

# MSBET's demise teaches lesson on Internet economics

John William Templeton  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"The problem with computers is that there is not enough Africa in them."

This quote by Brian Eno came out of a conference called "Black Genius in New Media" back in 1997.

It is quite relevant to the news that BET has scrapped its collaboration with Microsoft called MSBET to develop another site called just BET.com, along with Microsoft, ATT, News Corp. and USA Networks.

The initial effort drew more from MS than from BET and demonstrated that the conventional Internet strategies are not going to work for African-Americans or anyone else. As the World Wide Web has developed, most of the capital has gone to people who believe that technology is supreme.

Sites present dazzling effects, wide-ranging search engines and a multiplicity of ways to shoot little critters.

An example of how this has emerged is the on-line trading craze. A growing number of individual investors now try to hedge and arbitrage like brokerages and banks because they now have access to real time information.

Instead, they're finding that they can lose money just as quickly as the banks and brokerages do, without the possibility of being bailed out by central banks.

In investing, like driving, speed kills, particularly if you don't know where you're headed. A more valid use of technology would be to access opportunities that would otherwise be too expensive to research and monitor such as the 1,200 public companies on the African continent or the growing number of African-American public companies. That kind of usage is driven by a commitment to service and an awareness of the opportunity, which then directs the technology.

People with knowledge, sensitivity and creativity are still going to outperform any integrated circuit.

A new site called allblackbooks.com doesn't attempt to stock as many millions of books as Amazon. Instead it focuses on the hard-to-find titles unavailable at chain

bookstores or most independents.

We're now seeing a spate of large media interests such as America Online, the Tribune Co. and the like decide that they want to turn the Internet into another way to siphon off Black dollars.

These are often the same corporate moguls who simply wrote African-Americans out of the television industry.

About a decade ago, a similar thrust targeted the black press with entities like Forbes and the Wall Street Journal attempting to block Black entrepreneurs. Once again, these firms will find that Black consumers don't follow trends, they set them.

Portals like Yahoo that can only come up with 18 responses to a search for "African-American business" won't get it.

Neither will a list of two million web pages. The solution for the Black virtual world will come out of the real Black world.

Dr. Philip Emeagwali, once holder of the world record for the fastest computation ever, has designed a site <http://www.emeagwali.com> that attracts 165,000 school children per week to talk about Blacks in science. He uses music, animation and the soul of an artist to create a welcoming environment. He has made the site easy to use, unlike most Internet experiences.

John "JT" Thompson, principal engineer of Shockwave and director for MacroMedia and author of the scripting language Lingo that drives 90 percent of interactive computer games and web sites, says the techniques that make video games successful have to be deployed by culture workers and educators.

By teaching young people how to make their own learning challenges interactively, they can understand topics like math and science that they might otherwise be afraid of.

Pioneers like these will spark the creativity of those who will create the information appliances and content that meet the needs of the African-American, Caribbean and African communities.

John William Templeton is executive editor of "Griot," the African-American, African and Caribbean business daily.

# Avoiding the census costs minorities, poor billions in aid

"Louie" Overstreet  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Article I, Section 2 of the U.S Constitution calls for a census count to be taken every ten years for the purpose of apportioning the number of persons represented by elected persons to Congress. Students of the Constitution will recall as ratified in March 1789, this article and section also stated we were to be counted as 3/5 of a person.

The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1868 nearly eighty years later called for African-American males to be counted as whole citizens.

Only needing to have a rudimentary understanding of U.S. History as it relates to how we have been treated, the loss of life in the struggle for progress, it is absolutely amazing that we as direct descendants of oppressed people could be so unconcerned as not to demand that all African-American citizens be counted.

In the last census (1990) count it was estimated that around 3.4 million people were not counted. Of this total nearly 1 1/3 million were African-American. If we all lived in the same place and you add the 1/2 million of us

who are convicted felons, who do not have any voting rights then you can begin to understand our plight. The 1.8 million African-Americans that don't count equates to the entire combined population of the states of Alaska, North Dakota and Wyoming.

These are eight general characteristics of the type of persons not being counted:

- Minority
- Live in rental units
- Do not have a telephone
- Do not live in married-couple households
- Live below poverty level
- Foreign born
- Do not have high school diplomas
- Distrust or are suspicious of government

If we are honest with ourselves, then we must admit that at least six of the eight characteristics could be used to describe and/or stereotype us. However, more important than being stereotyped is the fact that we are missing out on the dollars, which makes no sense. In Clark County an undercount of only In Clark County, an under count of 18,000 citizens in 1990, cost the county 180 million (See Ducking, Page 15)

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