

Indian Internet in late 90s and contrast after a quarter century

By Osama Manzar



Osama Manzar goes back to the late nineties and traces his old reported articles and posts that he had contributed to The Industry Standard, a weekly newsmagazine focusing on internet economy, and he compares the current scenario of the Internet and its India story.



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It was post mid nineties, somewhere around 1997 I had joined the Hindustan Times, one of north India's biggest national daily newspapers, to run their Internet division. It was a division without any staff but the management had decided to form an Internet department to effectively mark its presence on the World Wide Web. I had earlier worked for more than two and a half years in ComputerWorld, a fortnightly magazine for MIS managers, and had a vast experience of reporting on Indian and global Internet trends and how Indian IT companies were doing business. However, it was my passion with the Internet that enabled me to get a new media job at the Hindustan Times. My job was to create hindustantimes dot com and ensure that the entire newspaper was on the website so that it could be accessed anytime, anywhere, by anyone. And so it happened, we used to upload the entire edition just before midnight, certainly much before the dawn when the physical copy would reach the doors of subscribers. Unsurprisingly, the entire Indian diaspora would read the Hindustan Times newspaper much before anyone in India. However, unlike Indian readers in India, the diaspora would not only read the newspaper online but would also send feedback, comments, opinions, suggestions, rants and raves in abundance.

Unfortunately, all the mails from the diaspora used to come in one mailbox. Most of the staff of HT including many journalists did not have email where we could forward the mails received in their name or to the report they had written. Gradually many journalists would come to our Internet division room and read those emails. We also started registering for

their individual emails. The world of the Internet, and emails was alien to the journalist fraternity as I experienced on the floors of HT. It was fun to train and help attain the curiosity of many of those journalists who wanted to explore the Internet and have their own emails and read hundreds of those letters to the editor which were received through the online edition of the Hindustan Times.

In the meantime, I used to continuously explore the global Internet trends and how the world is progressing with the Internet. Being a journalist and interested in ICT and Internet, I used to read a lot of newspapers and magazines coming from the USA, like Wired, Fast Company, NetworkWorld, InfoWorld, Red Herring, Business 2.0 and the tech sections of the regular WSJ, NYT, and so on. One of those curious nights, I bumped into a magazine freshly launched with an unassuming name - The Industry Standard. The magazine was a weekly and was fully focused on tracking the Internet economy, dot com boom, and how the internet was affecting business. I wrote an email to Jonathan Weber, the weekly magazine's editor-in-chief and got a prompt reply inviting me to write occasional 200-word posts from India and committed to pay a dollar a word for the published posts.

Interestingly in the mid 1998, the total Internet subscribers in India was merely 105,000, even after the public commencement of Internet availability since August 15, 1995, a time period of almost 3 years. As per the report above, we had about 16 applicants for ISPs who wanted to provide Internet services to the Indians including entities like Fujitsu, Microsoft, and usual suspects like At&T and British Telecom. Compare those days with the current scenario when we have a claim of more than 1.10 billion mobile connections and just about 5 major ISP players, such as Reliance Jio, AirTel, Idea, BSNL and Vodafone.

I thoroughly enjoyed writing about how the Internet was taking shape in India and the dollar payment was not hurting at all.

It is interesting that in the mid nineties, the international news could be as relevant as it was for India, the localisation of the Internet in Hindi and other Indian languages. I came to know about Harsh through a friend of mine Venkatesh Hariharan who was an editor with one of the IT magazines at that time. Harsh was working with Western Railway as their MIS manager and being a Techy was also fiddling with developing software to make the keyboard work for Indian languages. He called it “Shusha” - the prevalent keyboard layout as well as TTF (True Type Font) that enabled Indian Internet users to type, read and write in four Indian languages; Hindi, Marathi, Gurmukhi and Gujarati. With this news being published in an international magazine, Harsh Kumar’s effort got a huge attention, on which he was working since 1995 with a campaign called Raj Bhasha. Around the same time, as I had reported, Nasscom was also getting active with a programme around localization called Bharat Bhasha.

1998 was the year The Industry Standard started as a weekly print magazine, and became so popular by 2000 that it came to be known as “the Bible of Internet economy”. In the year 2000, The Industry Standard sold the highest number of advertisement pages than any other magazines in the USA.

Actually, my first contribution to The Industry Standard, as per my records, was in early June 1998, to be precise, in the issue of June 1, 1998. And the topic at that time was that “VSNL wanted to be an AOL.”



DISNEY'S ONLINE KINGDOM

Now that it's absorbed Starwave, the Mouse will find out if old media can rule in the



**Washington
Gets Heavy
on Privacy**
PAGE 15

**What's Real
Up With
Zapata?**
PAGE 18

**Paul
Is
Dead**
PAGE 2

Showbiz Dings Harvard
PAGE 45

Net Salaries Exposed
PAGE 47

»POSTS



TEAM PHOTO

proff. **Environline** has teamed up with Lycos to provide users with daily content on environmental issues. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Mark Ferrell (director of information services), Nicole Rickard (creative director), Gwen Arbuckle (marketing associate), Ann Robertson (office manager), Josh Knauer (executive director). **ENCA** now: Luna, Simon.

India's AOL? VSNL Talks E-Commerce

India's government-controlled Vidish Sanchar Nigam Ltd. has ambitious plans to expand its basic e-mail and ISP service to e-commerce and other consumer services, according to a senior official. The company's presence from three to nine cities, and increased its subscription base to 505,000. And it has announced plans to invest \$1.4 billion in the next five years.

However, the business community and Internet enthusiasts are unhappy with the way the Internet is growing here. Why? There is not any service

Net for the local audience," says I.B. Saxena, an entrepreneur who sells to Delhites at bubblebuzz.com.

VSNL says it will get there. "We are soon going to be a complete ISP, like AOL. Electronic commerce is going to be a reality in two months," Singhal told *The Standard*.

— OJASU MANIYER, New Delhi

Measuring That New and Digital South

New South boosters have discovered the digital economy. A major's committee of high-tech execs and civic cheerleaders will choose a nickname



Don't expect the name to 550 cuts. The city's last marketing icon was Izzy, a blue blob who bellydanced at the 1996 Olympics. "I don't want to come up with a name that a significant number of people get it," Ellis says.

— Ken Folstein, Atlanta

GAMBLING

SE's Albanians Defeated Friday, May 28, 1999

OF 3 ALABAMIANs Deported

Last month, we reported on the Kenney Rogers Casino, a Caribbean-based online gaming hall, it doesn't allow gambling by U.S. Web surfers because of a new law that forbids importing of more than 100 foreign dollars

...because of pressing legal decisions, but we could play by listing our address as San Francisco, Albania. Now, we weren't sure we'd be able to take out our winnings, as casino mps had assumed us that the security was foolproof. Our personal information would be

Some days ago, an envelope finally arrived from Cryptologic, the company that handles the casino's e-cash arrangements. Inside was the PIN number that would let us withdraw our money.

Some smart luck at the post office had diverted the letter from Albania, and sent it on to San Francisco, California. We ran to our computer. But

... ..

India's AOL? VSNL Talks E-Commerce

India's government-controlled Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd. has ambitious plans to expand its basic e-mail and ISP service into e-commerce and other consumer services, according to VSNL Chairman and Managing Director B.K. Singh.

VSNL is the only commercial ISP in the country and has been offering services since August 1995, when the Internet became accessible to the public in India. So far the Department of Telecommunication (DoT) has received license applications from 16 prospective ISPs, such as AT&T, British Telecom, MCI, Motorola, CompuServe, Microsoft, Sprint and Fuitsu.

VSNL has slashed its tariffs in half, expanded its Internet



presence from three to nine cities, and increased its subscription base to 105,000. And it has announced plans to invest \$1.4 billion in the next five years.

However, the business community and Internet enthusiasts are unhappy with the way the Internet is growing here. Why? "There is not any service available on the

Net for the local audience," says I.B. Saxena, an entrepreneur who sells to Delhiites at bababazaar.com.

VSNL says it will get there. "We are soon going to be a complete ISP, like AOL. Electronic commerce is going to be a reality in two months," Singhla told *The Standard*.

— Osama Manzar, New Delhi

Actually, my first contribution to The Industry Standard, as per my records, was in early June 1998, to be precise, in the issue of June 1, 1998. And the topic at that time was that “VSNL wanted to be an AOL.” America On Line was a big and successful Internet Service Provider in the USA, and back home in India, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited was the sole ISP and was unable to meet the growing demands of the enthusiastic Internet users including those who wanted to use the Internet as a business platform and for e-commerce. The then chairperson B.K. Singh was the man in demand, who is no more now, having contributed enormously to the growth of Internet in India.

Interestingly in the mid 1998, the total Internet subscribers in India was merely 105,000, even after the public commencement of Internet availability since August 15, 1995, a time period of almost 3 years. As per the report above, we had about 16 applicants for ISPs who wanted to provide Internet services to the Indians including entities like Fujitsu, Microsoft, and usual suspects like At&T and British Telecom. Compare those days with the current scenario when we have a claim of more than 1.10 billion mobile connections and just about 5 major ISP players, such as Reliance Jio, AirTel, Idea, BSNL and Vodafone.

Hyderabad declared that it is building a whole new city by the name of Cyberabad and named it Hi-Tech City (Hyderabad Information Technology Engineering Consultancy City) and provided space for all big multinational tech companies like IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, Motorola, Citicorp, et al.

THE
INDUSTRY STANDARD
13
1998

THE NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE INTERNET ECONOMY
WWW.THISTANDARD.NET
\$2.95 U.S.

THE NET'S BULL RUN

Yahoo and Amazon.com lead a frantic stock tear. An in-depth look at who, what and why. [PAGE 70](#)

J. Crew Gets the Web

How Brian Sugar aims to make the company an online leader. [PAGE 25](#)

Inside the Web Ratings Game

[PAGE 32](#)

Meet Jon Postel, Master of Your Domain

[PAGE 30](#)

Customer Service Works Smarter

[PAGE 38](#)

Wiff Bites the Ad Man

[PAGE 14](#)

Carl Bursk, MTV

[PAGE 48](#)

HOW TO WIN

HOW TO WIN	HOW TO WIN	HOW TO WIN
Win the Lottery Buy a ticket Wait for the drawing Hope you win	Win the Lottery Buy a ticket Wait for the drawing Hope you win	Win the Lottery Buy a ticket Wait for the drawing Hope you win

Using the old filing and storage tradition puts you on the best shelf of the conference in Washington but keeps leading to Supplemental data storage product to get the most out of your data.

India Plans for 2010 AD

The government of India has issued an information technology plan to take the country to the 21st century. The plan, known as the National e-Governance Plan, aims to provide a global e-governance system. It will use the power and use of the Internet to provide a global e-governance system. The plan will use the power and use of the Internet to provide a global e-governance system. The plan will use the power and use of the Internet to provide a global e-governance system.

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How Kops Gets Into the Techno Loop

Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has been named as a judge for the 11th Circuit. She will be the first woman to serve on the court. She will be the first woman to serve on the court. She will be the first woman to serve on the court.

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COPIES **IN EVERYTHING** You know what strategy didn't work in California? But American Express' strategy of the beginning of the 1990s was to use the Internet to provide a global e-governance system. The plan will use the power and use of the Internet to provide a global e-governance system. The plan will use the power and use of the Internet to provide a global e-governance system. The plan will use the power and use of the Internet to provide a global e-governance system.

10 THE BUSINESS SOURCEBOOK JULY 13, 1998

INDIA

India Plans for 2010 AD

The government of India has drawn up information technology plans to take the country into the next century. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee says the government seeks to "make India a global IT power and one of the world's largest generators and exporters of software in the next 10 years."

India's Department of Electronics (www.doe.gov.in) has prepared a blueprint called India IT Vision 2010 and has formed a 16-member National IT Task Force (www.doe.gov.in/~doe/it_force.htm) to implement it.

Says M.G.K. Menon, the task force's cochairman: "We are soon going to end the monopoly of the Department of Telecommunication and Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited. The government will announce a clear-cut policy on Net services in three months. The private sector is going to play a greater role in IT-enabling the country."

If the IT Action Plan is fully implemented, India will receive everything from a national IT infrastructure with a high-speed Internet backbone to IT institutes, a software development fund, IT at the school level, cyber laws, electronic commerce and software localization.

— Osama Manzar

It is interesting to note that the above news report that I had posted talks about the big promises made by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then prime minister of India. We must remember that around Y2K (Year 2000), India was a leading software services country and had made its mark globally despite any role from the government. However, the above report that was published in The Industry Standard clearly shows that the Government of India wanted to make its presence felt in the growing IT industry and Internet driven business. The national IT Task Force that the government promised to have formed. I was also one of the members. We must also appreciate that the Department of Electronics, then, did create several funds and through CDAC made a significant mark in localisation efforts. What is even more critical to note from the cover page of the news magazine and the other news that appeared on the page where my report had a post, that led by the USA, the global internet market was advancing at a rapid speed. They were already making large deals, the internet was having a bull run and merger and acquisitions were already taking place.

I must mention that while The Industry Standard magazine emerged as a great success story to tell the stories of the Internet economy, the news weekly did not survive beyond 2001. The dot-com bust bankrupted the magazine and its print edition lasted only till 2001. I still have several copies of the magazine that run into more than 200 pages.

We must remember that around Y2K (Year 2000), India was a leading software services country and had made its mark globally despite any role from the government.



Photos

TEAM PHOTOS
The team responsible for operationalizing the August 8 arrival of the Home India website. From left to right: Sanjay Mehta, Hareesh Tibrewala, and the rest of the team.

Love Letters Straight From the Web

For more than 8 million Indian expatriates around the globe, it's never been easier or cheaper to make contact with home. The Online Postal Service (homeindia.com/post) is a perfect hybridization of e-mail and snail mail. It's designed for Indian expatriates who want to get in touch with their friends and relatives in India.

Sanjay Mehta and Hareesh Tibrewala, founders of Home India, are shown in a separate photo.

Out With the Old, In With the New

It's the classic sign of the dot-com era. AOL was a PC signifier when it built the company and its infrastructure. But AOL has been a shadow of its former self since the company's headquarters moved to the cloud. The company's headquarters are now in the cloud, and the company is now a cloud company.

Still a Drop in the Bucket?

When you're spending \$2.5 billion on ads, what's a few million more? The table below compares how much ad revenue is generated by different companies.

Company	Revenue (\$ millions)
Walt Disney	\$2.5
Microsoft	\$2.5
IBM	\$2.5
Oracle	\$2.5
Amazon	\$2.5
Google	\$2.5
Yahoo	\$2.5
Home India	\$2.5

Love Letters Straight From the Web

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The Online Postal Service (homeindia.com/post) is a perfect hybridization of e-mail and snail mail; it's designed for Indian expatriates who want to get in touch with their friends and relatives in India.

A letter from a foreign country requires about 15 to 20 days to reach its recipient in India, and telephone calls are extremely expensive. Using Home India's OPS, a letter gets delivered within about five days by the Indian Postal service, free of charge. You just have to go to the site, fill in

your message and the addressee, and click the Send button. Home India receives more than 1,000 message each day and has delivered 50,000 letters since its inauguration in February.

Home India is a service of Mumbai-based Multinet Infosys run by Sanjay Mehta and Hareesh Tibrewala.

Tibrewala and Mehta hope to recover the service's expense from user contributions, advertising on the Web site and sponsorships for delivering the mail in India. Both saw the need for a better way to contact home when they were studying in California.

— Osama Manzoor, New Delhi

So, in 1998, writing letters to your connections was still not common through emails. One of the innovations then was to provide an opportunity to the Indian diaspora to send their messages for their dear ones through a website which was further converted into print and sent through snail mail. Pretty much a hybrid solution, what we call today as phygital solution. Sanjay Mehta and Harish Tibrewala were known in India as the pioneers who understood the online world well and tried their best to offer several online solutions to the emerging masses.

Interestingly, Online Postal Service (OPS) provided by Home India was meant for the then 8 million diaspora population receiving more than 1000 letters every day and snail mailed more than 50,000 letters in early 1998, a quarter of a century back from now. While writing this déjà vu experience, I looked at what India Post is up to in the digital era and found these fascinating and yet quite not there kind of stats: India Post has more than 159,392 post offices spread across India with 808 head post offices, 24,282 Sub Post Offices, 134,303 Branch post offices, and 428,773 Letter Boxes. There are 223,523 Smartphones claimed to be available among 154,697 ICT-enabled Post Offices. According to a report, on an average each post office serves about 8605 people and if located in rural geographies then it would be serving about 6301 people on an average, and an area of 21 square kilometers. India Post also boasts a network of more than 1000 ATMs and being a bank also offers more than 253 government entitlement schemes through Direct Benefit Transfer to the tune of more than Rs. 10,000 crore (100,000 million). However,

as per the dashboard at India Post website: India Post mobile app has been downloaded by more than 10.6 million people; has a fleet of more than 135,000 door-step banking service providers, enabled digital transaction worth more than Rs. 26,000 crores (260,000 million), and reached out to 60 million customers.

Following is another update that one can read about how much digitalisation affected our Indian Postal services, especially because it is claimed to have a huge network across rural India.

I still remember how mesmerized I was that a digital invention was making an effort to go to the remotest parts of India to make those population of our rural India taste the joy of accessing computers, who did not have the internet or who may never have had a chance to see a computer.

October 23, 2017

INVT

INDIA'S NOT-YET DIGITAL POSTMEN

DIGITAL WORLD

OSAMA MANZAR



Respond to this column at
feedback@livemint.com

Last month I read an interesting article about India's postmen. It talked about the changing duties of postmen and the changing role of post offices. By the end of the article I was thinking of a scenario where our close to 2 lakh post offices are connected to the internet. I was excited.

I was compelled to find out what's happening in the villages where Digital Empowerment Foundation works. I immediately opened a WhatsApp group and asked some of our ground staff to interview their local postman on camera.

For those who are not aware, a post office is not just a space where mail is received and despatched, it is also a public institution that acts as a bank. It facilitates money orders, allows people to open post office savings accounts, and provides people with access to various life insurance and other government schemes.

Over the next couple of weeks, we received 22 videos from Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan. A few things were common across all post offices. The kind of mail received or despatched had changed. Earlier, people exchanged a lot of letters with their loved ones; many of them had to be written by the postmen themselves. "Today, everyone has a mobile phone; they simply call" is what a number of Gramin Dak Sevaks said. "There was a time when we felt tired just drafting letters for people and delivering them every day. Today, I'm delivering no more than 20 to 30 letters in a week," Basant Lal, a 33-year-old postman told our ground staff in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh. Most mail today comprises either letters or documents from the government or from educational institutions. "Delivery of Aadhaar and PAN cards is most common today. Almost nobody writes personal letters anymore," he added.

While administrative responsibilities of post offices have increased with the increasing number of schemes and services offered, mobile phones have made things a little easier.

Munni Bai Soni, the 56-year-old postmaster in Deshawadi, Madhya Pradesh, said, "Sometimes, when we don't have enough mail to deliver in a village or if a parcel is too big, we call the recipients to tell them that they can collect it from the post office."

The postman in Kachcha panchayat of Madhya Pradesh, Dilip Kumar, feels unproductive work has reduced with increasing penetration of mobile phones. "Not a lot of people come to us anymore to seek information about government or insurance schemes. Young boys and girls are tech savvy, and quickly look up the details online."

What about them? Can they also look up information immediately on the internet? No. Out of the 22 post offi-

ces we spoke to, only four had a functional internet connection. Most others have been "promised internet soon", but it's been a couple of years since the promise was made. Among the staff at the 22 post offices, only three had smartphones. Of the three, one had no data pack because there is no internet connectivity in his village.

Narayan Prasad, a postman stationed in Assam, covers a radius of about 40-45km. He no longer needs to go around every day delivering mail and then come back to the post office to do the paper work. The department has given him a 4G-enabled smartphone that is synced to his computer. "Whatever I feed on my phone application is transferred to my computer automatically. All my deliveries are recorded instantly," he says.

A postman in Ranchi is particularly happy with the internet. It has made it easy for him to access government information and updates in real time, send information to the district office or reports to the Department of Posts. There is no need to manually log entries. However, the post office in Tehri, Uttarakhand, is yet to reap the benefits of the internet. The postmaster there is yet to learn how to use a computer.

India has the largest postal network in the world with over 154,882 post offices, of which 89.86% are in rural areas. While all of them are supposed to have an internet connection (and be digitized by the end of the year), internet connectivity is non-functional at hundreds and

thousands of post offices. The government-operated institution employs over 6 lakh people, and offers a range of mail

COLUMN

and monetary exchange facilities. With such a wide network—each post office is meant to serve an area of about 20 square kilometers—it would be ideal for the post offices to have access to broadband internet connectivity and functional mobile/digital literacy to not just carry out traditional services offered at a post office but transform into digitally-enabled entitlements' offices.

This way, every post office will act as a government centre for the last mile, providing citizens with information on various government schemes and entitlements, and enabling access to the same by allowing download of relevant application forms for schemes, assisting rural communities in filling up the forms and submitting the forms online on behalf of the beneficiaries.

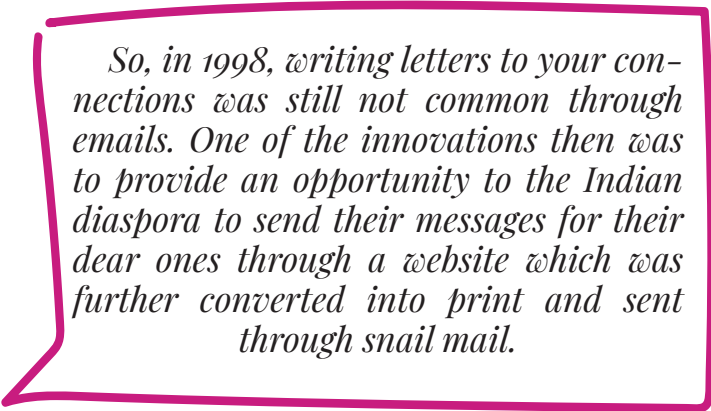
So can all post masters be trained in functional digital literacy? Can all post offices become hubs of digital services such as printing, scanning and copying? Since the post offices are the last-mile access for most villages, it will save villagers the money and time that they would otherwise expend to travel to the nearest block to access these services.

As I write this column on World Post Day (9 October), I wonder if by the next World Post Day we would have more to celebrate about our post offices than just new stamps.

Osama Manzar is founder-director of Digital Empowerment Foundation and chair of Manthan and mBillionth awards. He is member, advisory board, at Alliance for Affordable Internet and has co-authored NetCh@kra-15 Years of Internet in India and Internet Economy of India. He tweets @osamamanzar.

In 2017, when this column was written based on the information collected from the field, many of the 90% Indian post offices based out of rural India, and their post(wo)men had started using the Internet and smartphones as communication tools for posting, receiving and exchanging messages, simplifying their work and travels.

And then there was another time in late 1998. Bangalore, which later became Bengaluru, and is popularly known as Silicon Valley of India, then recognised as the leader of the Indian tech industry, got a challenge from Hyderabad.



So, in 1998, writing letters to your connections was still not common through emails. One of the innovations then was to provide an opportunity to the Indian diaspora to send their messages for their dear ones through a website which was further converted into print and sent through snail mail.

Welcome to the Latest Techno-town

The state's chief minister, Chandra Babu Naidu, a big supporter of tech industry development, is the force behind Hi-Tec City. "As we approach the next millennium, technology will determine the pace and content of our development. Information technology, therefore, is our mantra to leapfrog," he says. — Osama Manzar, New Delhi

Hyderabad declared that it is building a whole new city by the name of Cyberabad and named it Hi-Tech City (Hyderabad Information Technology Engineering Consultancy City) and provided space for all big multinational tech companies like IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, Motorola, Citicorp, et al. We also know, much later many more companies joined to make Hyderabad as their main tech center, such as Facebook, Google, and so on. Almost 25 years down the line, Hyderabad is a different world which can be seen as the tricity of old Hyderabad, and then its new avatar of metropolis, and also its third identity of Cyberabad. The other cities which have gone through the tech or metamorphosis are Chennai, Mumbai, Noida, Gurugram, and Pune.

Next is a great example of tele-health happening in the late nineties.

The whole effort was tried on a PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) line using ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) standards so that visuals, videos and audio could be shared. Sounds like a great idea and huge effort to do tele-health in the late nineties considering the whole connectivity infrastructure at that time was still dependent on PSTN lines as far as the customer side of connectivity is concerned.

THE INDUSTRY STANDARD

THE NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE INTERNET ECONOMY

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AOL STARTS A BATTLE WITH THE CABLE GUYS

PAGE 32

THE OLD GUARD HITS THE WEB INGRAM:

PAGE 35

FINGERHUT:

PAGE 35

LESSIG ON HOW NOT TO RUN THE NET

PAGE 43

WOMEN ON THE WEB



Geraldine Laybourne
of Oxygen Media
thinks she knows
what they want.

PAGE 39

INTERNET ECONOMY INDEX

SEPTEMBER 21, 1998

PRINTED IN USA

PROS



Going to Canada for a Second Opinion

The Web has enabled two doctors—one in India, the other in Canada—to exchange critical surgical information using standards-based computers, wireless connections and existing ISDN telephone lines.

Dr. K.R. Balakrishnan, head of cardiac thoracic and vascular surgery at Sri Ramachandra Medical College in Chennai, India, and Dr. Peter Einstein of Children's Heart Project International at the Toronto Sick Children's Hospital in Ontario have found the Net to be a great way to get a second opinion when you're in a crunch.

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CONS

The Biggest Net Test Yet

The online publication of the Super report affords an opportunity to confirm a few old notions about events related to the Web. Rather than being new holes online, events like multiple Web sites to self-identify.

Witness the Friday of the report's publication and the following Saturday Newsweek magazine reported the number of Americans accessing the Web at just 6 percent greater than the same period the previous week. Nothing there. That the number of people accessing the Web from home on publication day was actually 5 percent less than last Friday.

But, nothing is data shows that more than one-fifth of Web users who were online that afternoon looked at the report.

As the impact of most events on overall Web performance will be minimal, in this case, it was negligible. Performance data from Raycast Systems showed that average download times at an average business and news sites were actually faster on Friday than on the previous Tuesday of the same week.

A trend-related sites will be noted. On Friday, MSNBC received three times as many unique visitors as it usually gets. CNN doubled its normal number of page views. Many news sites reported records, but they were equipped to deal with spikes in traffic—even giant ones.

Web sites at the House of Representatives were monitored.

According to Reuters coverage, the House sites that week had about a 120 percent more visitors than they had during the previous week. House Oversight Secretary David Bonior says that in the three days around the posting of the Super report, House sites received six million successful hits, nearly the amount of traffic they normally get in a month. Those three days also saw approximately 60 million attempted hits.

"We've never reached" "Politics" says... —Morgan Jones/Photospin

IF IBM Wins, Can I Meet Ed McMahon?

There's a lot of buzz about the IBM's new e-business solution.

"Alpha Wins is trying to make IBM and the e-Business star up," says John Wagner, IBM's director of emerging technology development. "These things show that they mean it."

The launch of Internet-enabled IP works has pushed a project in two years. Top of those has been the project's status.

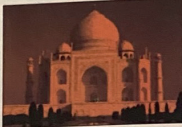
The month has taken IBM and company to Europe, the Far East, Asia, and Latin America. In case the opportunity to introduce IBM to new levels of glory with a new and project had to be enough time, subscribers will also win a single hundred bucks each.

—Alice Lash

Going to Canada for a Second Opinion

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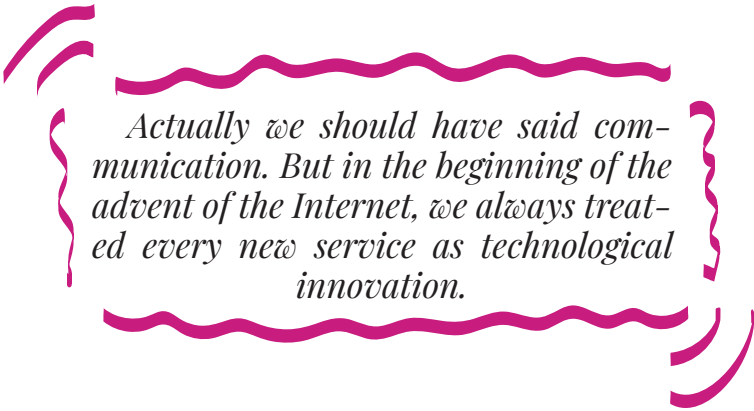


Performing open-heart surgery on infants and young children is a highly specialized endeavor. "You don't know all of the answers all of the time," explains Dr. Balakrishnan. "This technology has tremendous

applications because of the huge geographical expanse. ISDN facilities will be available even in rural areas and villages where there are no expert facilities available. Linking smaller towns in India will have more relevance, since practitioners here can access expert medical advice from doctors in urban areas in real time."

—Osama Manzar, New Delhi

Here are some posts that clearly give an idea of e-health or tele-health examples from the late 90s, tried and tested in India. It is interesting that the post I sent to The Industry Standard that got published in the issue of September 11, 1998 was about an effort that enabled a hospital in Chennai in India to connect with a hospital in Canada to share information and consultation over a surgical operation and get a second opinion. The whole effort was tried on a PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) line using ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) standards so that visuals, videos and audio could be shared. Sounds like a great idea and huge effort to do tele-health in the late nineties considering the whole connectivity infrastructure at that time was still dependent on PSTN lines as far as the customer side of connectivity is concerned. Let me do a little tech explanation that the ISDN line is nothing but a modem that uses or gets integrated into the telephone or PSTN line and sends and receives digital data. An ISDN line is not a DSL line. Considering that in the late nineties tech folks were trying tele-health in a restricted environment of bandwidth and digital infrastructure; however, even after 25 years of a long gap, tele-health is still not common. Only after Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a little push and demand for online doctors consultancy from remote areas. It is ironic that in the above less-than-200-word post from India, the doctor from Shri Ramachandra Medical College in Chennai clearly said that the ISDN line makes a lot of sense for remote areas and villages in rural parts including small towns for expert medical advice. Alas, that is still not common, however, it is believed that the bandwidth with 3G and 4G connections are hardly a problem.



Actually we should have said communication. But in the beginning of the advent of the Internet, we always treated every new service as technological innovation.

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MORE PAIN IN DOMAIN NAME GAME
PAGE 19

HOW MICROSOFT SEDUCES DEVELOPERS
PAGE 20

MICHAEL WOLFF OUTS THE WEB
PAGE 14

MONEY ON THE NET

SPECIAL REPORT: FINANCE IN THE INTERNET ERA
The Next Revolution in Online Trading PAGE 33
The Best Market Eyes the Net PAGE 36
Ten VCs You Should Know PAGE 38
Softbank: Spending Money the American Way PAGE 41
Metrics: IPOs Vs. Acquisitions PAGE 44

INTERNET ECONOMY INDEX
PAGE 47

OCTOBER 5-12, 1998
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PROUD
Highlighting the Successes: A look at Zhongshan Street in Beijing last week capped with increased computer demand after the Chinese government cracked down on smuggling of high-tech equipment from Taiwan and other Asian countries. China now has one personal computer for every 4,000 people. — Bill Stewart

PLATE PAINT
A New Way to Get Framed
T he Seattle e-commerce giant, which Amazon.com's book store is in Seattle, prospects up to \$5 million in revenue by the end of 1998 and a jump to \$10 million in 1999. Much of this also appears to integrate types — sports photos, large French silverware — and profit margins are still low. But users have an upside: a chance to see art experts to stock his virtual shelves and sell, without high-priced originals, which can't be lost. Any museum from downtown galleries, but later says that "There are lots of people who are always missing." — Amy Linn

INDIAN
Rural India on \$19.95 a Month
Technology can put you in touch with human suffering without taking you out of your air-conditioned cocoon. Now thanks to the Net, New Delhi-based Dakshinayan is pushing the limit of remote access with a program that promotes inter-cultural solidarity and an understanding of the myths and realities of Third World poverty. Through its Development Education Program, the Indian nongovernmental organization gives outsiders an opportunity to come in close contact with rural India. Director Sidharth Sanyal has put information about the program at www.linkindia.com/dax; volunteers can fill in a form online. Once they arrive in India, they'll pay about \$5 a day to cover costs. The Web site has made it easier for volunteers to get information about the program. Terrestrial correspondence was cutting deep into Dakshinayan's pockets, so the Net has turned out to be manna from heaven. The ease of e-mail has quadrupled the number of volunteers in just one year. Sanyal has asked IBM to provide information kiosks at the village level. This would let local people generate content, so the rest of the world can know how this half lives. — Osama Manzar, New Delhi

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— Osama Manzar, New Delhi

Actually we should have said communication. But in the beginning of the advent of the Internet, we always treated every new service as technological innovation. As you can see, there was this social or non-governmental organisation called Dakshinayan from Delhi who created a website to get anyone interested to know rural India, to apply and pay to experience the geographies, culture, food, language and people of rural India. For Dakshinayan, the motto was to bring in maximum number of people for the cultural exchange to expose rural India, and because of the availability of a web page, the interested people's number increased four times, and so was Dakshinayan's income, which they had fixed about USD20 for a month or USD5 per day. It is interesting to note that in 1998, the dollar to Indian rupee exchange rate was less than 40 rupees per dollar; however, after about 25 years, the exchange for a dollar is Rs. 83, more than double. In this post that got published in the weekly The Industry Standard in the week of October 5, 1998, my reason for filing this news was because the effort was linking rural India with mainstream economy and people. In the news, Dakshinayan is quoted saying that "they approached IBM to establish rural internet kiosks to generate local content for global interest, which is one of the reasons Digital Empowerment Foundation was established.

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THE INDUSTRY STANDARD
THE NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE INTERNET ECONOMY WWW.THESTANDARD.COM \$2.95 U.S.

ZAP BREAKS 31 NET HEARTS
PAGE 17

STEINBERG ON START-UPS
PAGE 36

TIME WARNER: GOODBYE, PATHFINDER?
PAGE 24

HOW TO HIRE SMART KIDS
PAGE 46

INTERNET ECONOMY INDEX
OCTOBER 26, 1998

RATING THE WEB



Jeff Levy of RelevantKnowledge and Mary Ann Packo of Media Matrix have merged their companies to try and become the Nielsen of the Net. But is that what we need?

PAGE 29

NET ACCESS MEETS THE SUBCONTINENT

When Internet access is going to be a reality in India, it's going to be for one reason: P.V. Narasimha Rao. The former prime minister of India is the one who has made it possible for the Indian government to open up the Internet to the public. He has done this by signing a law that allows the government to open up the Internet to the public. This is a big step for India, as it is the first time that the government has done this. It is a big step for India, as it is the first time that the government has done this. It is a big step for India, as it is the first time that the government has done this.

Content Deficit Down Under

There's a content deficit in Australia—and Australia's online scene is feeling the pinch. The problem is that there is not enough content in Australia's online scene. This is a problem for Australia, as it is the first time that the government has done this. It is a problem for Australia, as it is the first time that the government has done this. It is a problem for Australia, as it is the first time that the government has done this.

Surens Won't Be Foiled Again

Internet systems are being used to place a bet on the outcome of the 1998 Indian general election. This is a big step for India, as it is the first time that the government has done this. It is a big step for India, as it is the first time that the government has done this. It is a big step for India, as it is the first time that the government has done this.

INDIA Net Access Meets the Subcontinent

For the last two months, India's one-and-only ISP, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (www.vsnl.net.in), has been turning away customers looking for new Internet accounts.

According to VSNL sources, the ISP doesn't have enough telephone lines to meet the subcontinent's explosive demand for online services. Today VSNL has one phone line for every 15 customers.

Complaints are mounting about the difficulty of logging on, let alone staying on for more than 15 minutes.



At Internet World in Delhi this August, even former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao criticized VSNL's Internet services.

Some observers blame the government-owned telco Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited, which they say has failed to provide phone lines for VSNL in a timely fashion. VSNL

has applied for a separate exchange dedicated to the Internet, but MTNL has yet to act.

The government announced last year that ISPs would be privatized. The citizens still wait.

— Osama Manzar, New Delhi

Let's go back to late 1998, this is news from October. There was only one ISP (Internet Service Provider) and that too owned by the government, and Internet was possible only through a telephone line - the physical carrier of the world of data. Imagine a world where one telephone line had more than 15 Internet subscribers, and no one could last more than 15 minutes online because of low bandwidth, high demand, and erratic stability - perhaps because most of the telephone lines were copper lines. People were in queue and demanding the Internet and there was no one to serve them. Even the then prime minister criticized the situation. Internet was not opened up, connectivity was yet to be liberalised. 27 years down the line, Internet has been liberalized, with the PM WANI, it is so open that anyone can buy Internet and any one can sell Internet, even a tea shop or an individual. Besides, technologically, we do not need a telephone line to carry the Internet or data. Life has moved from a copper line, to optic fiber to WiFi and lately reaching to a situation of "can i have a right to disconnect?"

However, the first one to take the Internet to wider areas was the government entity itself - the MTNL (Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited). They announced the opening of "Cyber Dhabas". Which also means that the Internet was made to be available in a public space and for ordinary people.

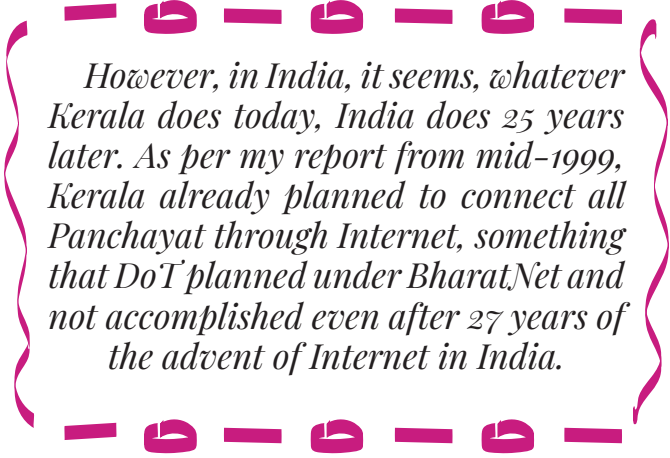
By early 1999, with the mounting pressure from the aspiring Internet users, the Indian government loosened the restrictions on being the sole ISP. However, the first one to take the Internet to wider areas was the government entity itself - the MTNL (Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited). They announced the opening of “Cyber Dhabas”. Which also means that the Internet was made to be available in a public space and for ordinary people. We all know the journey of the Internet - it started with being available to telephone line users, to expanding the same to the public in a few places and create a trend of kiosks using the spread of Internet, and then, even cyber dhaba or cyber cafe became quite a trend, at least in smaller cities and towns. Gradually, Internet provision became competitive, hundreds of ISPs joined the bandwagon and started offering Internet like peanuts. The whole meaning of public access points started changing and all kinds of cafés, hotels, and restaurants started becoming free to access the Internet.

Yet rural India continued to be a huge challenge for even big ISPs to spread and expand. Because the cost of infrastructure for the internet in rural and remote areas could not promise enough volumes. One can read the logic of ARPU to understand how telcos calculate their justification for where they should provide internet profitably.

Interestingly, for the claimed connected communities in India, that is for more than 700 million internet users, the issue is always whether their internet is meaningful or not: can they

download everything comfortably; can they do transactions; can they watch videos; can they consume streaming content; can they do video conferencing; can they do online banking and e-commerce?

On the other hand for the rest of 600 million Indians, either they do not have internet or they have meaning-less internet. This population suffers complete unconnectedness. In the meanwhile, the story and importance of ISP as an internet service provider was totally democratized in late 2020, when the Prime Minister of India announced PM-WANI. In essence the PM-WANI enabled the quashing of the licensing regime of ISP, and also liberalized the Internet to be bought and sold by anyone.



However, in India, it seems, whatever Kerala does today, India does 25 years later. As per my report from mid-1999, Kerala already planned to connect all Panchayat through Internet, something that DoT planned under BharatNet and not accomplished even after 27 years of the advent of Internet in India.

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BOO.COM
A GLOBAL
FASHION PLAY
PAGE 36

IPO PROBE
HOW THEY
FIX PRICES
PAGE 52

ROCK 'N' ROLL
MUZE MAKES
THE BIG TIME
PAGE 80

NET RETURNS
THE CRISIS IN
CUSTOMER SERVICE
PAGE 92

INTERNET ECONOMY INDEX
PAGE 90

MAY 17-24, 1999

Money Changes Everything
Big Brokers Hit the Net
Regulation Creeps
PAGE 42
PAGE 46
PAGE 54

Margaging the Future
Who Needs a Broker?
Deciphering Wall Street
PAGE 60
PAGE 74

FINANCIAL SERVICES



[illegible]

Here Comes the Smart State

It plans to provide connecti-

ty to all 991 village *panchayats* (administrative levels). Videoconferencing will soon be in place between many state and local districts. Also ahead is the task of monitoring 50,000 projects involving \$3.5 billion. State Secretary Amitabh Kant says, "These projects are being implemented by local bodies comprising 14,000 elected representatives, over 50,000 employees and 100,000 resource persons."



Kerala has begun to place Internet kiosks in villages, and has signed a preliminary agreement with World Tel to set up Internet community centers.

This year, the Net may be introduced in 150 schools, while computers will reach 750 high schools and

500 primary schools. The Kerala State Electronics Development Corp. is even planning a "PC for Every Home," hoping to achieve a penetration rate of 10 PCs per 1,000 people by 2001. That would equal one in every home only if each home had 100 people, but hey, it's progress.

— Osama Manzar, New Delhi

In most of the global development and progress, India is no less than 25-50 years behind. However, in India, it seems, whatever Kerala does today, India does 25 years later. As per my report from mid-1999, Kerala already planned to connect all Panchayat through Internet, something that DoT planned under BharatNet and not accomplished even after 27 years of the advent of Internet in India. It is astonishing that Kerala wanted to involve all its Panchayat and its elected members in 1999 to get connected, linking the last person in the village. It also wanted to allocate and plan enough budget to have personal computers in each household, and Internet kiosks in all Kerala villages including primary and government schools to have computer labs. Kerala is known for its visionary approach to development, and even legislating something that would take them to the next level. Kerala, is the only state in India where “Access to Internet is a basic right, says Kerala High Court.”

In April 1999, it was big news and a service that a hospital launched and offered connecting patients to her relatives and friends through video and messaging. One of the first to adopt an internet and digital communication tool in the health sector here was Wockhardt Hospital and Heart Institute in Bangalore.



POSTS

Cheat Sheet

The Bull on the Web

BY ALAN LASH

1. If all that you don't believe: Cautious by nature, Merrill Lynch's call Windows PDA, "PDA 99," Microsoft promises not to be upgrading software for portable PCs (the "PDA 99").

2. New PDA's benefits: Research reports that Merrill Lynch's new PDA is a smart tool that automates your e-mail and automatically sends data to your e-mail's computer. Due to power demand, the new PDA will not connect directly to the Internet.

3. The new PDA's benefits: The new PDA is a smart tool that automates your e-mail and automatically sends data to your e-mail's computer. Due to power demand, the new PDA will not connect directly to the Internet.

4. The new PDA's benefits: The new PDA is a smart tool that automates your e-mail and automatically sends data to your e-mail's computer. Due to power demand, the new PDA will not connect directly to the Internet.

One Word: Plastics.com

25% of Annual Revenue

11%

PHILIP BERBER

Philip Berber, a managing director at online stockbroker CyberCry, has become the first plastic surgeon to use the Internet to find patients. He's also the first plastic surgeon to use the Internet to find patients. He's also the first plastic surgeon to use the Internet to find patients.

Watch Your Relatives Write

It's bad enough to be stuck in a hospital bed. But now your relatives can see how much dignity you've lost without even having to visit.

This innovation comes courtesy of the staff of Wokhard Hospital and Heart Institute in Bangalore, India. The hospital has recently started a free service in which hospital workers fit a Web camera onto a laptop to capture video of patients. The hospital's IT personnel then compress the files and upload them to the hospital's site (www.whhi.com).

The site also provides updated medical reports. Family members can check the status of a relative recovering from surgery and then write get-well messages or e-cards to the patient.

Judging by the number of applicants, the service is just what the doctor ordered. Since launching April 28, the hospital has received more than 70,000 entries.

—Osama Manzoor, New Delhi

INDIA

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—Osama Manzoor, New Delhi

PHOTOGRAPH BY VALLI OVERSEER FOR THE

In April 1999, it was big news and a service that a hospital launched and offered connecting patients to her relatives and friends through video and messaging. One of the first to adopt an internet and digital communication tool in the health sector here was Wockhardt Hospital and Heart Institute in Bangalore. Most of the uploading of the video of the patient and receiving feedback and relatives messages were received through their website at WHHI.com, not really a real time service but certainly internet and web enabled service. When I was reporting about this news to The Industry Standard, there was an immediate acceptance by the magazine sitting in the USA, that such digital development was worth a news that the digital world would be interested in knowing. After 27 years, I have no idea if this kind of service is even required or asked for, considering that mobile based connectivity and mobile based photo and video capturing is so insanely common that we know everything about our patients in any hospital in India.

However, what is more interesting is why the video enabled services like real time video conferencing, or video based doctors consultations are not made available across our villages, and unreachable geographies where most of the public health centers are dysfunctional and no doctors want to visit remote locations to provide health services. At the end of the day, technology is not about its own innovativeness but how the planners and policy makers use them to benefit their subjects.

As it can be noted from the covers of the magazine that

globally, and especially in the United States, the trend of Internet was already captured by the imagination of financial services, online trading, and the race of major sectors getting online, such as travel agencies, financial services sector, telecom services into portalization, and annexing several other online services, online customer services and management, IPO launches of many dot-com companies, expansion of several companies in general and retail outlets to the internet, or read web, meteoric rise of jobs for software developers for online. And interestingly, 27 years back, there was already an introduction of bot usage in online shopping. Of course, today, after more than two and a half decades later, bots and the role of bots and their menacing use is common across social media.

Intel was always a leader in making efforts to make digital literacy as common as possible. I remember, from my interaction with Intel in 2012, when I asked them what's their interest in making digital literacy taking to masses, and they replied saying that "we need our children to be future job ready and in general people to be ready to use digital devices - which will in turn make their company benefit by employing them or by selling them devices."

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NEW FORMULA
THE POWER OF
CLICKS AND MORTAR
PAGE 6

GET RICH SLOW
A NEW WAY TO
MANAGE MONEY
PAGE 10

KEEPING SECRETS
PROTECTING YOUR
CUSTOMERS' PRIVACY
PAGE 121

¿HABLA ISP?
THE BATTLE FOR
LATIN AMERICA
PAGE 36

INDUSTRY ECONOMY INDEX
PAGE 118

AUGUST 2-9, 1999

ENTERTAINMENT ON THE NET: A SPECIAL REPORT

Waiting for Broadband PAGE 64
Warner Takes Again PAGE 68
Monsters Face the Music PAGE 69
Launch Takes the MTV PAGE 62

Check Out Michael Daut! PAGE 84
Indie Films Move Online PAGE 86
Tuning In to Quixote PAGE 96
Dolly Dinosaur's Mistake PAGE 100

TECH

TECH INVESTMENT RISING FAST

Technology-related investments in Europe and the U.S. have risen sharply in the past year, according to a survey by the European Venture Capital Association and Private Equity Associates.

TECH INVESTMENTS

Europe was just \$4.5 billion. By 1999, American tech investment had almost doubled, to \$16.5 billion, while European tech investments had nearly tripled to \$13.5 billion. What this comparison tells, however, are significant structural differences between the two investment worlds. Tech investments in the U.S. during 1997 amounted to a meager 10 percent of total VC investment of \$165 billion. In Europe, that amounted to just 28 percent of the \$46.5 billion total. European investment still flows heavily into "old industries" such as the consumer and industrial sectors.

—Alexa Manaster, London

SP Anarchy in the U.K.

In nine months after the launch of Freeview, the U.K.'s first pay-per-view service, consumers are charged for every local call they make to order pay-per-view channels. In England pay-per-view is a free service, but in the rest of the U.K. it's a pay-per-view service. The service will charge a price per minute for viewership. AOL did not disclose the name of the phone company with which it will launch.

—David Drake, London

TECH

Cyber Bus to the Himalayas

Intel India has dispatched a Cyber Bus to 60 Himalayan villages. In collaboration with the National Science Centre in New Delhi, Intel's bus, which contains six multimedia computers, will provide hands-on training for about 400 students in every village. Says Atul Vijaykar, the director of Intel South Asia, "Project Vidya, the country's first computer-awareness program, seeks to make learning fun." Vidya in Hindi means education.

Inside the Cyber Bus, children can learn about Indian culture and history, basic science, the solar system, the importance of water, the problems of deforestation and so forth. The commentaries are in English, but Intel feels that since many of the titles cover well-known Indian stories, village children will have little trouble understanding them.

According to Debjani Ghosh, the education officer of Intel India, "It is very difficult to teach children subjects like health, hygiene, nutrition and history. Our objective is to make these subjects interesting so that the students can enjoy learning and retain easily whatever they have learned."

Intel is working on local language software to make Project Vidya more easily accessible.

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While America was exploring how to take entertainment online in the late nineties, a customized bus with computers traveling to Himalayan region for making computer and digital awareness was news as far as India was concerned. Intel was always a leader in making efforts to make digital literacy as common as possible. I remember, from my interaction with Intel in 2012, when I asked them what's their interest in making digital literacy taking to masses, and they replied saying that "we need our children to be future job ready and in general people to be ready to use digital devices - which will in turn make their company benefit by employing them or by selling them devices."

I still remember how mesmerized I was that a digital invention was making an effort to go to the remotest parts of India to make those population of our rural India taste the joy of accessing computers, who did not have the internet or who may never have had a chance to see a computer. We must note that Internet penetration in 1999 in India was still a meager 0.3% of its population - that was just about 3.1 million. Even today, after 28 years of the Internet in India, Himalayan regions are mostly unconnected, specially the remote locations like Ladakh.

Intel, who actually conceived this idea of sending a special vehicle called Cyber Bus with multimedia computers installed in the bus consisting of amazing content that would be accessible without internet, gradually also played a proactive and critical role in conceiving National Digital Literacy Mission for India. We at Digital Empowerment Foundation also got involved

with Intel and Nasscom to work with the Ministry of Communication and Informational Technology to have NDLM adopted by the government to have national level implementation of mass adoption of digital literacy. This was in 2012.

Gradually, in 1999 while i was writing for The Industry Standard posting small news from India, I also ended up developing digitalHT.com, on the lines of yahoo.com, a national portal for India under the aegis of the Hindustan Times where I was working and my daily job was to ensure that hindustan-times.com is functional, updated, healthy and responsive to its readers online. DigitalHT.com immediately got the attention of investors who were looking for an opportunity to play big in dotcom books, and Chase Capital approached HT, and invested around 9 million dollars in the proposed new entity for 49 percent stake. Hindustan Times went for the deal and started looking for a new CEO for the new entity, and I left Hindustan Times to try a new startup with a techie partner and founded 4CPlus.com, the company that would provide CMS and web solutions to the publishing industry.

Further story in the next time soon...

About the Author & this publication

Osama Manzar is a senior Ashoka Fellow, a British Chevening Scholar, India Visitors Leadership Program Fellow of US State Department, and co-founded Digital Empowerment Foundation in 2002 which has digitally empowered more than 30 million people in 20 years. He started as a career journalist in IT magazines, has written extensively on digital development, including more than 500 pieces as a columnist in LiveMint for 10 years. He also has to his credit to have travelled to more than 10,000 villages.

In this narrative Osama Manzar brings out how the Internet was taking shape in India during the 90s, through his earlier writings for the weekly newsmagazine, The Industry Standard of Silicon Valley, and co-relating to the current times of Internet, India and global integration.