Peter Burgess LinkedIn Blogs

Better Than the Internet of Everything

Introduction

When I was very young, I was taught that if I could do something, that did not mean I should do it. Wise advice from my parents.

It seems to me that the Internet of Everything has something of this characteristic. Not surprisingly a big promoter of this idea is Cisco … a company that makes switches for the Internet which would be a huge beneficiary of a world that embraces an Internet of Everything.

I am not so sure that society as a whole will benefit very much from an investment in an Internet of Everything. Maybe it would … a little bit … but relative to the investment involved, not so much.

Surely there are better ways to allocate these investment resources.

Clearly, the Internet has been a 'game changer' in many ways, but has the game changed in the right direction, and has the change been as effective as it could have been.

It seems that the Internet has facilitated a lot of activity that has a significant profit component, but virtually nothing where the benefit is significant for people and society but there is no profit. Very little has happened with technology deployment without a substantial money profit component. Meanwhile huge important issues that impact society and the environment don't get addressed. Of course this is not limited to Internet related investment, but applies to every type of investment needed in the modern economy.

So, what would be a better Internet.

An Internet of Every Person and an Internet of Every Place would, I believe, have a huge value, with much more significant than an Internet of Everything.

An Internet of Every Person

Decision makers in the modern economy have been taught that the performance of the corporate organization is a good proxy for the performance of the society and the economy … and while there is some relationship, it is quite weak, and not always positive. The corporate profit is impacted by the size of the payroll … payroll down means profits up … and technology and productivity enable this now as never before.

An Internet that puts people at the center of the data flows and analysis has the potential to end up with impact that is favorable for people … and that would be good.

There are already many Internet links that connect with people, but in the main these Internet links are those that entertain the person and have commercial value and profit for the content provider. Whether or not the content has any meaningful value to the person is a secondary consideration, even if it is a consideration at all.

Another connection that people have relates to advertisers pushing product at the person. The reason of this has nothing to do with what the person needs, but is driven solely by a corporate agenda that relates to selling their products profitably.

In an Internet of Every Person, the content would be the sort of content that helps people make better decisions for themselves and for society … which includes the environment. When people make good decisions for themselves and for society, in the end the commercial sector will follow. It is people who are the customers, and it is customers that pay the bills and make profit possible.

In the prevailing data flow model, a person is a customer or a potential customer … nothing more. However, with an Internet of Every Person, data flows are about quality of life (wellness, happiness and yes … goodness) and people can make decisions that help to improve them.

An Internet of Every Person need not have privacy issues. In this segment of the Internet, the goal would be to enable a person to have a better life. This contrasts with the prevailing business models in the Internet space which harvest personal data of all sorts for the singular purpose of monetizing these data in any and every way possible.

An Internet of Every Place

The modern world has macro economic data, and especially at the national level, and there is also lots of capital market data and data about corporate performance. There is very little data about place or community, yet is in the place that we live, go to work and play.

Having meaningful management data about place would be a major step in improving the data available for decision making and for accountability generally.

The 'state' of a place changes rather slowly, and getting good data about a place is relatively easy. Maintaining the data so they are up-to-date is also relatively easy. More important the data shows something that is actionable and capable of relatively easy validation. A place doesn't move and a place does not close down. By comparison a 'development project' funded by the World Bank, the United Nations or some bilateral or other development agency closes down and disappears after a relatively short amount of time. The place does not.

I became convinced that achieving progress in a place was more important than either the performance of a country or the performance of a company or the performance of a project. People live and work in a place, and their quality of life is closely correlated with the characteristics of the place. We talk a lot about places, but the enviro-socio-economic data about a place is not anything like as good as it could be and should be. An Internet of Every Place can change this.

Good data about very place on the planet should be 'a click away'.

For the past 60 years every project of the Official Development Assistance community has collected data about the places where the project works … but these data disappear as soon as the project ends. A follow on project, years later collects the same data again … and then the data get lost when the project ends. This is ridiculous, but it is essentially what happens. Make the place

the focus of the data, and have an Internet framework for this and socio-economic progress and performance will materially improve.

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