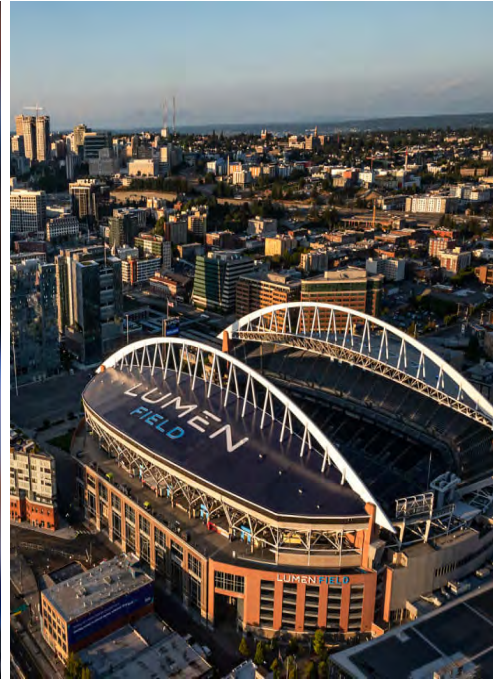
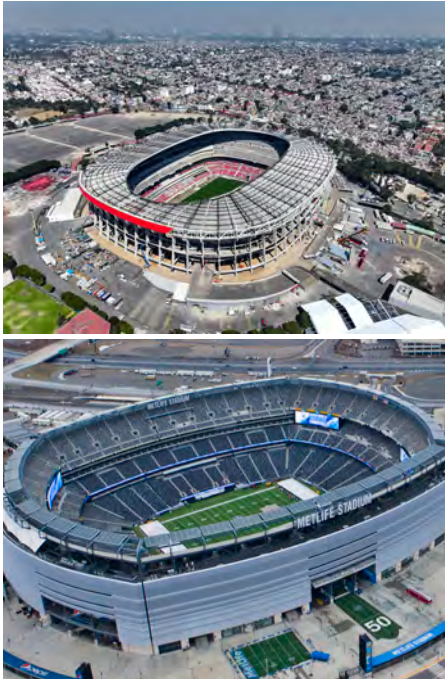


BUSINESS DAY WEEKENDER

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SIXTEEN ICONIC STADIUMS TO HOST FIFA 2026 WORLD CUP



FASHION

The weekend wardrobe:
How Lagos professionals
are dressing off-duty



FOOD

10 oldest food brands still
operating today

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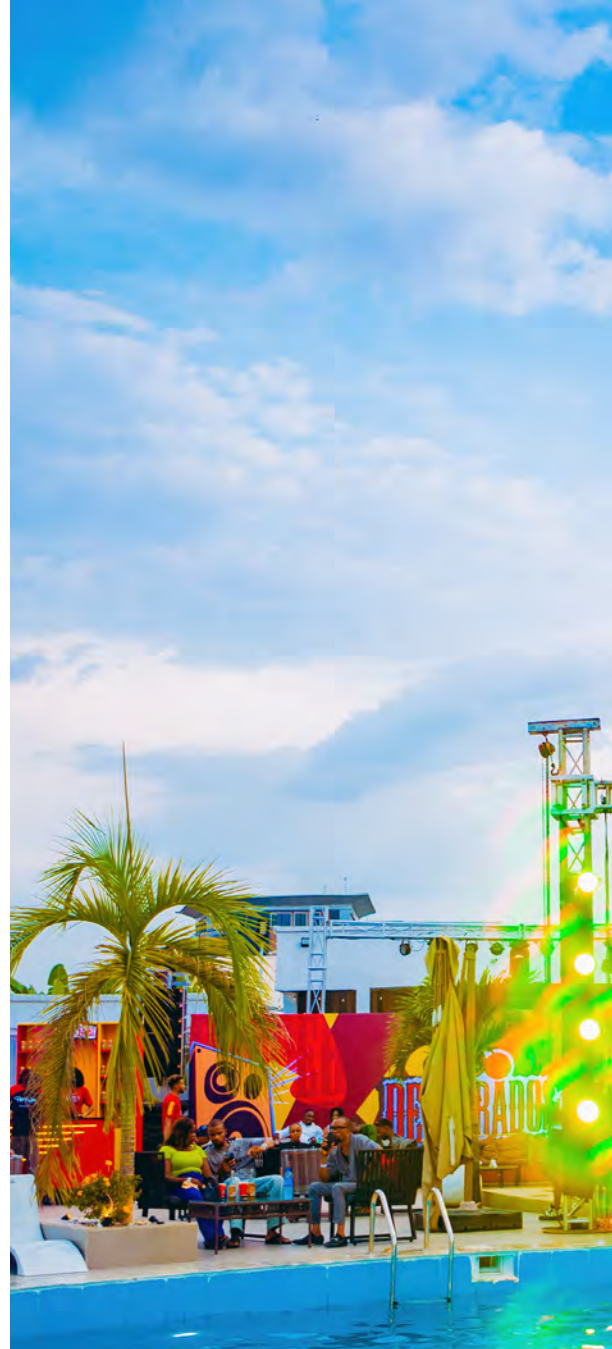
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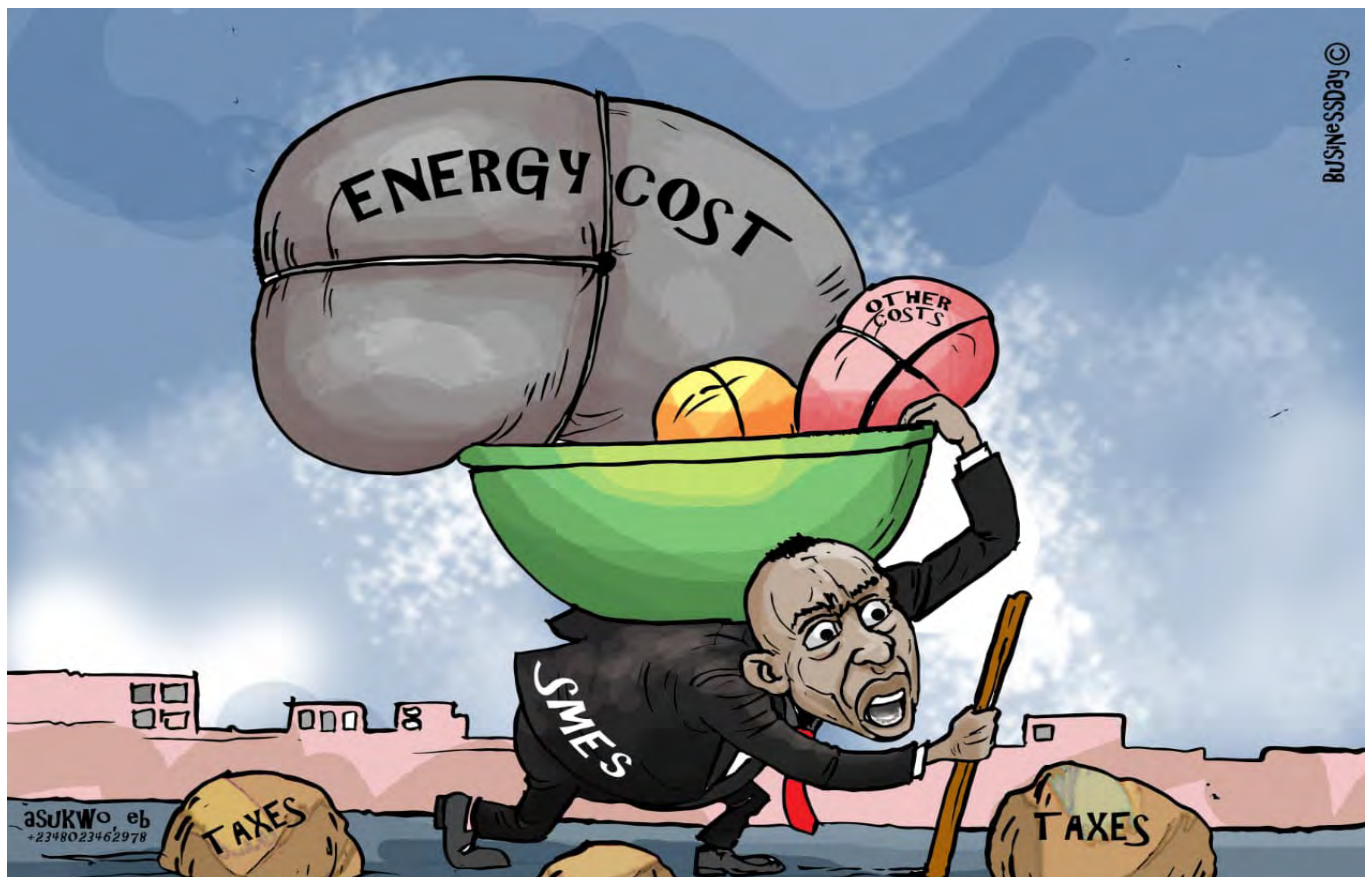
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SIXTEEN ICONIC STADIUMS TO HOST FIFA 2026 WORLD CUP

ANTHONY NLEBEM



The FIFA World Cup 2026 is fast approaching, with stadiums across North America putting the finishing touches in place to welcome fans to world-class venues.

A total of 16 stadiums will host the tournament across the United States, Mexico and Canada. The venues are spread across 16 host cities, 11 in the United States, three in Mexico and two in Canada, marking the first time the World Cup will be staged by three nations.

The expanded competition will feature 48 teams and 104 matches, making it the largest edition in history. Of these, 78 games will be played in the United States, while Canada and Mexico will host 13 matches each.

Fans can expect action at globally recognised venues such as MetLife Stadium and Estadio Azteca, the latter set to become the first stadium to host matches at three different World Cups. Newer arenas like SoFi Stadium will showcase cutting-edge technology, offering immersive experiences through advanced screens, acoustics and fan-focused design.

Mexico will kick off the tournament in Mexico City, returning to a historic venue that hosted the opening matches and

finals of the 1970 and 1986 editions. The host nation will play its group matches on home soil, with fixtures scheduled across Mexico City and Guadalajara.

Beyond football, these stadiums are designed as major entertainment hubs, combining large capacities, many exceeding 60,000 seats, with modern infrastructure to enhance the matchday experience.

FIFA World Cup 2026 stadiums

United States

Dallas Stadium (Arlington, Texas) – 94,000





New York/New Jersey Stadium (East Rutherford, New Jersey) – 82,500

Atlanta Stadium (Atlanta, Georgia) – 75,000



Kansas City Stadium (Kansas City, Missouri) – 73,000

Houston Stadium (Houston, Texas) – 72,000

San Francisco Bay Area Stadium (Santa Clara, California) – 71,000

Los Angeles Stadium (Inglewood, California) – 70,000

Lincoln Financial Field – 65,000

Seattle Stadium (Seattle, Washington) – 69,000



Boston Stadium (Foxborough, Massachusetts) – 65,000

Hard Rock Stadium – approx. 65,000

Canada

Toronto Stadium (Toronto) – 45,000

BC Place – 54,000

Mexico

Estadio Azteca – 83,000



Estadio Monterrey (Guadalupe) – 53,500

Estadio Guadalajara (Zapopan) – 48,000

These venues will provide the stage for football's biggest stars, as new legends emerge and unforgettable moments unfold at the most expansive World Cup in history.

THE WEEKEND WARDROBE: HOW LAGOS PROFESSIONALS ARE DRESSING OFF-DUTY

CHIOMA ONUH





Many young professionals in Lagos, look forward to the weekend for many reasons, ranging from wedding parties, hangouts with friends, beauty treatments, exhibitions, random parties or even afternoon naps.

One other reason is the freedom of structured workwear... weekends comes with that freedom.

Workwear is structured, predictable and often dictated by corporate culture even though professional have found a way to insert Ankara, asoofe and adire to their weekday wears, but off-duty style is different. It shows personality, social life and, increasingly, economic reality.

More and more, weekend dressing is becoming simpler, more relaxed and more intentional. After years of fast fashion, people are simplifying

Wardrobes once filled with trend-driven pieces are now leaning towards fewer, more versatile items.

Many young professionals expect clothes to work across multiple settings, from brunch to informal meetings to evening hangouts.

What the weekend wardrobe looks like now

Relaxed trousers paired with fitted tops. Simple dresses styled with flat shoes or low heels. Two-piece sets that can be worn together or separately.

Denim remains a constant, both trousers and jorts.

Comfort is becoming a priority even in footwear, with more people choosing loafers, sandals or simple sneakers over heels.

Unpredictable Lagos traffic, long distances and other unforeseen plans have made comfort a practical necessity.

Clothing that restricts movement or requires constant adjustment is being replaced by pieces that are easy to wear for long hours.

This is particularly relevant for weekends, where plans often change quickly.

Social media still influences though, but differently. Instead of copying full outfits, many users now adapt ideas to suit their lifestyle and budget. The focus is now less on perfection and more on practicality.

Rising living costs are also playing a role. As disposable income becomes tighter, there is more pressure to make clothing choices that offer long-term value.

Buying fewer, better-quality pieces that can be styled in multiple ways is becoming more appealing.

10 OLDEST FOOD BRANDS STILL OPERATING TODAY

ESTHER EMOEKPERE

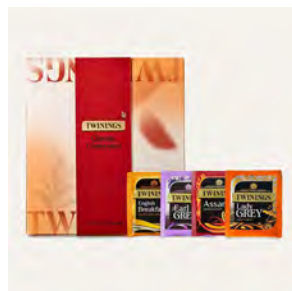


There is something revealing about the brands that survive for centuries. In food, survival is rarely about excitement. It is about consistency, trust, and the ability to remain useful across generations that eat differently, shop differently, and live differently. While trends come and go, a small group of food brands has stayed relevant by doing largely the same thing, well, for a very long time.

What stands out is not just their age, but the kind of products they make. Most of these brands are built around ingredients and essentials rather than finished meals. They sit quietly in kitchens, used daily, often without much thought. That steady presence is what has kept them in business for over a century, and in some cases, over three.

Twinings (1706, United Kingdom)

Founded by Thomas Twining in 1706, Twinings is one of the oldest continuously operating food brands in the world. The company began as a tea shop in London and still trades from the same location. Its logo has remained largely unchanged, making it one of the longest-used commercial identities. Tea, as a daily staple, has allowed the brand to remain relevant across centuries.



Crosse & Blackwell (1706, United Kingdom)

Established in the same year as Twinings, Crosse & Blackwell built its reputation on preserved foods such as pickles and sauces. These products were essential in an era before refrigeration and have continued to find a place in modern kitchens. The brand has changed ownership over time but remains in circulation.



Baker's Chocolate (1764, United States)

Baker's Chocolate was founded in 1764 and is one of the oldest food brands in the United States. It specialises in baking chocolate, a product tied closely to home cooking rather than direct consumption. Now part of a larger food group, it continues to be sold in its original category.



King Arthur Baking Company (1790, United States)

Founded in 1790, King Arthur Baking Company is the oldest flour company in the United States. Flour is a basic ingredient that underpins a wide range of foods, which has helped sustain demand. The company is now employee-owned and has expanded into baking education and related products.



Lyle's Golden Syrup (1881, United Kingdom)

Lyle's Golden Syrup, introduced in 1881, is known for maintaining one of the oldest unchanged product designs in the world. The green tin and its distinctive label have remained consistent for well over a century. The product itself, a simple sugar syrup, has not required reinvention.



Colman's (1814, United Kingdom)

Colman's began in 1814 and is best known for its mustard. It has held a long-standing reputation for quality and has supplied mustard under royal warrant. Its focus has remained narrow, centred on a single product category.



Cadbury (1824, United Kingdom)

Cadbury started as a small shop in 1824 and grew into one of the world's largest chocolate producers. Unlike some others on this list, it has expanded significantly in scale and product range, but chocolate remains at its core.



Lea & Perrins (1837, United Kingdom)

Lea & Perrins introduced Worcestershire sauce in 1837. The product created and defined its category, becoming a standard ingredient in cooking around the world. Its recipe and positioning have remained largely unchanged.



Knorr (1838, Germany)

Knorr was founded in 1838 and focused early on producing dried soups and seasonings. These products addressed the need for convenience and preservation. Today, Knorr operates globally and remains a major player in packaged food.



Tabasco (1868, United States)

Tabasco was established in 1868 and is known for its hot sauce made from aged peppers. The production process has remained consistent, and the product continues to be sold in nearly identical form. It has built global recognition without major changes to its core offering.

HOW HELICONIA PARK IS OFFERING HOSPITALITY BEYOND ACCOMMODATION WITH LEAP INTO LAGOS' FINE DINING

CHISOM MICHAEL





Heliconia Park Hotel is expanding its footprint in Lagos with the launch of Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar, a concept that reflects its evolving approach to hospitality. Moving beyond accommodation, the brand is creating a more layered experience centred on comfort, quality, and thoughtful design.

Led by Pasquale Fiore, Managing Director and CEO, Heliconia Park has steadily grown its presence across Lagos and Port Harcourt. In this interview with CHISOM MICHAEL, Fiore speaks on the vision behind Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar and the gap it addresses in Lagos' dining scene. He also shares how it fits into Heliconia Park's growth and what sets the experience apart.

First off, how would you introduce Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar to someone hearing about it for the first time?

Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar is a space we created for people who appreciate good food and a well-designed environment. It sits within Heliconia Park Hotel Lagos and brings together a contemporary dining experience, a poolside setting, and an outdoor bar, all within one comfortable space. The design gives it a sense of calm that feels quite removed from the energy of the city, which is intentional.

We wanted to create somewhere that feels like a proper retreat, whether you are coming in for a business lunch, a relaxed dinner, or simply to spend time in a pleasant environment. It is open to hotel guests and to the public, and that accessibility is something we are proud of. The experience is refined but never stiff. That balance is really what Oasis is about.

What kind of gap in Lagos hospitality were you trying to respond to with this addition?

We noticed that people were looking for spaces that combine quality dining with a genuine sense of comfort, without the stiffness that sometimes comes with fine dining or the inconsistency that can come with more casual options.

Lagos has no shortage of places to eat, but a space that brings together good food, a relaxed atmosphere, and reliable service within one well-designed environment is still something people appreciate when they find it. Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar is our response to that. It is not about filling a gap for the sake of it; it is about offering something we are confident we can deliver well.

Heliconia Park has grown steadily in recent years. How does Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar fit into that journey?

Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar is a continuation of the direction we have been building towards. From the beginning, our focus has been on creating complete experiences. Hospitality does not stop at accommodation, and dining plays a central role in how people engage with space.

This allows us to extend the Heliconia Park experience in a more considered way. It brings another layer to what we offer and strengthens the overall identity of the brand without moving away from what has always defined us.

What inspired the launch of Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar at this time?

Over time, we observed that guests were looking for more than convenience. They wanted a refreshing space with comfort and attention to detail, like the experience we provide across Heliconia Park Hotels.

We are launching Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar at our Lagos Heliconia Park Hotel & Spa now because it reflects our readiness to meet that expectation at the right standard.

It was important for us to launch only when we were confident that the experience we offer would feel wholesome and consistent with the brand.



Heliconia Park is known for “Comfort & Luxury.” How does Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar bring this idea to life?

Like with Heliconia Park Hotel, we have created an environment that is refined and easy to enjoy. At Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar, this reflects in the design, the service, and the overall atmosphere. All guests can experience quality dining without any sense of formality that feels distant. The experience remains relaxed and familiar, which is central to how we define luxury.

Lagos has a competitive dining scene. What distinguishes Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar?

Lagos is a strong and dynamic city with a wide range of options. We respect that and understand that expectations are high. For us, the focus has been on creating a space with a clear identity. What distinguishes Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar is the consistency across every element. The food, the service, and the ambience are aligned to deliver a complete experience. It is not about doing many things but doing the right things well.

How does the restaurant complement the broader Heliconia Park Hotel Lagos experience?

It strengthens the experience in a more deliberate way. Heliconia Park Hotels has always been designed as a complete environment, and Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar brings dining into that ecosystem with more intention. It allows us to offer a fuller experience within one space, without relying on external options.

It also opens up Heliconia Park as a brand in a new way. Guests no longer need to stay overnight to engage with the brand. People can come in, dine, spend time, and experience the environment on their own terms, which adds a different kind of accessibility to what we offer.

Beyond hotel guests, who is Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar designed for?

It is designed for both our guests at Heliconia Park Hotel and the public who are looking for a different kind of dining environment. It is a space that works for business meetings, quiet dinners, and social occasions.

The intention behind Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar is to create a place that feels accessible, while still maintaining a strong sense of identity.

What kind of dining experience can guests expect?

The focus is on a well-executed, contemporary dining experience built around quality ingredients and thoughtful preparation. The menu leans international, with a clear emphasis on consistency, presentation, and flavour, rather than trying to do too many things at once.

People are more conscious of the overall experience. We have taken that into account and created an experience that feels unhurried. It is a place where guests can sit comfortably, have conversations, and spend time without pressure. The pace, the service, and the setting all work together to create something that feels considered rather than overstated.

Design plays an important role in

Heliconia Park properties. How does that translate into Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar?

At Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar, design is used to create a sense of separation from the city. The space is intentionally set up to feel quiet and removed, even within Lagos. It gives guests a chance to step away from the usual pace and settle into a more relaxed environment.

There is a strong connection between the indoor and outdoor areas. The restaurant opens into a poolside setting with a dedicated relaxation area and an outdoor bar. The space is wide, airy, and well-lit, which makes it comfortable at different times of the day. It is designed to feel open without losing its sense of privacy.

What lessons from your properties in Port Harcourt and Lagos influenced this restaurant?

Both locations have shaped how we think about consistency and guest expectations. In Port Harcourt, we built a strong relationship with guests by focusing on familiarity and trust. That foundation has been important.

In Lagos, the scale and diversity of the market required a more structured approach to service and delivery. Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar brings those lessons together, combining consistency with a more refined and focused experience. Our goal is to build a brand that offers a complete and consistent experience across different touchpoints.

What would you like guests to take away after visiting Oasis Gourmet Restaurant and Pool Bar?

A sense of ease and satisfaction. We want them to feel comfortable and well looked after. If guests leave with the intention to return, then we have achieved what we set out to do. That is what matters most to us.



HOW AKWA IBOM IS ENGINEERING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECONOMY, FROM TRAINING HUBS TO FACTORY FLOORS

EKAETTE OKON-JOSEPH



On a humid morning in Uyo in late September 2023, barely four months after taking office, Governor Umo Eno stood inside a once-quiet public building along IBB Avenue and made a pointed statement about the future of Akwa Ibom's economy.

The former state e-library, long underutilised was being reborn as the Ibom Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development Centre (Ibom-LED), a facility designed not just to train, but to produce business owners at scale.

That moment marked the beginning of what is emerging as one of subnational Nigeria's most structured attempts at building an entrepreneurial pipeline, linking skills development, access to finance, local manufacturing and public procurement into a single economic strategy.

From Private Enterprise to Public Policy

Eno's approach reflects his private-sector roots. Before politics, he founded Royalty Hotels and built a diversified business group employing thousands.

That background aligns with a broader consensus among development economists: entrepreneurs, not just infrastructure, drive sustainable job creation.

According to the World Bank, small and medium enterprises account for about 90 percent of businesses and more than 50 percent of employment globally, making them central to growth strategies in emerging markets. In Nigeria, SMEs contribute nearly 48% of GDP, based on data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

Yet access to capital and formalisation remain persistent barriers. A 2020 survey by the SMEDAN and the NBS found that over 80 percent of Nigerian SMEs operate informally, limiting their ability to scale or access credit. Ibom-LED appears designed to directly address those gaps. Building Entrepreneurs, Not Just Training Them

Launched on September 23, 2023, Ibom-LED combined training with financing in a way rarely seen at the state level.



The first cohort was backed by N250 million, ₦50 million for training and N200 million disbursed as ₦500,000 grants to 400 participants.

The programme goes beyond classroom instruction. Participants receive support for business registration through the Corporate Affairs Commission, product certification via NAFDAC, and financing pathways linked to the Bank of Industry.

Economists say this “full-stack” approach is critical. “Entrepreneurship programmes that integrate training, capital and market access tend to have significantly higher survival rates,” notes a report by the International Labour Organization on youth enterprise development.

By early 2025, more than 1,200 entrepreneurs had passed through the accelerator. Many have since been integrated into an alumni network designed to sustain mentorship and investment linkages.

Scaling Through Public Spending

The next phase of the strategy became evident in 2025, as the state moved from training to large-scale capital deployment.

In February, ₦550 million was disbursed in grants across multiple programmes, from female entrepreneurs to cultural enterprises. By March, an additional 2,000 entrepreneurs received equipment support spanning trades such as tailoring, welding and catering, alongside mobility assets including buses and cars.

The logic is straightforward: reduce start-up friction and accelerate income generation.

It also reflects a broader shift in development thinking. Research from the Brookings Institution shows that asset transfers, tools, equipment, or capital, can significantly boost productivity and earnings for microenterprises in low-income settings.

Local Content as Economic Policy

What distinguishes Akwa Ibom’s model is how these entrepreneurs are being integrated into government spending.

Uniforms for public schools, security outfits and state programmes are increasingly being produced by local tailors trained through Ibom-LED. Catering contracts and service delivery are similarly being localised. This approach directly addresses capital flight, a longstanding issue in subnational economies where government spending leaks out to external suppliers.

“Local procurement policies can have multiplier effects, keeping value within the domestic economy,” according to analysis by the OECD.

For Akwa Ibom, the goal is to create a closed-loop system: train entrepreneurs, fund them, and then create demand through government contracts.

Ibom Paint: A Case Study in Industrial Revival

The clearest expression of this philosophy may be found in Etinan, where a once-dormant factory has been brought back to life.

Formerly known as Peacock Paints, the facility had been inactive for years before the Eno administration moved to revive it under the state investment vehicle. Rebranded as Ibom Paint, the plant was renovated, retooled and relaunched in June 2025.

Today, it produces paint that is being prioritised for use across state-funded infrastructure projects, effectively guaranteeing demand while rebuilding local manufacturing capacity.

The model mirrors industrial policies seen in emerging markets, where governments act as both catalyst and customer. According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, such demand-side support is often critical in reviving early-stage industries.

Oversight of the facility has been placed under Ime Uwah, who also leads Ibom-LED. The dual role reflects an intentional link between entrepreneurship development and industrial production.





Replicating the Model: Dakkada Industries

The state is now extending this approach to other sectors under the Dakkada Industries initiative, covering products such as toothpicks, tomato paste, pencils, tissue paper and plastics.

While many of these facilities are still undergoing rehabilitation, the ambition is clear: create multiple entry points for small-scale industrial participation, giving entrepreneurs practical examples of viable cottage industries.

Analysts say demonstration effects matter. “Visible success stories can lower perceived risk and encourage more individuals to enter entrepreneurship,” notes research from the Harvard Business School on entrepreneurial ecosystems. Ibom Paint, in this context, serves not just as a factory, but as proof of concept.

Youth, Inclusion and Scale

The strategy also has a strong demographic focus. Nigeria's median age is just over 18, according to United Nations, making youth employment a central economic challenge.

Akwa Ibom's response has been to embed youth inclusion into its programmes. More than 15,000 young people have reportedly received financial support, while targeted cohorts, such as all-female batches, aim to address gender gaps in enterprise.

One such beneficiary, a shoemaker trained through Ibom-LED, now runs a small business employing others, part of a growing base of micro-enterprises feeding into the state's economy.

Measuring Impact, and the Road Ahead

While the numbers are still modest relative to the state's population, the architecture being built is notable: training, funding, production and procurement linked in a single loop.

If sustained, the model could address one of Nigeria's structural challenges, how to translate public spending into broad-based economic participation. For now, the early signals are visible: a revived factory in Etinan, thousands of newly equipped entrepreneurs, and a procurement system increasingly

tilted toward local producers.

The long-term test will be durability, whether these businesses can scale beyond state support and compete in wider markets.

But the direction is clear.

In Akwa Ibom, entrepreneurship is no longer being treated as an abstract policy goal. It is being engineered, deliberately, systematically, and increasingly, visibly.

Ekaette Okon-Joseph is the Special Assistant on Media to the Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Umo Eno on media and can be reached via email.



THE 10 MOST EDUCATED COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD IN 2026

CHISOM MICHAEL



Education continues to serve as a key benchmark of national development, as global economies place increasing value on knowledge and skills.

In its 2026 assessment, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development highlighted the world's most educated countries, pointing to strong higher education access and sustained investment in learning.

Data referenced by The Times of India shows that top-ranking nations combine high university completion rates, robust research output, and effective links between academia

and industry. Beyond literacy, education now reflects a broader culture of continuous learning, shaping economic growth, innovation, and social mobility.

Here are ten countries where a large share of adults hold tertiary qualifications, and where systems support long-term learning outcomes.

1. Canada

Canada ranks first, with a high proportion of adults holding tertiary degrees. Public investment and policies that support access have shaped its system. Institutions such as

University of Toronto and University of British Columbia attract students from different regions. The country maintains a structure that allows both domestic and international students to participate in higher education.

2. Ireland

Ireland has moved up in global education rankings in recent years. A growing workforce and sustained funding have supported this shift. Trinity College Dublin remains a central part of the country's academic network. Links between universities and industry continue to influence research and employment outcomes.

3. Japan

Japan's system places focus on structured learning and technical skills. Students perform well in science and mathematics across global assessments. University of Tokyo plays a role in research and academic output. The country maintains consistent standards across its education levels.

4. South Korea

South Korea continues to record strong academic results. Students often rank high in international testing, especially in STEM subjects. Seoul National University reflects the country's focus on academic performance. Education remains linked to economic planning and workforce development.

5. United Kingdom

The United Kingdom remains a major centre for higher education. Institutions such as the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge draw students from across the world. The system combines long-standing academic structures with ongoing research activity.

6. Luxembourg

Luxembourg ranks among the most educated countries despite its size. Its multilingual system supports learning across different languages and cultures. Government support and cross-border collaboration continue to shape its education framework.

7. Australia

Australia remains a key destination for international students. Universities such as the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University contribute to research output and global rankings. Education exports also play a role in the country's economy.

8. Sweden

Sweden's system centres on access and balanced learning. It supports both academic study and practical skills. Lund University is part of a network that contributes to research and development. Policies focus on equal access across social groups.

9. United States

The United States continues to lead in research and innovation. Universities such as Harvard University and Stanford University influence global academic rankings. The country attracts students due to its wide range of programmes and research funding.

10. Israel

Israel completes the list with a strong focus on science and technology. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem supports research across several fields. Education remains linked to the country's role in global technology development.

LAGOS MAINLAND'S HIDDEN GEMS: TWO JOLLOF SPOTS COMPETING FOR YOUR GLOVO CART

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



Food delivery platforms have made it easier to compare everyday meals across different kitchens without leaving home, especially for something as familiar as jollof rice.

Jollof rice is a constant, whether it is served at parties, shared at home or ordered from a restaurant. It is one of those meals people return to often, so when it comes from a restaurant, expectations are usually straightforward.

This week, I found myself scrolling through Glovo, looking for restaurants on the mainland that offer solid jollof rice. From portion size to price and overall availability, these are the two spots that stood out.

Yummy Treats Naija

Located in Ikosi Ketu, their jollof rice combo with peppered chicken or turkey goes for N4,500. You can choose either chicken or turkey, although the turkey attracts an extra N500. The meal also comes with plantain, but it is only about two slices, so if you are big on plantain you may need to order extra on the side. That said, for the price, the portion size is quite filling and the chicken serving is decent. Each delivery also comes with a small pack of biscuits. Aside from jollof rice, they also have a wide variety of breakfast meals to choose from. They cater to both indoor and outdoor events, including food trays, food boxes, bulk orders and soup bowls. They are open every day of the week except Sundays, and they operate a no refund policy.

Bimpzy Pots and Wraps

Their jollof rice, plantain and beef combo goes for N3,500.

The combo includes two scoops of jollof rice, one scoop of plantain and two pieces of beef. You can also customise your order if you prefer not to go with the set combo, with a single portion of jollof rice selling for N900.

They are currently running a promo that gives 25% off any item on their menu. Located in Ogudu, they are open every day except Sundays. Other items on the menu include soup, swallow and shawarma.

HOW JAMB POLICY PUTS MORE NIGERIAN YOUTH AT RISKS

CHARLES OGWO

As Nigeria's tertiary admission process evolves, questions are being raised about whether recent policies by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) are adequately safeguarding candidates, particularly young applicants navigating the murky waters of insecurity in the country.

Many Nigerian youngsters preparing for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), face challenges beyond passing the examination; it now includes navigating an early arrival policy that some say compromises their comfort, safety, and well-being.

Besides, the board is exposing many of them to more dangers by posting them outside their town of registration. Just on Wednesday, report from Benue State, indicates that some UTME candidates travelling from Makurdi to Otukpo Local Government Area (LGA) for their scheduled examination were abducted.

According to a source in the area the attackers stopped the 18-seater bus on the highway at about 7 pm, and forced the passengers into a nearby forest.

"The passengers, most of who were candidates going to sit the 2026 UTME were all marched into the forest."

Confirming the incident, Ifeanyi Emenari, the Benue State Commissioner of Police, told journalists that he had mobilised tactical teams and Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) to the area to lead rescue efforts. Before the Benue incident, in 2023, some candidates

were attacked in the early hours on their way to write their UTME examination in Rivers State.

According to the victim's narrative, "My brother and I, whose arrival time was 6:30 am, left for our location, which is Elele old refinery road via Evinox Connection Nig. Ltd in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

"We got to Elelewon junction by 5:30 am, and immediately the bus driver dropped us off. A group of boys came in and attacked me. They first matched me with a very big cutlass; they targeted my forehead."

After all their struggles with the thieves, they were robbed of their belongings, including bags, phones, power banks, and money, among others.

BusinessDay earlier raised concerns over the early arrival time and posting candidate's outside the town of their registration. According to the board, candidates for the first session are expected to arrive at their examination centres by 7:00 a.m., instead of the earlier communicated 6:30 a.m. The board also clarified that the first session examination will now begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 10:30 a.m.

Speaking about the new directive from JAMB, Ajibade Ayodeji, a senior lecturer at Babcock University, said, "I believe the 7:00 am arrival time is still too early.

"Considering the realities of transport logistics, especially for candidates coming from distant areas, it can be quite stressful and even unsafe."

Ayodeji emphasised that an ideal time should be more flexible, perhaps between 8:00 am and 9:00 am so that candidates can arrive safely and in a better state of mind.

“Many candidates would have to leave their homes very early in the dark, which raises security concerns.

“Exams such as UTME should prioritise the students’ safety, not just punctuality,” he said.

Chris Nmeribe, a teacher, said the early arrival time introduced by JAMB is understandable from an administrative standpoint, because it helps the board with accreditation, biometric verification, and curbing malpractice.

However, Nmeribe noted that when this is mirrored with Nigeria’s realities, there are legitimate concerns.

“Many candidates are posted far from their homes, forcing them to travel very early, sometimes before 5:00 am. This exposes them to security risks and transport difficulties and even affects their mental alertness due to fatigue.

“Although shifting from 6:30 am to 7:00 am is a step in the right direction, it is still not sufficient to address these challenges,” he said.

He said that a more balanced approach would be fixing 8:00 am as the arrival time and ensuring candidates are assigned to centres closer to their location.

“While discipline and structure are important, policies such as this must also reflect safety, accessibility, and the well-being of candidates,” he emphasised.

According to a report from Abuja, the CBT centre at Skillpath International Academy in Karu, where 4,000 out of the 2.2 million candidates are expected to write the exam, candidates were seated as early as 8am but several complained about malfunctioning desktops, mice, and keyboards.

Although the first session was scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m, candidates faced a delay of about 15 minutes, as the examination questions did not appear on their computer screens until approximately 8:45 a.m.

One of the CBT managers, who spoke with journalists, blamed JAMB for the delayed start of the examination, lamenting that such setbacks could unsettle candidates.

Besides, he revealed that a similar situation had occurred during the mock examination.

“They delayed for about an hour because of uploading of questions. This can make candidates forget what they read.

“The candidates are supposed to just walk in, log onto their system and write their exams. The delay contributes to poor performance,” he said.

At Ikorodu in Lagos State, candidates, who were supposed to write their UTME at Winsford Comprehensive College Igbogbo were delayed, leaving the youngsters frustrated without any explanation.

It is still fresh in Nigerians memories how some candidates died over JAMB’s technical glitches, and faulty results grading, which led to a re-sit of the examination in some states.

It is high time JAMB rethink its policies and stop subjecting young Nigerians to unnecessary emotional trauma.

BEYOND THE ROOM: WHY REPRESENTATION IS NOT THE SAME AS LEADERSHIP

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

Representation counts women in the room; leadership ensures women shape what happens in the room. Or simply put, representation is presence; leadership is influence.

I have been thinking about this distinction recently, through the ordinary moments — the everyday interactions where men and women simply share space in conversations. In those moments, when a woman offers a perspective and it is brushed aside, she raises an emotional or relational concern, and it is dismissed as unnecessary. Sometimes the dismissal is even quieter — a phone appears, attention drifts, or the engagement feels thin, distracted, almost optional.

Yet when the man spoke, the conversation suddenly became expansive and engaging. The difference was not the topic. It was whose voice was assumed to lead the exchange. And in that small, ordinary moment lies a powerful illustration of the difference between representation and leadership, because most people tend to think that women's leadership means something out of the ordinary.

When a woman's perspective is trivialised, interrupted, or quietly sidelined, what we are witnessing is representation without influence — the appearance of inclusion without the reality of voice. It points to the bigger picture — women may be physically present, but their lived experiences, insights, and emotional intelligence remain peripheral to the discussion.

The Socialization of Whose Presence Matters

I share these everyday moments not to criticize individuals, but because I often meet well-meaning people who support women's leadership in principle, yet unintentionally undermine it in practice. I am simply surfacing a pattern many of us participate in without realizing it. Some of the people who genuinely support women's advancement are also the ones who unintentionally diminish women's presence.

They invite women into the room. They believe in women's potential. Yet through habits shaped by years of social conditioning, they interrupt more easily, speak with greater certainty, or unconsciously treat their own perspectives as the natural anchor of the conversation.

What we are observing in these moments is not simply personality. It is socialization.

Research in sociolinguistics and communication studies shows that men and women are often socialized into different communication roles. Masculine communication tends to be associated with authority, decisiveness, and control of discussion, while feminine communication is more often associated with maintaining harmony, accommodating others, and supporting relational dynamics. Over time, these patterns shape not only how people speak, but how their contributions are interpreted.

Studies show that identical ideas can be evaluated differently depending on who presents them. Perspectives delivered by men are more likely to be perceived as confident, authoritative, or decisive, while similar contributions from women may be interpreted as tentative, emotional, or secondary.

These subtle biases influence whose ideas are taken seriously and whose perspectives are treated as central to the discussion.

They also shape who occupies conversational space. In mixed-gender discussions, research consistently shows that men tend to speak for longer periods, interrupt more frequently, and steer the direction of conversation more often. Over time, this pattern reinforces the perception that their contributions are the default reference point around which discussions revolve.

The result is subtle but powerful: men's perspectives are more readily treated as the foundation of the discussion, while women's perspectives are more easily positioned as supportive additions.

Over time, these expectations become invisible rules that govern not only conversation, but presence itself. When a woman's perspective is overlooked or quietly deprioritized, it is rarely the result of deliberate exclusion. More often, it reflects deeply embedded assumptions about whose presence naturally carries authority in a room.

And this is precisely why the distinction between representation and leadership matters.

Because inviting women into the room is not the same as ensuring their presence translates into contribution.

Real inclusion requires something more intentional: recognizing these patterns and actively creating space where women's perspectives are treated as sources of insight capable of shaping outcomes.

From Dismissed Voices to Discarded Contributions

This socialization creates a dangerous slide: when we habitually dismiss a woman's voice in everyday interaction, we are practicing the dismissal of her presence as a whole. This is about decision-making authority. When a voice is treated as secondary, the contribution it carries is viewed as optional. In the quiet moments where a woman is interrupted or her perspective is framed as 'emotional,' we are witnessing the erosion of her right to shape outcomes.

These micro-dismissals in conversation eventually become the macro-barriers in our institutions. If a woman's voice isn't socialized to carry weight in a simple discussion, her presence in a boardroom or a cabinet is often treated as decorative rather than decisive. To move from the appearance of inclusion to the reality of power, we must recognize where we are merely 'counting' women and where we are actually allowing their expertise to move the needle.

Here are five examples where the shift from dismissed presence to decisive leadership must happen:

1. The Mobilizer vs. The Architect (Political Power)

Presence (Tokenism): Women acting as "Party Woman Leaders" or local mobilizers. They are the backbone of the campaign, organizing the 47.5% female voting bloc and singing at rallies. They provide the numbers that get men elected, but their contribution ends at the ballot box.

Leadership (Influence): Women serving as Principal Officers in the National Assembly or sitting at the "inner caucus" table where primary lists are decided. They don't just deliver the votes; they write the laws and sign the checks.

2. The "Gender Desk" vs. The Economic Engine (Institutional Placement)

Presence (Tokenism): The default appointment of women to the Ministry of Women Affairs or "Social Welfare" roles. These are often "pink ghettos" where women fulfill quotas without touching the nation's core economic or security levers.

Leadership (Influence): Women holding the "Big Three" portfolios—Finance, Defense, or Petroleum. When a woman manages the national purse or security architecture, she isn't just representing a demographic; she is defining the nation's survival.

3. The Decorative Board Member vs. The Gatekeeper (Corporate Governance)

Presence (Tokenism): A woman appointed to a board to satisfy diversity requirements. She attends every meeting and her photo is in the annual report, but her voice is rarely sought on high-stakes mergers or capital allocations.

Leadership (Influence): A woman serving as the Chairperson of the Audit or Risk Committee. In this role, her "No" can halt a multi-billion naira transaction. She is the protector of the company's integrity, not a passenger on its board.

4. Culture Fitting vs. Culture Shaping (Identity & Style)

Presence (Tokenism): A woman who survives a patriarchal workplace by "playing the game," adopting masculine traits like stoicism or dominance to avoid being sidelined. She has reached the top, but the ladder she used remains broken for others.

Leadership (Influence): A leader who uses her power to dismantle "invisible rules"—implementing mentorship systems and redefining empathy and consensus-building as high-performance skills rather than "soft" traits.

5. Subjective Anecdote vs. Lived Expertise (Intellectual Authority)

Presence (Tokenism): A woman shares an insight based on community reality or caregiving, but it is framed as an "emotional" or "personal" anecdote. It is politely heard but dismissed as unscientific or non-analytical.

Leadership (Influence): Lived experience is recognized as a legitimate form of data. Insights shaped by community engagement and everyday realities are treated as the primary source of truth for decision-making, ensuring solutions actually reflect the people they serve.

Beyond Counting Women

The distinction between representation and leadership is often discussed in the language of numbers—how many women are in parliament, on boards, or in executive roles. Unfortunately these numbers may not count, because it is about whose presence carries weight.

Leadership does not begin when a woman is appointed to office. It begins when her contributions are treated as worthy of shaping direction.

Because when a woman's presence is taken seriously in conversation, her contributions are taken seriously in decision-making. And when her contributions are taken seriously in decision-making, leadership stops being symbolic and becomes substantive.

SAFE VS. CONVERTIBLE NOTES: NAVIGATING FINANCING OPTIONS IN NIGERIA

ADERONKE ALEX-ADEDIPE

Introduction

Financing is an important component of every company's formation and growth. For early-stage companies, founders often face the important decision of selecting the investment model that best supports the company's development.

While there are several financing options available such as direct equity investments and debt financing, this newsletter focuses on Simple Agreements for Future Equity (SAFEs) and Convertible Notes.

Understanding the differences between SAFEs and Convertible Notes is essential for investors and founders seeking to balance risk and growth opportunities in early-stage financing.

Understanding a SAFE

Introduced by Y Combinator in 2013, a SAFE is a contractual instrument through which an investor provides funding in exchange for the right to receive equity at a later date and upon the occurrence of a specified triggering event. Under a SAFE, the investor's return is realized when the company undergoes a liquidity-triggering event. These triggering events are usually defined in the agreement and may include events such as a merger, acquisition, an initial public offering (IPO), a change of control, etc.

SAFEs can be structured in several ways depending on the terms negotiated. The common structures include:

- (i) a discount, no valuation SAFE, where the investor converts their investment into equity at a discounted price compared to new investors in a future financing round;
- (ii) a valuation cap, no discount SAFE, which sets a maximum company valuation at which the investment will convert into equity;
- (iii) a valuation cap and discount SAFE, combining both protections for the investor; and
- (iv) a Most Favoured Nation (MFN) SAFE, which contains neither a discount nor a valuation cap but allows the investor to adopt more favourable terms offered to future SAFE investors. For more details, please read our newsletter here.

Understanding Convertible Notes

Convertible Notes represent a more traditional approach to early-stage financing. Structurally, they are debt instruments that convert into equity or repayment. When an investor provides funds through a Convertible Note, the company is technically borrowing money.

The note includes a principal amount, an interest rate, and a maturity date. It is designed to convert into equity or repayment upon maturity.

This structure means that Convertible Notes begin as debt obligations but transform into ownership stakes when a qualifying financing event occurs. Interest accrued over time is usually added to the principal amount before conversion. The maturity date also introduces an additional layer of protection for investors to recoup their investments.

Distinction Between SAFEs and Convertible Notes

The most fundamental distinction between SAFEs and Convertible Notes lies in their classification. A SAFE is not a debt instrument, rather, it represents a contractual right for an investor to receive equity in the company in the future upon the occurrence of specified triggering events. As a result, a SAFE does not create an obligation for the company to repay the invested funds and does not accrue interest over time.

Convertible Notes, by contrast, are debt instruments that are designed to convert into equity at a later stage. When funds are provided through a Convertible Note, the company owes the investor the capital sum until the note converts or is repaid.

Prior to conversion, the investment typically accrues interest and is subject to a fixed maturity date. At maturity, the principal and any accrued interest may convert into equity depending on the terms of the agreement. These features generally provide investors with additional protection and leverage, while SAFEs tend to offer companies flexibility and no immediate financial obligations.

Conclusion

As Nigeria's startup ecosystem continues to expand, founders and investors will increasingly encounter alternative financing instruments when raising capital. SAFEs and Convertible Notes both serve this purpose, providing an avenue through which companies can secure funding at the early stages of growth.

Choosing between the two often depends on the growth objectives of the company and the level of protection investors seek. Regardless of the structure adopted, obtaining professional legal advice and maintaining a clear understanding of the conversion mechanics are essential to ensuring that both founders and investors are adequately protected.

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LOST TECHNIQUES. FOUND FUTURES: REVIVING INDIGENOUS ART METHODS

The Living Archive

What does it mean to inherit a craft no one taught you?

That question sits at the center of one of African art's most charged conversations right now. Artistic knowledge, like oral history, does not disappear in a single moment. It thins, becoming the province of fewer and fewer hands until what remains is a photograph,



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Good drinks. Great art. Better company.

a museum object, or a half-remembered name for a process nobody living can fully reconstruct.

In this digest, we trace how certain African artistic techniques were displaced, how contemporary artists are bringing them back on their own terms, and what that recovery means for cultural ownership and the future of the work itself.

When Technique Becomes Unsustainable

The displacement of indigenous techniques followed the same logic as colonial disruption generally. What was economically useful was retained, and what was not got starved of the conditions it needed to survive. Adire eleko, the starch-resist indigo dyeing tradition practised by Yoruba women in southwestern Nigeria, required time, communal knowledge, and specific materials. Colonial trade flooded local markets with cheaper imported cloth, and the economic argument for learning adire quietly collapsed.

In Benin, the lost-wax bronze casting tradition, among the most technically sophisticated metalwork ever produced, was disrupted not only by the British Punitive Expedition of 1897 but by the broader collapse of the social structures that had given those objects their purpose. Tuareg silversmithing, Kuba raffia weaving, and Ndebele mural traditions: each carries its own history of pressure and scarcity. These were not cultures that forgot. These were techniques made unsustainable under largely imposed conditions.

What Contemporary Artists Are Actually Doing

The return, where it is happening, rarely looks like recreation. Nigerian practitioners working with adire are not producing nineteenth-century replicas. They are using resist-dyeing logic to address contemporary questions about abstraction and material memory. Ghanaian artists have collaborated directly with master weavers in Bonwire, co-authoring work that exists in both gallery and cultural contexts at once. The Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa has made consistent room for this kind of practice, technically rooted and formally alive.

Who Owns the Knowledge

Technique is not neutral. When an artist outside a specific community learns and deploys a method tied to that community's ceremonial or social life, questions of ownership are unavoidable. There is a meaningful difference between collaboration and extraction, even when both look similar from the outside.

What distinguishes responsible revival is transparency—credit given, relationships built, economic benefit shared. The most compelling examples of technique recovery are those where the artisan is not a source to be mined but a co-author with an acknowledged stake in what gets made. The Tiwani Contemporary gallery's engagement with artists navigating exactly these tensions offers one model; the partnerships formed through residency programs that embed artists within craft communities offer another.

The Longer Stakes

Younger African artists are increasingly drawn to indigenous techniques not out of cultural duty but because those techniques solve problems that industrial materials cannot. Natural dyes behave differently on the body and in light. Hand-loomed textiles carry structural qualities that machine weaving cannot replicate. Carved forms hold a relationship to material: its grain, its resistance, its history — that changes how an object reads in space.

This is where preservation becomes something larger. The recovery of technique is also a recovery of a certain kind of thinking: patient, material-sensitive, and deeply relational.

The knowledge that survives is not the same knowledge that was lost. It has passed through interruption, through hands that had to partly reinvent what they were reaching for. Perhaps that is not a compromise.

Perhaps that gap—between what was carried and what had to be reconstructed—is exactly where new work lives.

What does a tradition become when it is reimagined by those who had to fight to find it?



Cast brass relief plaque showing the Oba (king) sacrificing leopards as part of an annual ceremony | © British Museum's online collection



Adire Fabric



Keturah Ovio

Keturah Ovio is an Executive at Patrons Modern & Contemporary African Art. She is also an engineer and Founder of Dukka, a Fintech startup providing bookkeeping and payments solutions for small businesses. Keturah is passionate about African Art and has been collecting art since her early 20s. Now, she advises, curates, and manages collections for individuals and corporate organisations looking to start or diversify their wealth management through art collecting. She strongly believes that a fine marriage exists between Art and Technology

BIG FIESTA BY NIGERIAN BREWERIES: A PORTFOLIO-LED APPROACH TO CULTURAL SCALE



Easter has always been an active commercial period in Nigeria, with individuals and families celebrating in different ways.

For some, it is a time to travel, to return home, to reconnect, to step away from the pace of everyday life. For others, it unfolds in cities, across concerts, street gatherings, brunches and late-night outings that stretch across the long weekend.

This year, Nigerian Breweries didn't attempt to reshape that behavior, it instead worked within it.

Through its Big Fiesta platform, the company built a system of experiences that met people where they already were, turning a long weekend into something more connected, more visible, and more shared. It also comes at a defining moment for Nigerian Breweries, as the company marks 80 years of brewing in Nigeria; a milestone that reflects its longstanding role in shaping how Nigerians gather, celebrate and connect.

Through Big Fiesta, the company moved away from isolated brand campaigns and instead built a platform

designed to operate across cities, audiences, and its entire portfolio - simultaneously.

Launched at a media luncheon in Lagos, Big Fiesta was positioned not just as a series of events, but as a system of experiences to drive the post religious fasting celebrations. The ambition was clear: presence at scale, not visibility in pockets.

Execution at Scale: A Multi-City, Multi-Brand Rollout

From Lagos to Abuja, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Aba and beyond, Big Fiesta unfolded across the Easter window through a coordinated mix of concerts, nightlife activations, street experiences, and lifestyle gatherings. Total cities activated were 11, total activations were 38 and estimated consumer attendance were 114,666.

Across these locations, headline performances and DJ sets played a central role in driving turnout and cultural relevance.



Headline Acts Across Cities Included: Phyno, Flavour, Shallipopi, and Young John.

These performances were not centralised into a single flagship event, but distributed—ensuring each city had its own moment while still contributing to a larger national narrative.

Portfolio in Motion: Distribution Over Dominance

A key strength of Big Fiesta was how Nigerian Breweries deployed its portfolio. Rather than forcing uniformity, each brand leaned into its existing identity:

Heineken owned the premium concerts such as Young John Live in Abuja, as well as the Heineken City of Cities Garden City fashion showcase.

Desperados brought the louder, youthful energy through rave parties across four cities. Goldberg stayed close to culture and community with the Shallipopi Live in Benin concert.

Life and Tiger connected deeply in the East, leveraging Flavour and Phyno live performances in Aba and Enugu. Legend showed up where music meets everyday life, delivering its “Legendary” experience across four cities.



Amstel Malta and Chamdor catered to more relaxed, social occasions with experiences such as the Amstel Malta Easter Village

This created coverage instead of competition. Consumers didn't experience overlap—they experienced relevance, depending on where they were and how they chose to celebrate.

Consistency as a Competitive Advantage

What differentiated Big Fiesta was not just scale, but duration. Instead of a single peak moment, the platform maintained visibility and engagement across the entire Easter period.

In a fragmented media and consumer landscape, this approach offers a clear advantage which includes repeated exposure across touchpoints, multiple entry points for different audience segments and stronger brand recall through sustained presence

Measuring Impact Beyond Visibility

Beyond attendance and reach, Big Fiesta delivered on three key fronts:

Cultural relevance: Integration into how consumers already celebrate; Portfolio synergy: Multiple brands contributing to one shared narrative; and Experience-led engagement: Moving beyond passive consumption into active participation.

What Big Fiesta Signals for the Industry

Big Fiesta reflects a broader shift in Nigerian marketing: From Campaign bursts always-on cultural platforms and from Single brand dominance to Portfolio orchestration.

From Visibility to Experiences

For Nigerian Breweries, particularly in its 80th year, this positions the company not just as a participant in culture—but as an organiser of it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A HUMAN BRAND IN A DIGITAL WORLD

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

Being a 'human' brand involves being approachable and relatable in an industry dominated by corporate jargon and robotic interactions. It's about creating real connections with your audience by speaking their language, addressing their needs, and showcasing the people and values behind your business. When an enterprise feels human, customers engage with its content and are more likely to choose it over competitors. For small businesses like yours, this approach builds credibility and loyalty in a crowded market.

The importance of a 'human' brand

Humanising your image builds trust and credibility because it shows your audience the real people behind the business genuinely care about their needs. When you communicate authentically through heartfelt stories, genuine responses or relatable messaging, you create an emotional bond with your clients. This connection makes them feel valued and understood, which naturally fosters loyalty.

A humanised image could also encourage more engagement with your content, opening the door for valuable feedback. The more you listen to opinions, the easier it becomes to adapt, improve and grow. Unlike polished but impersonal marketing, authenticity resonates because people can spot sincerity. They prefer real, imperfect interactions over rehearsed campaigns, making being genuine crucial in driving long-term success.

Characteristics of a 'human' brand

Customers are more likely to buy from brands they connect with on a personal level. When your company feels relatable and genuine, it helps you form meaningful connections

that drive sales and inspire loyalty. Here are characteristics that define an authentic image and create those vital connections:

Authenticity: Your organisation stays true to its values, communicates honestly and avoids putting on a facade.

Empathy: You show understanding and care for your customers' needs and pain points.

Relatability: Your messaging and personality feel like they come from a friend, not a corporation.

Transparency: You're open about processes, decisions and challenges.

Approachability: Consumers feel comfortable reaching out and interacting with your business.

Personalisation: You tailor experiences and offers to make people feel seen and valued.

Consistency: Your voice and actions align across all touchpoints, showing reliability.

These characteristics make your brand more human, which allows clients to connect emotionally and choose you over competitors.

Strategies to make your brand more human
Making your image more human requires creating genuine connections with your audience through thoughtful and relatable actions.

i. Use storytelling

Stories tap into shared experiences, evoke feelings and make your brand relatable. Sharing ones like your founder's journey showcase your passion and values, which helps your clients see the people behind your business.

Highlighting success stories is another way to build trust and show how your product or service changes lives. A strong emotional connection can make your offering stand out, even if people have seen similar ones. When they feel something—whether inspiration, empathy or excitement—they're more likely to choose you over the competition.

ii. Develop a distinct brand voice

If you want your brand to sound conversational and approachable, imagine you're talking to a friend in your content. Skip the jargon and overly formal language—just be real. Use “you” and “we” to create a sense of connection and make your audience feel like part of the conversation. Moreover, keep your sentences short, direct and easy to read so your message flows naturally. Ask questions to spark engagement and show you care about their perspective. Don't be afraid to add a touch of personality with relatable examples. The goal is to make your audience feel comfortable and eager to engage.

iii. Leverage technology

AI can support your clients in a way that feels personal and genuinely helpful. For example, chatbots can deliver personalized, empathetic responses that make users feel valued and understood, as well as trainings and tutorials that are personalized to user needs. More than half of respondents in one study found that AI improves educational outcomes for all kinds of learners, and you can enjoy these same benefits to provide tailored instruction and troubleshooting to your audience—providing quick solutions with a level of care tailored to individual needs. Using technology thoughtfully helps you connect with customers and makes your brand more approachable and trustworthy.

Common mistakes to avoid

If you focus too much on sales without connecting emotionally, you risk pushing your audience away. People want to feel valued and understood, not like they're just a sale waiting to

happen. Avoid faking authenticity or saying what you think consumers want to hear—it's easy to spot and can destroy trust.

Inconsistent communication or a shifting brand voice can confuse your audience and make it harder for them to connect with you. Consistency is where the magic happens—companies with consistent branding see 33% higher revenue than their competitors. Staying true to your voice builds emotional connections and shows you care.

Last line

Put these strategies into action to start humanising your brand. Focusing on authentic connections and consistent communication creates lasting trust, strengthens loyalty and drives real growth for your business.



FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

Feyisitan Ijimakinwa is a Reputation and Perception Management expert. He is a prolific writer and researcher who, at different times, served as Head of Corporate Communications of top brands quoted on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. A versatile communications specialist, he practiced extensively as a print journalist and was variously engaged in the broadcast media, working on radio and television. Feyisitan continues to write on corporate communications, brand reputation and perception management, and brand intelligence, among others. He organises the 'Brand Intelligence and the Marketplace' masterclass. Feyisitan advocates a pollution free and sustainable environment

EIGHT WAYS TO BUILD AN ONLINE COMMUNITY AROUND YOUR BRAND

CHISOM MICHAEL



Businesses are increasingly rethinking how they build and manage online communities as concerns around risk, control, and long-term value reshape digital strategy. While public platforms continue to offer reach and visibility, a growing number of organisations are shifting toward private, controlled environments that better align with internal policies and company culture.

This transition reflects a broader focus on structure, accountability, and value-driven engagement. For many companies, the move is not only about reducing exposure to reputational or legal risks but also about creating secure systems that support collaboration, protect sensitive information, and enable sustainable growth over time.

According to Entrepreneur, here are key considerations for brands seeking to build effective online communities without exposing themselves to avoidable risks:

1. Public communities carry legal and reputational risks

Public or unmoderated online spaces can create exposure for businesses. In many jurisdictions, the definition of a workplace now includes digital environments. This means behaviour within company-linked platforms can lead to legal or human resources consequences.

Cases of harassment, misinformation or misconduct in such spaces can affect both employees and partners. For businesses, this creates a direct line between online activity and organisational accountability. The absence of clear moderation or structure often increases these risks.

2. Lack of control opens the door to external threats

Open communities are difficult to manage. Without access controls, they may attract individuals who do not have a direct relationship with the business. This creates room for fraud, false information and in some cases, data exposure.

Companies that rely on shared knowledge within their networks may find that public platforms do not provide the safeguards required to protect that information. As a result, internal discussions and insights may be compromised.

3. Online behaviour can affect wellbeing

Research shows that users of public platforms often engage in comparison with others. This can affect confidence and create pressure within professional communities. For businesses that depend on collaboration and trust, such outcomes may weaken relationships over time.

Creating a structured environment helps reduce these pressures and supports more focused interactions among members.

4. Culture should guide digital engagement

One of the central lessons from companies that have moved to private platforms is the role of culture. If company policies apply offline, they must also apply online. This ensures that behaviour remains consistent across all environments.

Businesses that define clear guidelines for participation are better positioned to maintain order and purpose in their communities. This includes setting expectations around communication, conduct and content sharing.

As one executive noted, "If the law still applies to your company's online spaces, your company culture needs to apply to them as well."

5. Private platforms allow structured collaboration

Some organisations have chosen to build internal platforms tailored to their operations. These platforms provide a controlled environment where members can access training, share updates and collaborate without interference from external users.

Verification systems and invitation-based access help ensure that only relevant participants are involved. This structure allows businesses to maintain oversight while still enabling interaction across locations.

In addition, internal systems can support real-time communication, resource sharing and performance tracking, all within a secure framework.

6. Consistency improves brand delivery

For companies operating across multiple regions, maintaining consistency is a key challenge. Private platforms make it easier to standardise messaging, training and service delivery.

By centralising information, businesses can ensure that all members of their network receive the same guidance. This reduces variation and supports a unified brand experience for customers.

It also allows teams to respond more quickly to changes in policy or operations.

7. Community support strengthens relationships

Structured communities do not limit interaction; they often improve it. Members are able to share experiences, offer support and exchange practical solutions within a defined space.

In some cases, participants collaborate directly to solve operational challenges. This may include sharing resources, recommending suppliers or assisting with service delivery in nearby areas.

Such interactions build trust and create a sense of shared responsibility within the network.

8. A controlled environment creates long-term value

Businesses that invest in private online communities often see benefits beyond risk management. These spaces can improve engagement, support learning and strengthen internal networks.

Over time, this creates a cycle where stronger communities contribute to better organisational outcomes. Members feel more connected to the business and more confident in their roles.

As one operator explained, "Owning your brand's online spaces creates a positive feedback loop that strengthens both the business and the community."

THE LAST WISH

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

I recently returned from the burial ceremony of my favourite aunty and I am yet to recover from everything that happened. If I had not witnessed it myself, I would have dismissed it as fiction.

My aunt, Magdalene, was the youngest and only surviving sister of my late mother. As the only two daughters of their mother, they were very close. Sadly, my mother died at a young age. Aunty Maggi, as we fondly called her, stepped in and became a mother to us. She carried that responsibility with grace until her death. She showed up for everything—school events, weddings, childbirths, no matter the distance. Even though she lived in the eastern part of the country while we lived in Lagos, she made sure the bond between us and her children remained strong.

However, we noticed something strange. Our cousins always preferred to visit us in Lagos and strongly resisted whenever we suggested going to Enugu. One holiday, we insisted on visiting them. That decision changed everything. It was the first and last time we went.

That visit opened our eyes to what Aunty Maggi was enduring. She always appeared cheerful, always smiling but beneath that was deep pain. She was married to a very difficult man. He never beat her but he was extremely abusive. He constantly insulted her, called her unprintable names and humiliated her in front of others. He treated his children harshly and showed us no kindness during our stay. His hostility made the environment unbearable, and we cut our visit short and never returned.

As we grew older, we understood more. He was an absent husband and father.. emotionally distant and unfaithful. He openly chased younger women even within their church and made inappropriate advances toward his daughters' friends. Because he was a major financier in the church, no one challenged him. Meanwhile, Aunty Maggi continued to serve as a devoted Christian leader, silently enduring everything.

His disregard for her was shocking. He disrespected her openly. Her own best friend betrayed her by borrowing her clothes and wearing them on dates with her husband. Still, Aunty Maggi refused to leave the marriage because of what people would say.

After years of enduring this, she suffered a heart attack and later a stroke. Her first son brought her to Lagos for treatment and ensured she received the best care he could afford. But the damage had been done. One day, struggling to speak, she gave clear instructions: if she died, she should be buried in Lagos within a week. Her body must never be taken to her husband's home. She also stated firmly that her husband must not see her corpse or attend her funeral, or there would be consequences.

She died the next day.

We were heartbroken. As preparations began, her first son shared her wishes with the elders but they refused. They insisted she deserved a befitting burial because she was a respected woman who had touched many lives. They overruled him and he reluctantly agreed.

A month later, all arrangements were complete and the journey began. At the morgue, one of the attendants casually remarked that her face looked different. It looked angry. We ignored it.

On the way to the east, the hearse broke down several times. An elderly man who was travelling in his own car stopped. He asked what was going on and we told him. He came down, placed his hand on the vehicle, said a few words and asked us to continue. After that, the journey became smooth. Everyone found it strange but said nothing.

When we arrived in Enugu, the burial activities began. It was meant to be a three-day event. On the first day, heavy rain fell from morning till evening. The ceremony could not hold because people could not attend. By evening, the rain reduced and a small service of songs was held. Then we discovered that the food prepared for guests had gone bad. Everything seemed to be going wrong.

The next day, we took her body from the morgue to her paternal home for final respects. The casket was brought out of the hearse and her children danced around it with friends and family. There was music and brief moments of celebration as people paid their last respects. After that, we proceeded to her husband's house.

When we arrived, the trunk of the hearse refused to open. The elders poured libation and the priests said prayers but the trunk would not budge. After several failed attempts, the elders decided we should move to the cemetery. As soon as we arrived there, the trunk opened with just one touch. It was clear she did not want to be taken to her husband's house, just as she had warned.

The funeral service was completed, though not without challenges. Afterwards, the reception began. The music was playing, food was served and people were enjoying themselves.

Suddenly, a strong wind started to blow. It became violent within moments. The canopy covering the live band was uprooted and thrown onto the table where her husband and his friends were seated. Panic broke out. People ran in all directions. Her husband was badly injured. Another canopy was lifted and thrown onto the cars belonging to him and her first son. It was clear something was wrong. It felt like Auntie Maggi was expressing her anger. Her son should have obeyed her final wishes.

Later that evening, an elderly man came to the house. No one knew him. He said their mother was very angry and not she was not done. He advised them to cancel the next day's plans and go to the graveside to beg her. They listened.

Early the next morning, we all went to the cemetery. What we saw shocked us. The sand covering her grave had been dug out. The security guards reported hearing strange sounds from the casket. The elders ordered that the casket be opened.

When it was opened, her face looked visibly angry. Her children began to beg her. They apologised for not honouring her wishes and pleaded with her to rest in peace.

As they spoke, the wind began to rise again. Then they started singing her favourite hymns and songs. Gradually, calm returned. The wind stopped. Then we heard a distinct click sound, like something being locked inside the grave. Everything became still.

They believed she had accepted their apology. The grave was covered properly, and we left in silence.

As the days went by, I realised that the old man who had met us on the way to Enugu and touched the hearse was the same man who had come to the house to warn us that Auntie Maggi was angry and needed to be begged. It was frightening. It was unbelievable. And if I had not been there, I would never have believed it.

One lesson stayed with me: never take lightly the wishes of a dying person.

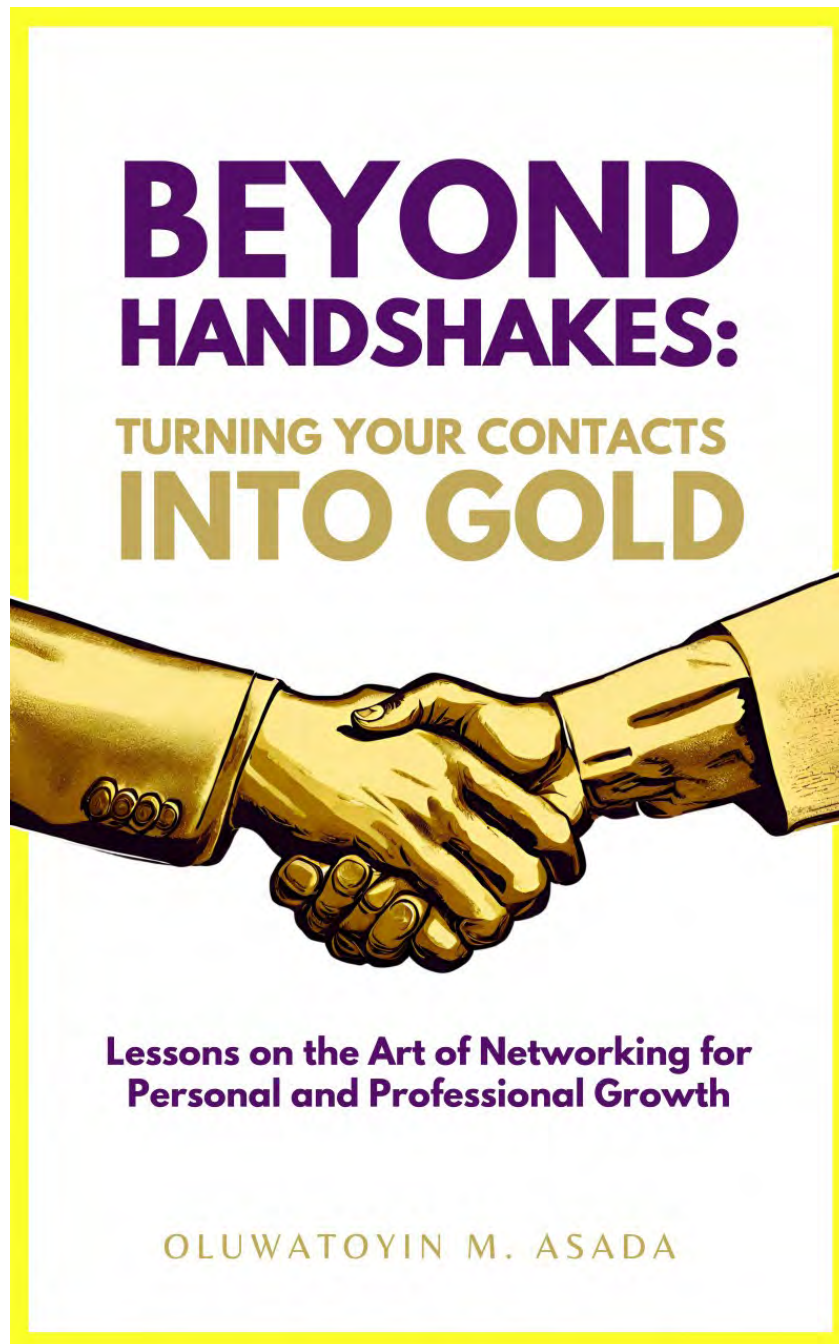


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Stop Networking for Nothing-A Review of
Oluwatoyin Asada's Beyond Handshakes
Title: Beyond Handshakes: Turning your
Contacts into Gold

Author: Oluwatoyin Asada
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Category: Self Help

BEYOND HANDSHAKES: TURNING YOUR CONTACTS INTO GOLD

TITILADE OYEMADE

Let's be honest, many of us are guilty of it. We attend events, smile, exchange numbers, maybe even take pictures... and then nothing. No calls, no messages, no real relationship. Just vibes and empty contacts. So what exactly was the point?

This is the uncomfortable truth Oluwatoyin Asada tackles, and she does it in a way that makes you pause and rethink everything you thought you knew about networking.

What makes this book different is how personal it feels. The author lets you into her world not just through her words, but through her pictures. You see her and you see the rooms she has been in. It quietly tells you, "This person knows what she's doing."

But she doesn't come across as intimidating. Instead, she feels real. She understands that networking can be awkward, uncomfortable, and even frustrating. And rather than judging you, she walks you through it, showing you that it's a skill you can actually learn.

The book reads like a conversation. You can almost imagine her standing in front of you, speaking, explaining, pushing you a little. And she doesn't just talk, she gives you tasks. Yes, actual things to do. It's almost like she's watching to see if you're serious or just here to read and forget.

If you've ever said, "I don't need to network, my work will speak for me," this book will gently scatter that idea. Because the truth is, people matter. Connections matter. And waiting quietly is not a strategy.

At some point, the book even feels like a push, a nudge to get up, stop overthinking, and actually try. But just when you think it's all smooth and

encouraging, she reminds you of something important: not everyone will like you, and not everyone will want to connect. That part? Very real.

One thing you might wish for is more stories, more behind-the-scenes moments of how she built her connections. Because if we're being honest, networking is not always as smooth as it sounds.

Still, the message lands. Networking is not a one-day thing. It takes effort, patience, and consistency. And yes, a bit of courage too.

By the time you're done, you may not suddenly become a networking expert but you will feel something shift. You'll find yourself a little more willing to walk up to someone, start a conversation, and see where it goes.



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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

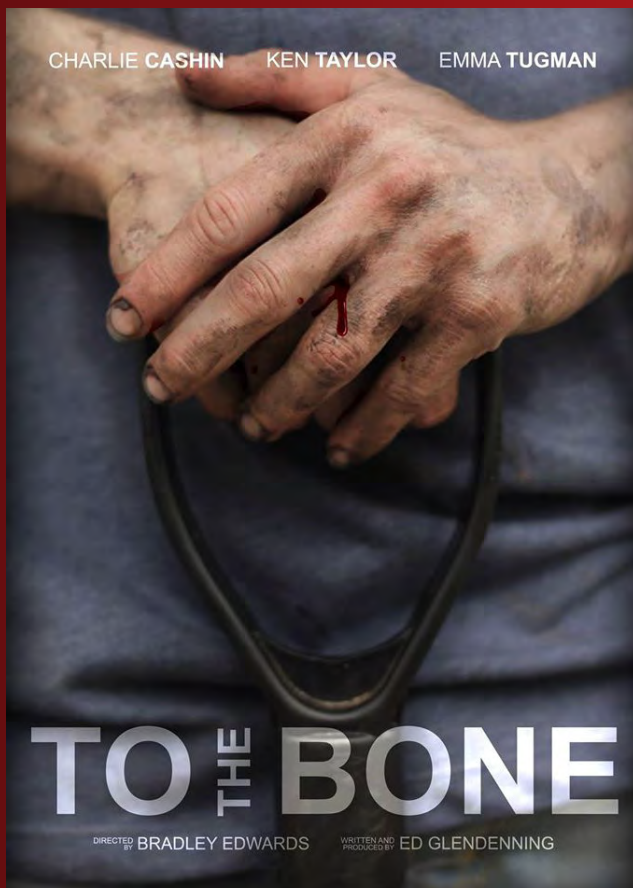
THE RED LINE (2026)

If you enjoy Thai thriller movies then you might want to check this movie out. This movie was okay but I felt like it was too slow and there were some decisions that could have been carried out differently. I didn't see it as smart moves but anyway people are enjoying the movie as it is already trending as No 1 in Nigeria in just a few days. In this movie 2 young ladies were scammed of their life savings and just couldn't take it. Nittha was a very smart and intelligent lady, she just couldn't believe she could be scammed of such an amount of money. She was so ashamed to mention it to anyone and even lied about the figure. She decided to join forces with 2 other ladies to fetch these guys out, catch them and get their money back. You will need to check out this movie to find out if these 3 women were successful on their mission, what they had to put together, what they had to do and how they almost lost their lives in the quest of getting their life savings back. The 135m Thai Crime, drama, thriller movie was directed by Sitisiri Mongkolsiri, they featured actors like Nittha Jirayungyurn, Esther Supreeleela, Teodsapol Maisuk, Akanat Nimit.



THRASH (2026)

If you are up for a nice simple horror movie, then this will be for you, it wasn't that bad, it was more of a thriller movie, if you enjoy horror movies with sharks then this will be worth your while. Dakota had lost her dad a while ago, years later she lost her mom, that was so difficult for her to handle, hence her locking herself inside the house and for months Dakota didn't go outside. Suddenly there was a category 5 hurricane coming to her city, this hurricane approached so fast and didn't give Dakota enough time to leave home. The storm surge came with loads of devastation, chaos, confusion and to top it up it brought hungry sharks into the city and into the homes of people. You will need to check out this movie to find out how Dakota saved Lisa and brought her in, how some kids found a way to survive and if her uncle was able to come for her rescue. The 86m disaster, horror, thriller movie was directed by Tommy Wirkola, they featured actors like Phoebe Dynevor, Whitney Peak, Djimon Hounsou, Alya Browne, Stacy Clausen, Dante Ubaldi, Sami Afuni, Tyler Coppin etc.



TO THE BONE (2017)

In this simple drama movie, a young 20-year-old lady Ellen battled with an illness called "anorexia nervosa". She struggled with eating as she just couldn't bite, chew nor swallow and this was beginning to take a toll on her health. Despite not eating at all, she would run and do countless sit-ups. Her parents became so worried and decided to take matters into their own hands. Ellen's parents found an unusual doctor who was specialized in helping young people going through different battles, his method wasn't the usual orthodox way but he recorded results over time. To help them, they brought them to a group home where they would be monitored and coached on how to be better in their life discovery journey. The 107m drama independent movie was directed by Marti Noxon, and featured actors like Lily Collins, Keanu Reeves, Carrie Preston, Lili Taylor, Alex Sharp, Liana Liberato, Brooke Smith, Leslie Bibb and many more.



WEEKEND QUOTES



1

Love differently.
Love with peace
.....WhispersbyTEN

2

'NO' on Caps-lock means
don't ask me if I am sure
.....WhispersbyTEN

3

Once your obedience is
complete, you trigger access
to longstanding territories
.....WhispersbyTEN

4

Being pleasant under
pressure is a proof of
self confidence and
clarity of purpose
.....WhispersbyTEN