



## **Global Technology Distribution: A Catalyst for Freedom or Destabilization?**

In our 21<sup>st</sup> century world, we face a growing, insidious threat from the world terrorism movement. But we can limit that growth, and perhaps even reverse it, by ensuring broad access to technology and the information it delivers. The leaders of corporations, governments and communities who understand this principal –and are driven by its urgency – will also realize social, economic and business growth as an outcome.

By creating new business models and distribution channels, corporations and community decision makers can play a significant role in tempering the influence of terrorist movements. Profitable business models and distribution channels can be created to address this urgent need, and simultaneously produce corporate growth. But corporations cannot be confined by traditional models if they are committed to playing a role in solving one of the most serious threats of our time. The response to this crisis may well define their longevity on the world stage, and it will directly impact our future freedoms.

There are tremendous disparities in the depth and breadth of information distribution on our planet. The United States comprises 4.6 percent of the total world population; Internet use here stands at roughly 69 percent. In South Asia, where more than half of the world population lives, Internet access stands at 8.9 percent. Sixty-eight percent of all web content is in English even though only 6 percent of the world's people read English. The world population is 6.5 billion and 85 percent of these people do not have access to the Internet. It is projected that the world population will exceed 9 billion in 2050, and most of those additional 2.5 billion people will live in today's developing countries. Clearly there is much left to be done to ensure that the Internet is not only accessible to the non-connected populations, but that it will be intelligible from cultural and linguistic perspectives.

For the sake of freedom, security and global prosperity, the information gap must be filled – and there is no time to lose. By not acting immediately we are sowing the seeds for future insurgencies and acts of terrorism. The consequence of slow execution translates into greater opportunities for subversive groups that are inherently anti-corporate and anti-government.

Statistics about Internet and PC users suggest there is a relationship between technology-based information and the susceptibility of people to embrace radical and violent ideologies. In Afghanistan, the Internet user index is 0.001 with 0 PCs per 100 people. In North Korea, the Internet user index is 0. In Iran, there are 9.1 PCs per 100 people. In Iraq, the index is 0.800 PCs per 100 people. As we have seen, these nations have proven to be fertile grounds for terrorist organizations.

Terrorists are committed to transforming the world and they will do so community by community, cleverly merging high-technology communication with low-technology

human conversations to spread their doctrine while spreading stories about disparity, persecution, and unjust treatment or existence. With an increasing global population and the determination of terrorist objectives that are global and lethal in design, corporate priorities must be redefined and used to expedite programs that provide Internet connectivity from inner cities to remote rural areas in developed and in developing countries.

The technology and distribution solutions exist today. While in some regions of the world, the obstacles to providing either telephone or Internet connectivity appear to be almost insurmountable, there are clear examples that the technology exists to overcome these challenges. For example, corporations working with the military have deployed their technology solutions to establish telecommunication and Internet services in the most remote regions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In the private sector, one may look to one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh, to learn from the Village Phone Program. This program demonstrates how a company can build from scratch a mobile subscriber base of over 10 million with coverage extending to 95% of the country. The success of the program is a direct result of fostering various usage models that support the local socio-economic environment.. The impediment to succeeding cannot be attributed to the lack of technology; it simply reflects a lack of will, creativity and prioritization.

One company is sponsoring “networking academies” run by local businesspeople in developing markets. Programs are available that allow multiple screens, keyboards and mice to be linked to a single PC, exploding access to the internet in countries where few PCs are available. Highly scalable and low cost, back-end infrastructure solutions also exist today. Some newer solutions are not being fully recognized in part because they threaten traditional corporate business models.

Additional ingredients of success in emerging markets are to leverage a multitude of technologies and delivery channels with consideration of local cultures and incentives. Global terrorists use technology and media to spread their ideologies and to communicate to their geographically dispersed comrades. While they live in caves and remote areas, leaders of extremist groups are successfully taking advantage of modern technology including television and the internet. The West is finding it challenging to counterbalance the biased information flow emanating from Al-Jazeera and that has had a detrimental effect on regional perceptions of the United States and other Western powers in the Middle East and elsewhere. Consequently, it furthers the agenda of terrorists. Western communication networks such as Alhurra, must include recognized and acceptable Arab commentators, and pertinent content to overcome an inherent mistrust in the West’s reports. More important and urgent, is the need to successfully communicate regionally meaningful information through the Internet to effectively win “the hearts and minds” of the 5.5 billion information deprived people before the terrorists do.

These are some examples. There are many more. All who participate in capitalizing on these new systems will benefit. For governmental and non-governmental organizations, the prospect of global political and economic stability increases. Corporations will be better poised to achieve their economic objectives and will also find additional resources derived from a reprioritized plan that reflects their purpose of deterring terrorism. Finally, the people whose horizons are limited by lack of information will be shown hope and alternative solutions to their problems.

In countries such as North Korea access to information is controlled. Lack of unfiltered information has prevented the North Korean people from driving their own economic and political destinies, and from transcending their government. And, in part because information has not flowed freely across North Korea's borders, the regime has successfully amassed a provocative military: more than a million strong and armed with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The good news is that the advent of new technologies such as cell phones and Internet it makes it increasingly difficult for countries to control access to unfiltered information. And while some countries may attempt to censor elements of the free flow of information, time and technology will certainly overcome their efforts. Thus, in the initial phases of deployment, limited censorship of information flow is acceptable, since it is preferable to a totally closed information society.

The only avenue to success is through immediate global collaboration between government authorities, companies and community leaders to understand the new priority for access to technology and its role in reducing global instability and proliferating liberty. The current situation is a global security and disaster preparedness risk. If leaders do not recognize and act on this they will be playing a role in the destabilization of the lives of generations to follow.

When priorities are fused to address the information gap, the free exchange of ideas will help people move to a more centrist world view. But, if we fail to act – and act quickly – the “digital divide” we face now will pale in comparison to the onerous “freedom divide” that evolves.

For additional information, contact Wendy Haig at [wendy@ironhorseventures.com](mailto:wendy@ironhorseventures.com)

[www.ironhorseventures.com](http://www.ironhorseventures.com)