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OPINION

TUESDAY, 04 DECEMBER 2001
OPINION STORY

Broadband: birth of a new super-industry

19 November 2001

Laparoscopy, a surgical technique requiring only a small incision through which to insert a camera scope and surgical tools is very popular because it's minimally invasive, suggests Prashanta Mukherjee.

However, the procedure still needs a pair of highly trained, skilled, precise and experienced hands – that of an expert surgeon.

On September 7 this year a group of surgeons in New York removed the gallbladder of a 68-year-old woman in Strasbourg, France, by guiding the movements of a three-armed robot. They used broadband.

One of the robotics arms held a camera probe. The other two arms wielded the surgical instruments. The procedure took 54 minutes, the patient recovered without complications and went home two days later.

To make this happen, the surgeon needed a constant return signal speed of under 200 milliseconds. They were able to get below 150 milliseconds, a speed that is virtually imperceptible to the naked eye.

This was the broadband industry in action.

Yes, for the first time since the advent of civilisation we have an economic infrastructure that "virtually" extends the human being in real time and demonstrates electricity- and road-like characteristics in its potential impact on civilisation.

To draw a parallel, using the Internet on broadband is just analogous to using the "light bulb on electricity", an application of broadband that is pervasive but not the most valuable necessarily.

I will make a statement now: "Broadband is an industry, in fact it is a super-industry – it will be bigger, more pervasive, than electricity and roads, the last two super-industries."

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Not many years ago electricity was an option for many (even now for many not as privileged as us), however the modern civilised world as we know it today comes to a complete halt without electricity.

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I assert that in five years or less, we will say the same of broadband.

Super-industries change other industries forever. Broadband is changing three of the most pervasive industries forever; education, entertainment and healthcare.

Consider these opportunities:

1. What if we could avail of some of the best specialist teachers, regardless of their geography, in every classroom around the country, working with the local teaching staff in real time collaboration? How would we think about the teacher shortage then?
2. What if we could call upon a specialist doctor "virtually", but in real time, to attend to a critical situation in Wellington or Hokitika or Gore, regardless of where the doctor was physically at the time? How would we think of the specialist shortage then?
3. What if all new movies were available in real time anywhere in the whole world on the same day at the same time? (Of course we can have Zone 1 broadband and Zone 2 broadband etc, to stop this terrible thing from happening!) How will the movie industry react?

So here is a call to action, let us stop taking about Internet; Cable, xDSL, satellite, wireless. Let us also stop blaming the telecommunications company or the Government.

Instead let us think of being the leaders of this new super-industry by mastering this industry before it goes mainstream.

Let us create and deliver new medical, educational and entertainment experiences to individuals around the globe that are always on.

We need them NOW and the world will need them VERY SOON.

And oh yes, the government did build the roads originally, however we bought the cars to drive and derive value. Well, do not expect any more in the case of broadband – you will have to buy the car, you may even have to pay for a bit of the road, that is if you do not like black!

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