NEW mobile networking tool similar to that used by US President Barack Obama during his election campaign was launched by a mobile social network in Johannesburg yesterday.

The US-based company, Mig33, announced its intention to expand in South Africa by using the upcoming elections as a launch pad.

The company, which is hoping to take market share away from Mxit, said it had "millions" of users and 3000 users already registered for the mobile elections group.

The ANC, DA, ID and UDM have already registered groups on the new platform, and next week a party leader is expected to field questions on one of the system's chat stadiums, which is larger than an ordinary chat room.

Steve Boom, Mig33 chief executive, said the company was providing the software free, along with free messages, but users would have to pay for the data transmitted.

The chat programme is one of several online campaigns being used by political parties to get their messages across.

Various parties have already launched their own pages on social networking sites such as Facebook, but Boom said that Internet usage on PCs and laptops was relatively low (4 million computers in South Africa) compared to mobile Internet users (9.5 million).

Thami Mtshali, chief executive of iBurst, said the added advantage of mobile Internet was that it was instant and easier to use.

He said: "This is another form of Internet at your fingertips to address the digital divide. This type of software can also work in multiple languages.

"This will also be tremendously useful in rural communities where people will be able to communicate about issues that affect them on the ground, instead of relying on opinions expressed on TV and in newspapers," Mtshali added.

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