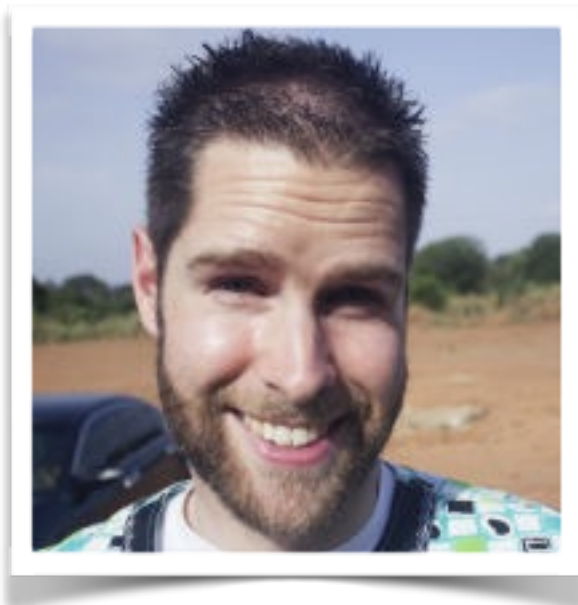




Mark Boots

VOTO Mobile



Mark Boots, 29, is the co-founder and executive director of Ghana-based VOTO Mobile, a mobile phone-based service that removes barriers to insightful communication and feedback loops between citizens in emerging markets and the organisations who serve them.

Traditional ways of engaging the world's poorest people are expensive, inefficient, and leave the most marginalised people out of the conversation. Distance, infrastructure, language and literacy challenges result in unheard voices and a lack of reach and feedback for programs.

Specialising in voice-based mobile engagement, VOTO enables organisations to easily share educational information and gather real-time feedback via citizens' existing mobile phones.

Along with Louis Dorval, VOTO Mobile's co-founder, Mark experienced how government agencies in West Africa were struggling to better understand the needs of their citizens and the impact of their services. The old way – complex in-person surveys involving motorbikes and clipboards – was challenging and often didn't happen for lack of resources. In an environment where almost every household had access to a mobile phone, they agreed that there must be a better way.

Together, they started working on an SMS survey platform, but saw very low participation rates during testing and a strong male and urban bias. When they moved to voice interactions in local languages, they measured a participation rate of more than 30%, with nearly equal female/male and rural/urban engagement.

Since launching in early 2013, VOTO has been used by more than 250 organisations to engage with over 500,000 people across 72 countries. Recently, the platform was used by the World Bank to help raise voter turn-out levels in a participatory budget process in Brazil, increasing voter turn-out by more than 30%. In Northern Ghana, they just completed a two-year maternal health education pilot reaching 7000 expectant mothers, with 93% of women recommending the weekly service to their peers.

The online platform makes it easy, cost-effective, and fast for any organisation to launch their own interactive mobile programs, but VOTO's team is also focused on human-centred design research to optimise the impact of these initiatives. VOTO's technology also sits behind the scenes, powering sector-focused mobile content providers in Ghana and around the world.