Potential growth of the internet 10891

Technology, Internet

The Internet

The 1990 s will go down in history as the decade that witnessed the birth and explosion of a worldwide revolution. A revolution that, in a matter of a few years, affected a sizeable portion of the world s population, not only by enriching their daily lives but by changing their very existence. This revolution has come to be known as the Internet, a network of network s . What started out as a Military maneuver to counter a nuclear threat has now turned into a into a medium through which millions of people communicate, conduct business, seek and attain education, and even entertain themselves. In short, it would not be an exaggeration to state that a growing number of people exist through the Internet. Every day, thousands of people " go online" for the first time to explore this exciting new medium. However, the development of this dynamic new environment is still in its infancy providing adequate proof of the role that it will play in the future.

The Internet s Astounding Growth

In the few short years since it became a part of people s everyday lives, the Internet has managed to link communities together in an unparalleled fashion. The medium s growth rate has been nothing less than phenomenal. In 1990 only a small cadre of researchers knew what the Internet was. By mid-1999, worldwide, 150 million individuals were connected to the Internet. Some estimates suggest that worldwide there soon will be as many as one billion people online.

More than 50 million American households and millions of businesses, schools, libraries and other institutions have access to the Internet, and that

number is growing rapidly. Network traffic continues to double every 100 days, and Jupiter Communications, a leading Internet analyst firm, projects that almost 55 percent of the U. S. population will be online by 2002. The Internet today has been compared to the telephone in the 1920s or television in the 1950s. And yet, while it took the mass market almost three decades to adopt the phone and TV, the Internet has been adopted on a mass scale within just five years. The reason is that unlike radio and television, the Internet is open, interactive and decentralized. Any one user, anywhere in the world, can " publish" and distribute information or electronic products and services to a virtually unlimited Internet audience, at very little cost. In fact, most of the content on the Internet is user-generated. These key factors openness, interactivity and decentralization make the Internet a uniquely empowering medium that can have a dramatic impact on people s lives.

There should be a few basic principles to guide the development of an environment designed to make the Internet accessible, affordable and valuable to all members of the global community. Adherence to these principles will deliver the economic and social benefits promised by this new Internet medium.

1. Internet policy should foster individual choice and empowerment in the economic and social dimensions and rely on individual decision-making for determining the products, services and content available on the Internet. Practices developed in the crucible of the private sector and the marketplace can best direct the development of the interactive medium.

2. Public policies should be market-driven and industry-led. Policies should be developed collaboratively, with input from industry leaders, government officials and, perhaps most importantly, consumers and other stakeholders. Public or private gatekeepers should not be allowed to prevent new entry, deny business opportunities or limit the free flow of information in the Internet.

3. Where government involvement is determined to be necessary, policies should be technologically neutral and non-discriminatory, to ensure that the Internet enjoys the same potential for growth as any other medium and that the value of the unique, interactive nature of this new medium can be fully realized.

4. Policies should be designed to assure that all segments of society and all countries of the world have access to the potential economic and social benefits of this new medium and that the medium becomes as essential to our daily lives as the television and the telephone, and more valuable.

In sum, we seek to maximize the economic and social benefits of the Internet with industry-led, market-driven policies that allow this dynamic medium to reach its full potential.

" It is more important than ever that policymakers, both in the U. S. and abroad, recognize the enormous potential economic and social benefits of the medium."