The Internet Model

*Strength and stability through
co-ordination and consensus*

At a time when the existing processes behind the development and administration of the Internet are being questioned, it is important that policy makers - both in the public and private sectors - have a sound understanding of just how the Internet has developed and what has made this development so successful. The biggest future threat to the stability, growth and global reach of the Internet may come from decisions based on a lack of understanding of the unique way in which the Internet's technologies and resources are developed and co-ordinated.

The Internet has evolved in a way that ensures that no single entity is "in charge". Hundreds of different organisations and thousands of different companies make decisions every month that might affect how the Internet develops. Through this decentralised process, the companies that supply connectivity, services, computers, software, and content - along with the customers who purchase them and employ the network for their own purposes - are free to innovate, experiment, generate value, and benefit from the connectivity, information, and services that are available. More than any other communications medium, it is the users that define what the Internet is and what it will become.

The unprecedented growth and innovation that we have seen in the Internet sector is due in large part to this lack of constraint on its technological development. In addition, the policy development and implementation processes employed have been open, democratic and inclusive, ensuring that both the public and private sector can contribute to the technical co-ordination of the Internet. These long-established, bottom-up industry self-regulatory processes have been encouraged and facilitated at national, regional and global levels by a range of private sector led organisations. These include the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet Society (ISOC), the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs), the Council of European National Top-Level Domain Registries (CENTR) and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

These organisations and groups share several common characteristics: they are open, independent, not-for-profit, membership organisations that work together to meet the needs of the global Internet community. They facilitate direct participation by any interested party and ensure that the policies for allocating Internet resources (such as domain names and IP addresses) are defined by those who require them for their operations. This self-regulation has been the key to the successful growth of the Internet and is flexible enough to adapt to changing future needs.

These forums give governments the opportunity to work with the private sector and the Internet community. It is through the combined expertise of the business sector, technical experts, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and professional associations that the stability, growth and global reach of the Internet can effectively be co-ordinated.

Rather than attempting to create new, untested mechanisms that are inexperienced and unaccustomed to the Internet's characteristics and operational necessities, we should continue to support the decentralised, open, bottom-up innovation that has made the Internet the powerful, global tool that it is today.

References

- The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) - www.ietf.org
- The Internet Society (ISOC) - www.isoc.org
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  - APNIC - www.apnic.net
  - ARIN - www.arin.net
  - RIPE NCC - www.ripe.net
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- Council of European National Top-Level Domain Registries (CENTR) - www.centr.org
- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) - www.icann.org