

Unleashing Creativity

Fueling the fires of rural broadband innovation can change the world for the good.

By Frank Odasz / *Lone Eagle Consulting and Rural Telecom Congress*

Destructive forces such as ISIS use the Internet – particularly social media – to market mindless violence to youth. However, the Internet can be equally effective at presenting an alternative worldview of life, liberty and happiness for all. People of goodwill must recognize that they have a global voice and a responsibility to speak out. They must find creative solutions to bring people together around actionable solutions to ensure the global public good.

In fact, the global economic competitiveness of the United States depends on bringing all good people together to participate sustainably in the interconnected global economy.

Two billion people are online now, and another 4 billion, mostly young and poor, are expected to be online by 2020 or soon thereafter. What will they learn to do, and what will they choose to do? It matters a great deal!

The global population coming online presents a multitrillion-dollar profit opportunity to U.S. companies. It also presents them with a moral and social obligation and a challenge to national and global security.

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING CAN PRESERVE THE RURAL LIFESTYLE

Broadband and digital entrepreneurship can offer new freedoms for those who cherish the rural lifestyle. Keeping current in times of

dramatic economic and social change requires rural citizens and rural communities to learn more effective ways to collaborate. That's the only way to find out what works best for other rural folks like them.

Rural citizens should ask whether their communities will choose to embrace their broadband opportunities before out-migration makes economic recovery unlikely.

Access to education has historically been tied to economics: Those who can't afford the cost don't get the benefits. Broadband changes all that. It gives people the opportunity to learn nearly anything for free – as long as they have learned to learn.

What I love about rural and tribal cultures is the attention to quality of life, the outdoor amenities and the friendly folks who are not in too much of a rush to hold a conversation and share a laugh with anyone, anytime.

However, rural culture sometimes encourages conformity. In the words of the old proverb, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." Rural and ethnic communities that shun local innovators and suffer from a mindset of inferiority and poverty often lack self-efficacy – the belief in their ability to succeed. Without this belief, and without a predilection to self-directed learning, people are unlikely to benefit from broadband until someone can effectively encourage them.

For any individual, the motivation that arises from the satisfaction of learning new skills and gaining new capabilities, including the growing capacity for learning, powers a self-sustaining growth cycle. Individual capacity can grow as an inner innovation engine. The

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problem is getting this growth cycle started. Most learners are easily overwhelmed until they develop their capacity to absorb more information through regular practice. Even if they have broadband, they are likely to use it only for entertainment until peers encourage them to grow.

Collaboration with others, mutual encouragement and ongoing sharing among few or many learners creates benefits that are measurable and exponential.

Less can be more in the age of information overload. “Value bandwidth” describes the wisdom condensed from knowledge and raw information. It’s more important than volume bandwidth.

For example, an ISP in rural Nepal uses connectivity for the betterment of the entire community. Minimal broadband – not even enough to qualify as broadband under FCC

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guidelines – enables users to make Skype video calls, watch educational videos, share online media, access social networking sites, receive payments and, in general, get connected.

Rural and ethnic communities that celebrate innovators and innovations will find that those who know how will be eager to share their new knowledge with those who want to learn how.

The Broadband Opportunity Council message is clear: Broadband makes unleashing the creativity of all Americans possible. President Obama’s final State of the Union address ended

with a challenge to lead with unarmed truth and unconditional love. Certainly the United States has always stood for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. Now this message has become actionable. ❖

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