

Bringing the World Together Online: Global Technology Distribution

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It is no longer sufficient to justify access to the internet and technology for billions of unconnected people primarily for social, educational or economic development. In the world we live in today access to technology is a global security necessity. Corporations, governments and community leaders that understand and are driven by the urgency of this principal, will also realize social, economic and business growth as an outcome.

Movements founded on ethnic or religious extremism are on the rise and triggering the establishment of a network of global terrorism. By driving technology adoption and creating new business models, corporations and community decision makers can play a significant role in tempering and limiting the growth of such movements globally. An examination of the distribution of technology combined with various usage statistics will shed some light on the direction that corporate strategists should focus their resources in order to bring about a new priority.

Information is the backbone of any society. With the world population at 6.5 billion, there remain 5.5 billion people who do not have access to the Internet. Recent data reveals that of the one billion Internet users, 81% of those users reside in 20 of the roughly 240 countries and territories worldwide. The United States comprises 4.6% of the total world population with Internet use in the U.S. at roughly 69%. In contrast, Africa's population accounts for a little more than 14 % of the world population, while roughly 3% of that continent's population have access to the Internet. In South Asia, where more than half of the world population lives, Internet access stands at 8.9% of their population.

Developing countries with their enormous populations are having an increasingly vital voice in the overall direction of the global economy and political stability. According to the United Nations the population projections of the world in 2050 are expected to exceed 9 billion people. The vast majority of the new 2.5 billion people anticipated over the next 40 years will reside in today's developing countries, with the developed countries' population growth remaining almost stagnant.

While operating in developing countries and regions, today's global terrorists use technology to spread their ideologies and to communicate to their geographically dispersed comrades. Ironically, governments and corporations continue to wrestle with the justification and resources necessary to quickly provide those same tools to the very people whom the terrorists target as their membership. Extremist groups are taking advantage of modern technology while living in caves and remote areas to spread their doctrine to new and existing followers. In addition to enlisting members from prisons and offering well educated people the promise of leadership roles, their primary targeted audiences are the vast numbers of disenfranchised and poverty stricken members of various societies throughout the globe who are unaware and uninformed.

For the sake of freedom, security and global prosperity the information gap must be filled and there is no time to lose.

Other elements of terrorism can take the form of dictatorial states that maintain control of their people through total management of all means of communication, including the Internet. In countries such as North Korea, all access to information is state determined and controlled. In part, because we have not been able to penetrate their technology boundaries with the free flow of information, they have successfully amassed a provocative military armed with chemical and biological weapons that stands over one million strong. Living in a country where the information is so tightly controlled does not allow individuals to transcend governments, and to take their own destiny more freely in their own hands either politically or economically. Many countries who house terrorist bases work to restrict access to the free flow on information out of fear that they will loose the support and control of their people. Traditional media, such as television, radio and print can and have been restricted by some governments. With the advent of new technologies such as cell phones and Internet it is increasingly difficult for those countries to control access to unfiltered information.

Statistics about Internet and PC users by country present some interesting points that may bear a relationship to the vulnerability and susceptibility of people's gravitation toward radical and violent ideologies. In Afghanistan, the Internet user index is 0.001 with 0 PC's per 100 people. In North Korea, the Internet user index is 0.000 and the ratio of PC's per 100 people is 0/100. In Indonesia, the index is 1.2 PC's per 100 people. In Iran, there are 9.1 PC's per 100 people. In Iraq, the index is 0.800 PC's per 100 people. It should be noted that several of the countries listed above further impede the free flow of information by controlling what information their citizens are able to access on the Internet.

Notwithstanding that 94% of the world is non-English speaking, it is estimated that 68% of all web content is in English. While government and corporate leaders galvanized the early adoption of Internet technology, it is clear there is much left to be done by both to ensure that the Internet is not only accessible to the rest of the non-connected populations, but that it will be intelligible to them from cultural and linguistic perspectives.

These Internet limiting circumstances are further compounded by the fact that the overwhelming content found on the Internet is western oriented and written in English. As of October 14, 2005, it was reported that there were 4.59 billion web pages on Google in English, 12.6 million in Arabic (or 0.3% of the English pages), and 87.1 million in Chinese (2% of the English pages). In view of the fact that the United States represents a mere 4.6% of the world population, it becomes clear that a more aggressive effort must be made to reduce this economic, cultural and language online disparity in order for the Internet community to become more truly representative of the multi-dimensional population of the world.

The inability to quickly create and implement solutions for the more than 5.5 billion people globally who do not have access to the Internet, or whose access is limited by language barriers, increases the risk of expanding an already existent gap in economic prosperity that ultimately will translate into a political and ideological group of adversaries. Slow approaches to these issues

provide the time needed for insurgent groups to incite political, economic and social instability that will have profound and long-term consequences to the free world. While solutions to these issues exist, the mindset, urgent prioritization and a global collaborative approach do not.

When corporate and government priorities fuse together to address the communication gap in developing countries, the combination necessary to radically change and stabilize the world will be underway. The term “digital divide” will pale in comparison to a “freedom divide” which will evolve if immediate steps are not taken to prevent it.

While the challenge of expanding the accessibility and connectivity of the Internet to a much broader based constituency may at first appear daunting, a number of multi-national corporations are making an effort to move in the right direction. There are companies today with solutions that do not require pre-existing infrastructure in order to provide cell phone or Internet connectivity, companies like PacStar, Cisco and Nortel to name a few. Larger companies, like IBM, Microsoft, Intel, HP, AMD and many others, have any eye on these markets as an area to drive new customer growth. In addition, there are a number of low cost devices that are under development and close to deployment, such as Wyse terminals and the \$100 laptop program. One of the most aggressive objectives is that of AMD, which is targeting to have 50% of the world population online by 2015. Without such a corporate commitment it is estimated that 50% of the global population would not be connected until 2050. Another notable program is that of Intel which has allocated one billion dollars over the next five years for their World Ahead Program, which recently showed promise with their program in the Amazon jungle providing technology to one of the most remote places on earth. Both Microsoft and the Gates Foundation are also engaged in identifying solutions to address the needs of developing countries. Many other companies also have designated programs.

There are efforts underway to introduce new wireless technologies to enable developing countries to bypass traditional land line connections to gain more rapid, affordable and greater access to the global Internet network, using multiple channels of communication. In addition, a number of companies are developing less expensive and easier to use devices to ensure that even the less economically advantaged can participate in the global Internet community. But these measures need to be accelerated and more rapidly expanded into the vast and diverse array of local markets regardless of geopolitical boundaries. Finally, the content that becomes available to the billions of new potential Internet users must be localized. Terrorists are committed to transforming the world and they will do so community by community, building from the spread of stories about disparity, persecution, and unjust treatment or existence, to build a community as they grow their base. Corporations can add to their list of roles and responsibilities, community and nation building, diplomatic skills and the propagation of freedom and its qualities.

While many of the social priorities underlying internet connectivity programs were valid five years ago, the global environment in which we are now operating has undergone dramatic changes. Although the original social, educational, and economic motivations driving these programs remain laudable and valid today, there is new and higher priority. Current and future corporate objectives must address an appreciation that liberty and freedom are at stake. With an increasing global population and the determination of terrorist objectives that are global and

lethal in design, a redefinition of corporate priorities must be put in place and used as a basis to expedite programs designed to provide rapid and low cost Internet connectivity from inner cities to remote rural areas in developed and in developing countries. Terrorist groups thrive on disconnected groups and communities and we must reach those masses of people first.

The urgency to fill the information gap that flows from the lack of communication with the Internet has a much more serious underpinning since the growth of global terrorism. Disenfranchised and poverty stricken people often provide fertile ground for conversion to terrorist organizations. When people are limited to the propaganda proffered by such organizations, and faced with a ballooning population which further impedes the possibility of their individual economic prosperity or advancement, there is little opportunity to consider alternative ideologies or avenues to address their concerns. It is precisely these groups in developing regions that corporations tend to avoid and terrorist movements gain their strongest foothold.

The players in the technology community have an opportunity to reorganize their priorities and methods for putting access in the hands of as many people as possible. In the past, the traditionally accepted priorities have been to advance education, workforce development, and economic prosperity. Today's models must be adjusted to reflect the recognition of freedom as a priority, with education, workforce development, and economic prosperity as channels in support of this new priority. Beyond connectivity, companies should facilitate the proliferation of communication and collaboration tools for the masses which enable people to share ideas and information as well as stay informed.

The slower the implementation of programs, the more opportunities there are for terrorists to expand the ranks of their organizations. This means in some cases, well intentioned educational or social priorities may need to be subordinated to global security priorities. By not immediately filling the information gap wherever it exists, we may be sowing the seeds for future insurgencies and acts of terrorism. The consequence of slow execution of these programs is no longer a mere failure of meeting projected revenues or satisfying a social objective in a given region, it translates into greater opportunities for subversive groups that are inherently anti-corporate and anti-government in their objectives. This will leave people everywhere and in particular in developed countries with an even more serious strategic threat that is growing on a daily basis. The implications of this unrest are initially felt locally, but eventually spread beyond geopolitical boundaries as we are observing today.

All participants involved in the process of reprioritizing will benefit. For governmental and non-governmental organizations, the prospect of global political and economic stability increases. Corporations will find additional resources derived from a reprioritized plan that reflects their purpose of deterring terrorism and increasing the awareness and appreciation of what freedom offers and means. Companies would then also be better poised to achieve their economic objectives. Finally, impacted individuals will be exposed to hope and alternative solutions to their problems.



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The responsibility rests with community decision makers, technology companies, corporate leadership and government authorities to understand the new priority for access to technology and its role in reducing global instability and proliferating liberty. Governments need to view this situation as a national security and disaster preparedness risk. The only avenue to success is through immediate global collaboration between governments and private sector. For leaders not to respond to this challenge, means they will be playing a role in the destabilization of the lives of generations to follow.

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