

Intellectual Property and the American Dream

How one creator utilizes IP to serve marginalized communities and connect across continental and cultural divides.

“Media is the most powerful influencer.” Yet, when Michael Maponga moved to the United States in his youth, he experienced significant culture shock. To make things more difficult, there was no entertainment or inspiration in his new home connecting him to the stories of his Zimbabwean culture. Fortunately, America is the land of opportunity, and intellectual property (IP) now empowers Michael to bring pan-African stories to the world, connecting these communities across continents and cultural divides.

Interacting and connecting with a variety of different cultures is a key component to diversity. Diversity strengthens communities and inspires individuals. In Michael’s

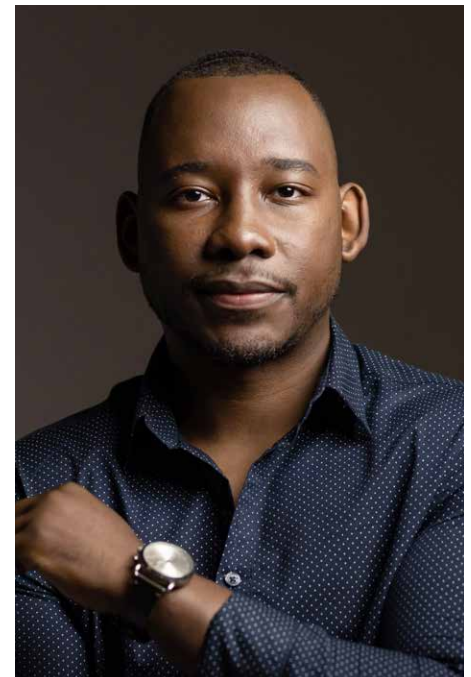
“It’s important to take your time to make sure that you build something of value with a strong foundation, and that you own the IP too.”

words, “[Experiencing] different cultures tell their stories inspired me to want to bring African stories to the world.”

Michael Maponga is the Founder of Maponga Studios, a film and television production company, and the Founder and CEO of AfroLandTV, a distribution vehicle supported by Comcast NBCUniversal and Techstars. Every month, these stories reach over 2 million people in the United States alone.

Maponga Studios and AfroLandTV are just the beginning, too, as Michael and his team work to scale up and broaden the creative ecosystem bringing these stories to communities all across the globe. His current system has Maponga Studios feeding content into AfroLandTV and its partners, and the revenues from AfroLandTV feed back into the production studios, generating the next round of content. For his next steps, Michael intends to scale up with more studios, film crews, theaters, and other endeavors that give him greater control over projects and limit the need for outsourcing, all while meeting the needs of underserved communities.

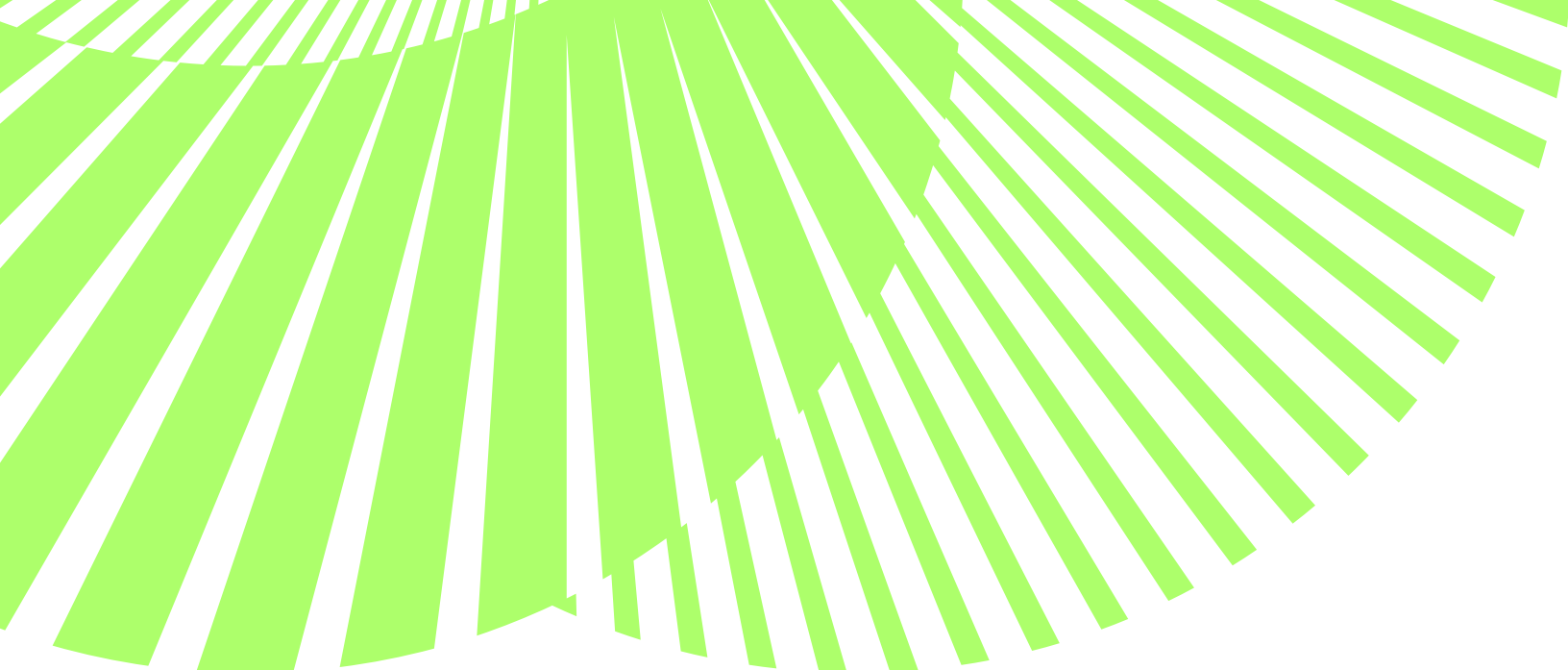
As a creator and entrepreneur, Michael maintains IP rights in everything from his stories and production company to data



Michael Maponga

Founder, Maponga Studios
Founder and CEO, AfroLandTV

collection and the technology backing his distribution platform. When asked about the role of IP in his entrepreneurial endeavors, Michael immediately quipped, “IP is very, very critical to our mission in bringing diversified stories to the world.” He continued, “It’s important to take your time to make sure that you build something of value with a strong foundation, and that you own the IP too.”



When asked how IP enables and accelerates innovation and creativity, Michael continued, “It’s absolutely critical to control IP because this gives the underserved an opportunity to create valuable assets, generational wealth.” “[IP] empowers people in innovation, the competitive nature of this, because where there’s competitiveness, there’s always going to be progress. We become a better country. We become better people.” Simply stated, ownership of IP empowers entrepreneurs and enables progress.

But what if there were no IP protections?

“It scares me because then we become a communist nation. The essence and the greatness of the United States is the innovative

people that are willing to take the risk to create IP that is valuable and important to the world and that is life changing are rewarded for their risk. Now if you take out the IP, what kind of society do we become? We would then block innovation, and then we’re now doing the mundane.” After all, the American Dream gives Michael opportunities and something to chase. Without IP, what enables creators and innovators like Michael to chase risky solutions to a variety of challenges?

The United States is certainly a mature and trusted regulatory system, but more can be done to further enable our creators and innovators, especially those operating in the global market system. This is especially apparent since IP protections are under attack in many forums, both domestically and internationally. As Michael

said, “It is very important for us to continue to have administrations that support entrepreneurial endeavors,” because regulatory decisions at all levels of government and throughout all branches can literally kill small businesses. These decisions have “a long-term effect and that thumps and stops innovation and creativity, so it’s definitely important for our lawmakers to know and to be educated.”

IP enables creators and innovators. IP ownership empowers entrepreneurs and marginalized communities. IP is vital for innovation, competitiveness, and progress. Simply put, the American Dream is powered by IP.

