

HOMENETWORKING01.INFO

01/01/2011 |

Surfing the Net while watching TV – now the thing amongst the young

31/08/2010 04:32

76% of 18 to 24-year-olds Browse the Internet While Watching TV | eHomeUpgrade[1]

My comments

I have read the eHomeUpgrade article about how young people are surfing the Web while they are watching TV. There are various factors that I have observed that are encouraging this kind of activity and are based a lot on observation and experience.

Younger people being more likely to be tech-savvy

Ever since the 1980s, information technology has become a key part of one's education in most school curriculums. Initially this started off with "computer studies" or something similarly-named being a secondary-school subject, but has moved towards computer use being integrated in to regular school studies over the last twenty years.

Similarly, most younger people have been known to adopt to newer technologies more easily than people of older age groups. This typically has been noticed by the "kids" being the ones who can work consumer-electronics devices beyond the basic requirements like setting the clock on a video recorder, or being "nimble-fingered" with the mobile phone's keypad to send text messages.

The current home-computing environments that promote this activity

One is the proliferation of laptops, notebooks, netbooks and similar portable computers available new or secondhand at prices that most could afford as well as smartphones that have integrated Web-browsing capability being available under subsidised-handset contract. All these devices are equipped with an integrated Wi-Fi wireless-network adaptor which allows for use-anywhere functionality.

They would typically be used in a Wi-Fi-based home networks which has coverage that extends to areas where a television set would be located like the lounge room. Another situation that also commonly exists would be the colocation of a TV set and a computer in a teenager's own bedroom or the lounge areas that teenagers or other young people primarily use like "games rooms", "rumpus rooms" or simply the secondary lobby in a two-storey house.

These setups would encourage the use of an Internet-connected computer while watching TV shows, which I have seen a lot of at home with a teenager who was often had a laptop going while

watching TV.

TV shows running Websites

As well, most TV studios are operating programme-specific Websites that are seen as a way of extending the programme's value. This typically includes the providing of extra video material, Web downloads, forums and the like and is often used as a way to make the show appeal to the younger generation.

It is also supplemented by information pages like Internet Movie Database[2] and epguides.com[3] as well as fan-created "unofficial" Websites for the various TV shows and show genres. They will have such information like episode guides with season, episode an "first-screen" information as well as biographies for the characters in the show, cast and crew details.

In some cases, this is also tied in with Web-based "catch-up TV" where you can see recently-screened episodes as well as supplementary video material.

The Social Web

This leads me to the Social Web being the primary reason for surfing the Web while watching TV. Here, viewers use the show's Web forums, Twitter, Facebook and MySpace to chat with like-minded friends and fans, and in the case of the social networks, use "official front ends" like Facebook Pages and Twitter hashtags to participate with the show. Some TV shows like, panel shows or reality-TV shows may link these feeds in to the show's fabric by having the compere read out selected content from the Social Web or have a ticker at the bottom of the screen showing similar information. An example of this is when ABC-TV Australia was running "Q and A" on Monday nights, they had a Twitter hashtag called #qanda and all of the Tweets with this hashtag appeared as a ticker on the bottom of the screen.

Recently there have been some social-network sites centred around TV shows where one can "check in" and chat with like-minded viewers about favourite shows.

The various social networks have been made easier to use with smartphones and similar devices either through a client app written for the popular smartphone and "Web-tablet" platforms or a handheld-optimised "mobile view" of the social network's Web view.

Conclusion

The combination of technologically-astute young people, ubiquitous portable computers, the home network and the Internet, TV-show Websites and the Social Web all reinforce the fact that TV isn't for lounging in front of anymore.

Links

[1]

http://www.ehomeupgrade.com/2010/08/27/76-of-18-to-24-year-olds-browse-the-internet-while-watching-tv/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ehomeupgrad

The Ruslan Kogan vs Gerry Harvey debacle – how I see it

28/08/2010 08:33

I have reviewed and currently own a Kogan Internet radio and also know of someone else who owns the same radio and a picture frame under this same label. As well, I have known Kogan as being a name associated with cost-effective LCD TVs sold directly through the Internet.



[1]

Kogan Internet table radio

Compare this with Harvey Norman, those big “category-killer” furniture /domestic-appliance /consumer-electronics superstores appearing in nearly every Australian city and you watching those TV ads where you hear someone shouting like a race-caller about the way you can buy new furniture, appliances or consumer electronics on varying “no-deposit no-interest” credit packages.

Here I have observed the debate put forward by Ruslan Kogan who founded and owns Kogan with Gerry Harvey who founded Harvey Norman and Ruslan had put up the issue of his low-cost direct-market operation while Gerry had put forward the idea of people being more comfortable with buying the “big-brand” equipment off the retail floor at a chain store.

Tandy Electronics and the Realistic brand

Another company I always have thought of in this context concerning Ruslan Kogan and Gerry Harvey was Tandy Electronics, known as Radio Shack in the USA, at its peak through the 1970s and the 1980s. Here, this company had built a strong business on selling electronics parts, computers, electronics books and similar goods made under their own labels through mail-order or any of the many company-managed stores that appeared in many US towns, Australian cities and other company-managed retail locations around the world.

One major brand that stood out in my mind so clearly was “**Realistic**”. This brand was known for an ever-changing line-up of cost-effective consumer electronics that did the job properly and reliably. The keynote products that I and others would have associated with this brand were the STA-series stereo hi-fi receivers. Each year, there were at least 10 different receiver models with varying power outputs and levels of functionality with even the cheapest unit offering an expected level of functionality (support for 1 record player, 1 aux input, separate loop for 1 recording device, 2 speaker pairs) even though it was positioned as an entry-level unit.

I have personally used or seen in use many of the Realistic consumer-electronics equipment and have found that it could do the job very adequately at a very reasonable price and have found it to be a brand that one is not “ashamed to use”. For example, I had seen the Realistic MPA-20 public-address amplifier in use at an “open day” which a friend was hosting at their rose farm in 1999 and this was part of a PA system that was on loan from their local Country Fire Authority.



[2]

Realistic car stereo cited in this article

Similarly, I had used two examples of this entry-level “fast-forward-eject” car radio-cassette (catalogue number 12-1892), that is illustrated here and that was put on the market in 1980. The first example that I had used in February 1981 was installed on an old friend’s car, close to that month and was good on the tape with an earlier mixtape that I had. and, through subsequent uses was good on both radio bands and with many other tapes. The other examples that was installed in a lemon of a car that another friend was duped in to buying in 1993 by a smooth-talking mechanic. This example had played a recently-recorded mixtape of mine very reliably without the usual problems associated with this class of cassette player. I have also used and seen in use some hi-fi systems with Realistic components and the owners weren’t ashamed of using this equipment that was under this brand.

Therefore I have held the Realistic brand that was developed by Tandy Electronics as an example of how Ruslan Kogan could develop the Kogan brand further by running a good line of consumer electronics that works properly to the letter yet each unit is at a price point that yields more “bang for the buck” and satisfies the customer’s need properly.

Attitudes to Direct-Sales /Mail-Order Purchasing and “Clean-Skin” /“White-Box” products

As well, I have heard and read a lot about purchasing of goods from sources other than “bricks-and-mortar” stores of major chains being a common and accepted practice in the USA.

This can be in the form of buying through mail-order, over the phone or (nowadays) via the Internet with reference to large

paper catalogues or, for Internet-based purchasing, the vendor's Website. The likes of Sears and Amazon have started off in that country based on this trend and some outlets like Sears, Sharper Image and Victoria's Secret have built their name around these catalogues even though some of them operate traditional retail floor-space. But there is a different attitude shown by most Australian customers when it comes to buying goods like consumer electronics. A lot of them feel more comfortable looking at the goods in action on the retail floor rather than reading about them in a catalogue or Website.

Similarly, there is an acceptance for private labels and "clean-skin" / "white-box" products in the USA where goods or consumables made by an original or well-known manufacturer are repackaged by distributors or retailers under the distributor's or retailer's own label either to provide an affordable product or one that is positioned in to the shop's market. A large number of the Australian retailers do use private labels but, save for a few exceptions in the premium-goods sector, most of these labels aren't considered any worth and are only seen as being for cheapskates.

As well, in Australia there isn't much encouragement for packaging "original-brand" goods as "clean-skin" or "white-box" methods especially if the goods are sold through common retail outlets. Similarly, most people don't think of visiting independent retailers for most of their technology purchasing needs. This has usually been brought about by the arrival of "category-killer" retail chains which rely heavily on large stores located primarily in the suburbs where land is cheap alongside highly-saturated television-advertising campaigns centred around flashy graphics and announcers that sound like race-callers at a horse race and use of catalogues full of flashy graphics shoved in letter-boxes or inserted in to tabloid newspapers.

Exceptions to this rule that may happen include goods sold to the trade specifically for on-selling to customers as part of an installation or maintenance job, independent retailers selling "clean-skin" parts and accessories "loose" or in minimal packaging or independent computer resellers supplying "white-box" desktop computers that they build on their own premises.

Educational competence influencing purchasing practices

This rule may also be affected by the education level or technical competence of the customer where the customers who are more likely to be educated and /or technically competent are more likely to be astute when it comes to buying consumer goods. Therefore they are more likely to discriminate between the kind of goods available and show interest in and subsequently accept private labels, direct-sales /mail-order purchasing and independent retailers.

This fact is typically represented by the kinds of shops that make up shopping centres that exist in poorer neighbourhoods, where a lot of space is dedicated to larger "big-box" chain stores like Harvey-Norman and K-Mart whereas neighbourhoods that are more likely to be occupied by educated consumers are likely to have more strip shopping centres filled with independent retailers.

Conclusion

This debate between Ruslan Kogan and Gerry Harvey has put a lot more in to context when it comes to computer and consumer-electronics retail especially as the connected home becomes a reality and people will want to consider acquiring "connected" consumer electronics over the years.

Links

[1]

http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/KoganInternetradiocloseup.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

[2]

http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Realistic-mini-size-car-stereo-radio-cassette-12-1892-1981-catalog-shot.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Temporary "client-isolation" override for trusted network client groups on public networks - how about it?

27/08/2010 10:46

Most Wi-Fi hotspots that are properly set up are configured to isolate client devices on the network that is available for use by the general public. This function, commonly known as AP-isolation or client-isolation is seen as a security measure to stop network users trespassing on to the computers owned by fellow network users.

But there are times when it is desirable for network users to interlink devices using the hotspot's network infrastructure. For example, a person may want to transfer data between a laptop and another device such as a smartphone or digital camera. Another example would be for two trusted users who want to transfer data between each other or simply to play a network game over that local network. This kind of client-isolation would make it harder to set up these kind of mutually-trusted network interactions in public networks.

You may think that the only solution would be to use Wi-Fi Direct or similar Wi-Fi-based "personal-area-network" technology. The main limitation with this technology is that it requires the device or trusted computer to be close to the laptop that is the "hub" of the "personal-area-network" rather than be anywhere in the scope of the hotspot network. This can limit activities like photographers and videographers downloading each shot or take to a laptop computer as they complete their shots or takes; or simply the fun of peer-to-peer network gaming.

One way of going about this could be to establish a so-called "trusted-group" protocol for devices in the same logical network and this protocol could be managed at the public-network's gateway device. The devices could be registered by MAC address or use of a session-driven "trusted-group" key and, once set up this way, inter-client data transfer can proceed through the hotspot network. This could be set up through a management protocol that permits the creation of a trusted group and the

addition of client devices to that group.

The creation of the “trusted group” could be integrated at the provisioning stage of one’s hotspot session such as when the disclaimer contract is agreed on or the username and password is validated in a docket-based system. The user would then be pointed to a session-management page where they can log out, buy extra time or add computers and devices to the trusted group.

The main limitation with this is that there isn’t a way to provide for hotspot provisioning to devices like smartphones, PMPs or handheld games consoles. These devices typically have a small screen and use either “pick-n-choose”, SMS-style or an awkward-to-operate “virtual QWERTY” on-screen keyboard as their text-entry means. This may be of concern if one of these devices is being used to instantiate a hotspot session at a pay-to-use or membership-driven hotspot. This limitation would also make it more difficult to use one of these devices to set up or add devices to a trusted group and it would make it increasingly difficult to establish a local-network gaming session between a group of friends that are using handheld gaming consoles at a fast-food joint for example.

The IT industry could look towards answering this problem through use of UPnP or similar technologies for managing the provisioning of hotspot sessions to end-users and establishment and management of trusted device groups that override hotspot client-isolation setups amongst only the members of those groups.

A Sony Network Media Player to upgrade your HDTV with

27/08/2010 08:21

News Articles

Sony’s Upcoming SMP-N100 Networked Media Player Packs a Punch | eHomeUpgrade[1]

Hands on: Sony’s \$129 N100 Media Player ‘Does More Than Roku | CEPro[2]

My comments

Already have a Sharp LCD TV /Blu-Ray Disc combo or a good LCD TV or projector hooked up to a Blu-Ray player that you like so much? You may want network video playback or access to Internet TV.

This was fulfilled with devices like the WD TV Live or similar devices but if you place heavy value on consumer-electronics brands, you could be interested in the Sony SMP-N100 Networked Media Player. This unit isn’t just a DLNA Networked Media Player but is a dedicated component version of the Sony Bravia Internet Video platform which is what Sony is using to bring Internet video and applications to the lounge-room TV.

It can work with an 802.11g/n Wi-Fi home network, an Ethernet network or a HomePlug network if you use a HomePlug-Ethernet bridge and can play media from USB Mass-Storage Devices but

there are still a few questions that need to be answered.

One is whether the device can work properly as a Network Media Renderer where it is controlled by a DLNA-compliant external controller like TwonkyManager, Andromote or PlugPlayer and the other is whether it can handle high-definition media like high-resolution “megapixel” JPEGs or AVC-HD videos properly and quickly on suitable equipment. The former function is one I would consider important if you are using it to play music from your home network and you don’t want to turn on the TV to select what you want to play.

At least this is an example of a way of bringing Internet-based video to most users in a cost-effective way without having to consider replacing video equipment.

Links

[1]

http://www.ehomeupgrade.com/2010/08/24/sonys-upcoming-smp-n100-networked-media-player-packs-a-punch/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ehomeupgrade%2Fentries+%28eHomeUpgrade+1%29

[2]

http://www.cepro.com/article/sonys_129_n100_media_player_does_more_than_roku/D1/

Special Report – Windows 95 now 15 years old and a major change to the PC computing platform

25/08/2010 06:33

During mid-1995, the Intel-based “IBM-PC” desktop computing platform had been given a major improvement with the arrival of a new operating system from Microsoft. This operating system, initially known as “Chicago” and was to be known as “Windows 4” and “MS-DOS 7” but became known as Windows 95 had yielded many improvements to this platform that it was made increasingly legitimate as an “all-round” general-purpose computing platform that was ready for the Internet.

This operating system was launched with a huge campaign which revolved around the new “Start” button on the desktop and this was enforced with the use of the Rolling Stones smash-hit song “Start Me Up”. The visual element that was also used was the clouds in the sky symbolising a new operating environment for your computer.

How did Windows 95 improve the Intel-based “IBM PC platform”

Computer-Management Improvements

Integration of Windows graphical user interface with MS-DOS operating system

Previously, a computer that worked on the “IBM PC platform” required the use of Microsoft’s MS-DOS operating system or a similar operating system like Digital Research’s DR-DOS as its base operating system. These operating systems didn’t come with a graphical shell unless you paid extra for one and ran the shell as a distinct program.

This typically required users either to run a third-party menu program or graphical user-interface “shell” like Automenu, Microsoft Windows or one that was supplied with network software like Novell; or, if they had MS-DOS 4 or 5, start a DOSHELL graphical user interface. IBM typically pushed their OS/2 graphical shell as one that was suitable for any of their PS/2 series computers.

Now, Windows 95 integrated the graphical user interface with the MS-DOS operating system and had this running as a default setup. It had led to avoiding the need to remember to run particular programs to use a graphical-user interface.

A lot less to run to add functionality to the computer.

Previously, if you wanted to run sound, advanced graphics or other multimedia, use peripherals like a mouse or a CD-ROM drive or use communications or computer networks, you had to make sure that you ran particular drivers or memory-resident programs. This typically required you to work with the CONFIG.SYS or AUTOEXEC.BAT files to make sure these programs start.

If you wanted to increase memory for particular programs, you had to know how to stop a particular memory-resident program to free up the memory space. In the case of communications, you had to use communications programs which were effectively “terminal emulators” to work with bulletin boards and these programs were the only ones that could control the modem. Similarly, if you ran a network, you would need to run networking software to allow the computer to benefit from the network. Some of these situations even required the location to have a resident “geek” called a system administrator to set up these computers. Even the Internet on a Windows machine behind a dialup modem needed the user to run programs like Trumpet Winsock to establish the connection.

This improvement alone allowed a small organisation to share files or printers between computers that are connected on a network with minimal configuration effort and has opened up the path towards the home network.

With Windows 95, most of these functions were simply handled by the operating system rather than by extra software that had to be started. This had taken away all of the extra requirements that the user needed to think of to run a highly-capable computer and do what they wanted to do.

Ready for the Internet

1995 was the year that the Internet came to the mainstream. Cyber-cafes had sprung up around town and new businesses called “Internet Service Providers” came on the scene. It was considered the “in thing” to have an email address where you could receive Internet-based email and you also had to know how to surf the Web. The old order of bulletin boards and online services with their “controlled media” had fallen away for this new “uncontrolled media” order that the Internet offered.

Windows 95 was capable of working with the Internet “out of the box” whether through a network or a dial-up service. This was because the operating system had an integrated TCP/IP stack with support for PPP-based dial-up protocols. There was even a basic email client provided with the operating system.

User-interface improvements

The Start Menu

This was a new take on the previous DOSHELL programs, Windows Program Manager and the third-party menu programs as being a place to find and start programs. Here, the user clicked on the Start button at the bottom left of the screen and found a tree of program names which would represent to software found on their system.

It had been considered easier for most users to start working on whatever they wanted to work on and has become a standard motif for all of the Microsoft operating environments since this operating system.

Windows Explorer and the object-driven view

The file-management functionality was handed over to Windows Explorer which provided for a new way of managing files and objects. It allowed for programmatic views like a “My Computer” view that provided for a simplified shell or an “Explorer” view with a directory tree in a pane as well as an object-driven file view.

This collection-viewing concept had extended to the Control Panel and other operating-system components that used collections as they were introduced in to the Windows platform.

Larger file names

Previously in MS-DOS, you were limited to an 8-character file name with a 3-character extension that was used for defining the file type. Now, since Windows 95, you could create a meaningful file name of up to 32 characters long which allowed you then to identify your files more easily. There was a special truncated 8-character version of the file name for use with older programs that didn’t support the new file-name convention.

It became more important as digital cameras became popular because people could name their photos in a way that reflects the content of the picture and also was important as file-based audio storage came on to the scene.

The Registry configuration-data store

Microsoft introduced the Registry configuration-data store as a way of avoiding the need to maintain multiple configuration files across the system. Here, this store allowed for a centralised point of reference for holding this data that the operating system and applications needed for configuration-reference information that had to be persistent across sessions.

Under-the-hood improvements

Integration with the 32-bit computing world

This operating system was built from the ground up to be a true 32-bit operating system that was tuned to work with the 32-bit processors that emerged since the Intel 80386DX processor. This would then allow software developers to compile their programs to run their best in a 32-bit computing environment.

This was in contrast to programs like Microsoft Word 6.0 which were compiled for Intel-architecture 32-bit processors but in a manner that was to be compatible with 16-bit processors of the same architecture. As well, most of the MS-DOS operating systems were also compiled for use with the 8-bit "PC/XT" environments and/or the 16-bit "PC/AT" environments. The operating-system limitation then didn't allow these programs to work at their best even if run on a computer with a 32-bit processor.

This had allowed for a variety of optimised computing setups like true multitasking and multithreading that these newer processors could cater for.

It is like Windows 7 where the operating system has been tuned for a 64-bit computing world and optimised for the newer multicore processors that are part of the Intel-based processor architecture.

Readiness for newer computing designs

Windows 95 had also catered for newer computing design principles such as the "soft-off" principle that was part of portable laptop computers and was to be part of the up-and-coming ATX desktop-computer design standard. This principle catered for "one-touch" power-off and modem-based/network-based power-on practices which allowed for improved system management for example.

The operating system also allowed for support of various forms of extensibility through use of standards, class drivers and similar practices that avoid the need to overload Windows with drivers.

Conclusion

Windows 95 wasn't just an "ugly duckling" of an operating system but a major turning point for the evolution of the Windows platform. Happy Birthday Windows 95!

Wave of Intel dual-core Netbooks to break | Nanotech - The Circuits Blog - CNET News

24/08/2010 08:36

Wave of Intel dual-core Netbooks to break | Nanotech - The Circuits Blog - CNET News[1]

My comments

The new Intel Atom dual-core processor could be more than raising the bar for netbooks. One class of computer that appealed to me as a threat to the iPad was the "netvertible" or the convertible netbook. This was to have the same abilities as a netbook but also had a touchscreen that swivelled and folded over the keyboard like on other convertible notebooks and laptops.

There are a few issues that may put the brakes on this idea of a netbook competing with the Apple iPad. One is the lack of an e-book publishing system for the Windows platform that is robust enough to threaten the Apple iOS platform and the other is that netbook users are more likely to use their computers for producing content rather than just consuming it, an activity which the iPad is only good at. In this case, a writer, journalist or blogger could use a netbook as a "portable typewriter" for preparing written work on the road.

This may then allow the Atom chipset to be taken further to create a highly-competitive answer to the iPad and could also provide for "step-up" netbook computers for manufacturers who want to provide real differentiation in their netbook product lines. The chipset may also help with dethroning the StrongARM processors from the embedded/dedicated computing market like smartphones, medical equipment, NAS, Internet routers and the like; and extend the Intel Architecture in this class of device.

Links

[1]

http://news.cnet.com/8301-13924_3-20014400-64.html?tag=nl.e703

Broadband Internet service now the deal-maker in the Australian Federal Election

24/08/2010 05:20

Articles

Regional internet service to fore | The Australian[1]

Broadband the hot issue in Australian election | FierceCable[2]

My comments

I have been following the issue of rural broadband-Internet delivery and next-generation broadband in this site and have observed certain ways that this issue has been tackled. In Europe, especially the UK and France where service-provider competition is enforced by national governments, there has been plenty of locally-driven initiatives to get decent-level broadband in to rural and regional areas. Some of these initiatives have been instigated by independent private companies, sometimes with the help of local or regional governments. I have even cited some examples of Vtesse Broadband who have instigated action to “wire-up” some UK villages like Birch Green[3], Broughton[4] and Hatt[5] to decent-standard broadband, even to next-generation setups with FTTC fibre-optic with VDSL2 copper run to the customer’s door. In Hautes-Pyrénées and Finistère, France[6], there is an example of local government being involved with providing broadband to a community.

In Australia, the Federal election had yielded a hung Parliament and provided room for three independent MPs who are based in rural areas alongside a Greens MP to determine the next Federal Government. The Australian Labor Party wanted to establish a National Broadband Network which would provide fibre-to-the-premises next-generation broadband to most areas and satellite broadband to a few rural and remote areas. On the other hand, the Liberal and National Party coalition wanted to run with a fibre-optic backhaul and a mix of cable-Internet, DSL and wireless technologies as a way of pushing out broadband Internet to more communities. The broadband blueprint will end up as a deal-maker as far as the rural independent MPs are concerned because of country people needing to gain real broadband speed in their areas.

If the low-cost copper-based technology is to be seen as the preferred solution, the deal-makers need to look at a few issues like handling decaying wiring infrastructure, the possibility of sub-loop DSL setups or “cluster-specific” DSL-enabled telephone exchanges and the use of sub-loop VDSL2 for providing next-generation broadband speeds. As well, the plan will also have to support an environment that can change at any moment, whether due to an increased population density; or due to a high-value centre of employment appearing in the area.

What I hope for is that this election can be a real wake-up call to raising the standard of rural broadband access and the ability to put country areas on an equal footing with urban areas as I have said in this statement article[7].

Links

- [1] http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/regional-internet-service-to-fore/story-fn59niix-1225908603884?referrer=email&source=AIT_email_nl&emcmp=Ping&emchn=New_sletter&emlist=Member
- [2] http://www.fiercable.com/story/its-internet-stupid-broadband-hot-election-issue-broadband/2010-08-23?utm_medium=nl&utm_source=internal
- [3] /2010/07/another-two-villages-provided-with-full-broadband-service-this-time-in-hertfordshire/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

- [4] /2010/07/another-country-hamlet-in-the-uk-equipped-for-next-generation-broadband/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [5] /2010/08/next-generation-broadband-hits-the-country-in-the-uk-a-gain-this-time-in-cornwall/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [6] /2010/03/rural-broadband-activity-in-the-haute-pyrnes-and-brittany-regions-in-france/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [7] /2010/03/why-i-cover-rural-broadband-access-in-this-blog/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Next-generation broadband hits the country in the UK again, this time in Cornwall

20/08/2010 15:17

News articles

thinkbroadband :: Faster broadband comes to Hatt and Higher Pill thanks to Vtesse[1]

From the horse’s mouth

Vtesse Broadband[2]

My comments

Vtesse Broadband have done it again by providing two small communities in Cornwall with next-generation broadband. The two communities, Hatt and Higher Pill, have been provided with a level of Internet service that would be considered woeful by today’s standards but this could be rectified by the use of fibre-to-the-cabinet technology with a VDSL2 copper sub-loop link to the customer’s door.

One reservation I have always had about any DSL-based copper end-link used in a broadband setup in the country is that the telephone lines between the exchange and the customer would also have been playing a contributory role towards poor-quality service. This could be due to ageing copper infrastructure or wiring setups that aren’t particularly efficient especially if there are clusters of buildings.

What I was mainly pleased about is that a small private company had worked with a small community to provide that community with a real broadband Internet service, especially a next-generation service, rather than waiting for the major telcos to provide the service.

The same article had raised the issue of the UK government reneging on subsidising the fibre backhaul to these services and I would concur with this concept because if a government needs to put its resources where its mouth is when it comes to providing rural communities with decent-standard reliable broadband.

These small broadband setups that cover rural towns in the UK are something that needs to be watched by all of the major parties contesting the Australian Federal Election and by the party who wins the election and holds government because they can be an example of how rural communities have "gotten off their backside" to provide city-grade broadband Internet.

Links

- [1] <http://www.thinkbroadband.com/news/4351-faster-broadband-comes-to-hatt-and-higher-poll-thanks-to-vtesse.html>
[2] <http://www.vtessebroadband.co.uk>

Now McAfee is under Intel's control

20/08/2010 14:20

Articles

Intel acquires McAfee for \$7.68 billion - Engadget[1]

My comments

Most of the laptops that I have reviewed on this blog came with a trial edition of a McAfee desktop-security program. Similarly, there are some people who have cottoned on to a McAfee desktop-security solution of some form, either by taking out a full subscription to a trial program that came with their new computer, used a business-supplied program or, for long-time computer hobbyists and students, ran the shareware program on their DOS-based PCs to keep the likes of "Ping Pong" or "Stoned" off their hard disks.

This program, one of the "old dogs" of PC virus control and desktop security, has served many users very well but some users would find that Intel owning McAfee may change the course of the McAfee product lineup either to make it more cheaper or costlier. It could also be a chance to make for a "vertical" desktop-security package directed at a particular user group or, as I would hope for, prepare a competitive antivirus program for the Apple Macintosh platform. This is because as more people take to the Macintosh platform, the "computer underworld" could work on that platform and create malware for it.

A good question to ask is whether McAfee, being profitable, was simply bought out by Intel or whether McAfee was posting a loss and Intel offered to buy out the software company to offset the losses. The latter situation may be brought about by the arrival of the free desktop antivirus programs offered by AVG, Avira, Avast and Microsoft; and the fact that Microsoft is providing a highly-competent desktop firewall program that is baked in to the Windows Vista and 7 operating systems.

Who knows what could be the direction for premium desktop security programs, especially for the Windows platforms.

Links

- [1] <http://www.engadget.com/2010/08/19/intel-acquires-mcafee-for-7-68-billion/>

Product Review - Sony VAIO E-Series laptop computer

20/08/2010 04:06

Introduction

I am reviewing the Sony VAIO E-Series laptop computer which is Sony's attempt to create a VAIO laptop that can be positioned as a sole computing device for small business owners and similar people.



[1]

RRP AUD\$1399

Review Sample Variants Processor Intel Core i3 RAM 4Gb shared with graphics Secondary Storage 500Gb HDD 320Gb HDD or 640Gb HDD DVD-RW drive BD-ROM Blu-Ray /DVD-RW drive SDHC card reader, Memory Stick card reader Display Subsystem ATI Mobility Radeon 5650 with 2.8Gb shared memory Screen 15" widescreen LED-backlit LCD Networking 802.11g/n Wi-Fi wireless 802.11a/g/n Wi-Fi wireless Gigabit Ethernet Bluetooth Connectivity USB 2.0 x 4 eSATA x 1 (shared with 1 USB) Video: VGA, HDMI Audio: HDMI digital, 3.5mm Headphones, for the microphone in Express-Card 34 expansion slot

The computer itself

This laptop is another attempt to upstage the MacBook Pro laptops in aesthetics and functionality. It is finished in a cyan-blue housing with a black keyboard and keyboard surround. There are different variations with a larger variety of different colours available for the series.

Processor and RAM

This unit comes with an Intel Core i3 multicore processor and works on 4Gb RAM that is shared with the display subsystem's memory. This configuration seems to be "de rigueur" for most mid-range laptops offered on the market by the major manufacturers and is capable of handling most office and multimedia tasks.

Secondary Storage

The test sample came with a 500Gb hard disk which has all of the capacity as one logical drive rather than the usual practice of creating separate partitions for recovery data or vendor-supplied tools. There are machines in the range that have 320Gb at a cheaper price or 640Gb at a more expensive price. This is a size that I would find adequate for a computer that is expected to be one's only computing device used for their work and personal computing needs.

There is a standard DVD burner supplied as the optical drive but you can get a Blu-Ray reader /DVD-burner drive as an extra-cost option. You also have a separate SD card slot and Memory-Stick card slot for removable storage.

Display subsystem

This computer's display subsystem is driven by an ATI Mobility Radeon 5650 subsystem with 2.8Gb shared with the system's main memory. It uses a 15.5" LED-backlit widescreen LCD as the main display but can be connected to an external display device using either a VGA connection or an HDMI connection.

Keyboard and trackpad



[2]

Sony VAIO E-Series keyboard and trackpad

The keyboard is a chiclet type with a dedicated numeric keypad that would please business users. It has shied away from requiring you to press the Fn key to gain access to the standard function keys, a practice that has been required with other competing laptop designs. Yet it is still suitable for long-haul computing tasks because it doesn't appear to be cramped.

There are dedicated keys for use in gaining access to the VAIO shell extension, the Web and Sony's VAIO ASSIST program. The

trackpad is a similar design to some of the Dell notebooks I have reviewed where it is a recessed area finished in the same style as the palm rest. The buttons that you press to select the option are distinctly different and are actual buttons rather than marked-out areas on the trackpad.

Networking and Connectivity

The computer uses an 802.11g/n Wi-Fi wireless connection or a wired Gigabit Ethernet connection to connect to your network. There is the option of an 802.11a/g/n dual-band Wi-Fi network available at extra cost if you have deployed such a network.

The computer has an ExpressCard-34 slot which you can use for ExpressCard-34 (slim-profile) expansion cards such as wireless-broadband modems. As well, there are four USB 2.0 sockets with one that is shared with an eSATA external-hard-disk socket. You also have a headphone socket and a microphone socket located up front.

Software complement

The VAIO E-Series is powered by the Windows 7 Home Premium operating system but I would recommend that business users use the "Anytime Upgrade" option to upgrade to either Windows 7 Professional or Ultimate to do it justice. There is the complement of multimedia programs that Sony provides for all their VAIO laptops, including a VAIO DLNA media server.

Use Experience

With all optical-drive-equipped laptops, I run them through a DVD run-down test with a movie to assess how long the battery will last under a difficult environment. This is with the display showing the movie constantly and the optical drive spinning constantly. This unit was able to make through 1 hour, 42 minutes with wireless networking and Bluetooth enabled and 1 hour, 50 minutes without wireless networking and Bluetooth enabled. The DVD playback experience was smooth even with scenes that have a lot of action in them.

Conclusion and Placement Notes

This is another laptop that I would consider as being useful as a portable computing device for users who perceive it as their only computing device. This would include users who want it as a "work-home" laptop. It doesn't have the same "managed" business-class security complement that some business users would demand but would work as a basic all-around "work-home" laptop. It would also be another machine that I would put on the list of laptop computers that I would recommend to a parent who is giving a laptop to their son or daughter who is starting tertiary education and living at a dorm /hall-of-residence or similar facility.

It is also another machine that can be considered as a Windows-powered alternative to the Apple MacBook Pro laptop and is priced in the similar range and offers similar performance. It may therefore be considered as a laptop solution for people who are disaffected by Apple's recent goings-on and want to "move away" from Apple, yet still want a brand-name multimedia-capable laptop.

Links

[1]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-20-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
[2]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-20-001-Copy.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Tweet this on your lounge-room TV with Panasonic

18/08/2010 12:44

Panasonic Adds A Twitter App To Its Viera Cast Plasma HDTVS [1]

My Comments

First, they did it by enabling video conferencing with Skype, now Panasonic are allowing you to Tweet a comment about that show you are watching or follow your Twitter friends on your lounge-room TV. Who knows not if but when Facebook will become the next add-on for Panasonic's Viera-Cast TVs and Blu-Ray players. These sets will also need to work with a remote control that has a QWERTY alphanumeric keyboard so you you can get those Tweets or status updates out as that show progresses.

This happens to be highly relevant as an increasing number of television shows, mainly sports, talk shows, current-event broadcasts, reality TV and the like integrate Twitter in to their content and have set up a particular hashtag associated with that show. This typically includes the use of a "Twitter crawl" that appears at the bottom of the screen and /or the show's compere or anchor citing selected Tweets directed at the show.

It is becoming the direction for manufacturers to extend the common social-Web and Internet-driven-communications platforms to a "10-foot" experience on the lounge-room TV or video peripheral (Blu-Ray player or "personal-TV service") either by providing the function as an "app" that you choose from an "app-menu" or "app-store"; or as part of a firmware update that is rolled out to the device.

This may require a change in the direction on how the remote control for the TV set is designed. This may be in the form of a handset that mimics the Nokia N97 Mini smartphone where the top of the remote swings away to reveal a QWERTY keypad; a handset that looks like a BlackBerry or Nokia E-Series smartphone or simply an app for the common smartphone platforms which provides TV control as well as a link between the phone's text-entry keyboard and the TV. It may also mean that the infra-red remote control will go the way of the ultrasonic remote control and be replaced by a Bluetooth or Wi-Fi remote control. Other solutions may also include support for standards-based Bluetooth keyboards like the Logitech diNovo Mini[2] or Microsoft's Media Center keyboards.

In this case, there will need to be an interest in designing more of the multimedia keyboards that appeal to being operated while

you are slouching on the couch. This will mean keyboards that are backlit when they are used, small keyboards that can be worked with two thumbs; keyboards resistant to damage from crisps (US: chips) and sweet drinks that are often consumed in front of the telly and elegant-design keyboards.

Now it will certainly mean that the TV isn't just for watching your favourite shows any more. It will also be about integrating the social Web with the experience.

Links

[1]
<http://www.crunchgear.com/2010/08/17/panasonic-adds-a-twitter-app-to-its-viera-cast-plasma-hdtvs/>
[2]
<http://www.logitech.com/en-us/keyboards/keyboard/devices/3848>

Product Review - HP Photosmart Wireless-E Multifunction Printer (B110a)

17/08/2010 09:20

An Internet-based printing appliance from HP

Introduction

I am now reviewing the HP Photosmart Wireless-E Multifunction Printer (B110a) which is the successor to the Photosmart Wireless (B109n) printer that I reviewed previously[1] on this site.



[2]

Print Scan Copy Fax /

E-mail Paper Trays Connections Colour Colour Colour Colour
2 x A4 USB Inkjet Receive e-mail from Web-based
service 802.11g/n WPA2 WPS wireless

Prices

Printer

RRP: AUD\$129

Inks

Standard **High-capacity** Price Pages Price Pages Black
AUD\$18.76 250 AUD\$51.20 800 Cyan AUD\$16.76 300
AUD\$29.56 750 Magenta AUD\$16.76 300 AUD\$29.56 750 Yellow
AUD\$16.76 300 AUD\$29.56 750

There are no fees or charges to use the ePrint service for print-to-email or the ePrint applications.

The printer itself

This unit looks as if it is a copy of the previous model, with the same compact black chassis and small screen with ATM-style operation and “pinball-machine” touch-buttons around the screen. The printing mechanism is very similar to the predecessor and using the same consumables.

But there is a lot more that meets the eye when you plug it in and switch it on,

Improvements over the B109n

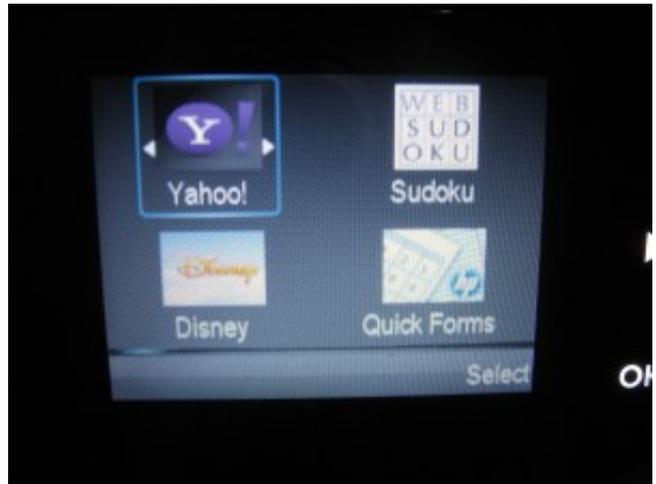
Wireless-network setup

You will notice the first improvement when you set up the printer to work with your wireless network. Previously, if your Wi-Fi network’s router or access point didn’t support WPS “push-button” setup, you had to connect the printer to your computer and run the HP-supplied software to enrol it with your secure wireless network. With this model, you can enrol it with your non-WPS wireless network segments using the control panel. This is done using a “pick and choose” text entry method for entering the network’s WPA passphrase.

Another improvement is the ability to integrate properly with 2.4GHz 802.11n Wi-Fi network segments which means that you don’t need to “downgrade” your 802.11n router or access point to “mixed mode” or 802.11g for it to work properly.

The Internet-based printing appliance

The printer can now work as a network-based “printing appliance” for emails and MMS messages as well as being a network printer and scanner. There is also support for “print apps” where the printer can print out Web pages, RSS feeds, Sudoku pages and the like from the control panel. These are all set up by visiting the HP ePrint website (<http://www.hp.com/go/ePrintCenter>[3]) where you establish an account using your Google, Facebook or openID credentials or site-particular credentials. Here, you enrol the printer by entering the device-specific code which is on an “ePrintCenter” sheet that is printed as part of the setup process.



[4]

ePrint Apps on unit’s screen

Once set up, you have a machine-specific email address which you can add to your laptop, smartphone or MMS-capable mobile phone. Here, you then forward your document, photo or message to this address or add this address as a BCC address to an email to have it printed on the printer. This will then be printed out by this unit without you needing to have a computer at the same location switched on all the time. You may have to make sure you type some text before the photo if you are sending a photo by MMS so the ePrint service doesn’t reject your picture as spam.



[5]

HP ePrintCenter management page

Similarly, HP have introduced “ePrint Apps” which allow you to print items provided by certain content providers from the control panel. I have talked about this feature on this site [6]last year when HP released their first TouchSmart-based Web-enabled multifunction printer that had this functionality. One of these “ePrint Apps” that I like is the “Tabloid” which allows you to have today’s posts from a list of RSS feeds that you select printed out at the touch of a button. Of course, there is the HP Quick Forms application which allows you to turn out ruled paper like notepaper, graph paper or music-manuscript paper using the printer’s control panel. This application still has some limitations like only being able to print 10 staves on the music-manuscript paper which is useless for certain music projects such as “vocal+piano”, quartet or organ pieces.

Limitations and Points of Improvement

On the other hand, the small control panel makes it harder to perform most walk-up printing tasks. Here, you have to highlight the task, touch "OK", then work through menus to determine the task, which can make the whole process more difficult and confusing to perform and lead to more operation errors. This is a real limitation for older people or those of us who have eyesight or dexterity limitations.

As well, like the previous model, this unit doesn't have Ethernet connectivity, which may be required if your Wi-Fi network is plagued with reception difficulties and you want to use HomePlug as an alternative networking method or connect it directly to the router using an Ethernet cable.

Some of these limitations may be to do with a common practice associated with the design of manufactured goods as the design nears the end of its lifecycle. This is where the manufacturer creates a model that is based on a common physical and mechanical design as other popular models that have the design but this model has a swathe of improvements over the previous models either in order to "finish off" the design or rush certain features in to that design.

Conclusion and Recommendation Notes

I would recommend this printer for home use as an entry-level network-enabled printer especially if you are moving towards the laptop-based wireless-network-driven "new computing environment". It would also work well as a secondary printer for the study or kitchen area or in another building, especially if you place high value on the unit's function as a "network printing appliance" that prints emails and photos that you send to it.

Links

- [1] [/2010/03/product-review-hewlett-packard-photosmart-wireless-network-multifunction-printer/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed](http://2010/03/product-review-hewlett-packard-photosmart-wireless-network-multifunction-printer/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed)
- [2] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-17-004.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [3] <http://www.hp.com/go/ePrintCenter>
- [4] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/IMG_5422.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [5] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/HP-ePrintCenter.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [6] [/2009/06/hp-unveils-the-first-web-connected-touchsmart-printer-or-the-digital-home-ehomeupgrade/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed](http://2009/06/hp-unveils-the-first-web-connected-touchsmart-printer-or-the-digital-home-ehomeupgrade/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed)

Samsung - one of the few major contributors to the DLNA Home Media Network

14/08/2010 09:45

I have been observing various Web feeds and found that Samsung has been working heavily on contributing to the DLNA Home Media Network in many different ways.

They had integrated the functionality in to most of their high-end Wi-Fi-enabled digital cameras and into their smartphones issued over the last year or so. An example of this is Epic 4G[1] which is the latest 4G-enabled smartphone now available to Sprint customers in the US, where this phone can be a media player, server and controller.

As far as the main lounge-room or home theatre is concerned, all of their TV sets that are based on the Series 7, 8 or 9 chassis which includes most, if not all, of their "main viewing area" flatscreen TV models sold over the last two years are DLNA enabled and is now integrated into an increasing number of the Series 6 flatscreen TVs issued since model-year 2009. These TV sets and the DLNA-equipped ones offered by Sony have been considered as an option for small business and education when it comes to applications like digital-signage because of their cost-effectiveness and ready availability at most of the big-name electrical retailers.

As well, they are rolling this function in to most of their Blu-Ray players and Blu-Ray-based "home-theatre-in-box" systems. Surprisingly, they have provided this function in to the BD-C8000 [2] which is the Blu-Ray equivalent of the portable DVD player that may be used to "pacify" kids with a movie during a long road trip. This is a product class that is less likely to be endowed with this kind of functionality because most of these players are made in a cost-driven manner.

It will be interesting to see what Samsung will come up with next as they design and release newer equipment over the subsequent years.

Links

- [1] <http://www.unthinkable.biz/home/article/1812/unthinkably-fast---this-phone's-so-cool---it's-epic-says-sprint->
- [2] http://news.yahoo.com/s/digitaltrends/20100811/tc_digitaltrends/samsungdebuts3dportableblurayplayerlargesthome3dledtv

A need to avoid “redlining” in broadband-Internet rollouts

13/08/2010 03:00

During the election campaign in Australia, both political parties put up their plans for an improved broadband Internet service, with Labor providing a fibre-to-the-premises plan for most metropolitan, regional and rural areas and satellite for other areas while the Liberal Party put up a plan based on cable-Internet, ADSL and fixed-wireless technologies with a fibre-optic backbone.

One of the issues that I have noticed is that the broadband issue hadn't touched on the issue of “redlining” when it came to provisioning of infrastructure. “Redlining” is where districts that are capable of receiving infrastructure aren't provided with the infrastructure due to a perceived economic environment that is in place or the goal of particular parties like developers or investors to “shape” a particular district to a desired usage vision. An example of this was what happened with the way cable-based pay-TV service was provisioned around the cities in Australia. Some neighbourhoods had the cables in the streets while other neighbourhoods didn't have the cables and in those neighbourhoods that didn't have cables, pay-TV was provisioned by satellite while broadband Internet was provisioned by ADSL. This became the same situation even though some of these suburbs were inhabited by wealthier professionals, “empty-nest” couples or others with more disposable income.

This can easily backfire as the demand for this kind of infrastructure shows up in the areas that are “redlined”. It can be caused by situations such as the subscription price for the services becoming more affordable for most people. As well, it can be exacerbated more by changes like gentrification of former working-class neighbourhoods or “empty-nest” couples moving to neighbourhoods with plenty of small houses.

Whenever anyone decides to roll out next-generation broadband, they need to make sure all areas that can be covered by a particular medium are covered by that medium.

Buyer's Guide – Buying a network-enabled printer

11/08/2010 08:00

Introduction

You may be operating an old printer that is “on its last legs” or you may be considering a printer for your new computer setup. At this point, you are thinking of which printer to purchase as your next printer.

The printer market is divided between two classes of printer user – the consumer which represents a typical household; and the small-business market which represents small organisations and home-office users who use the printer as part of telecommuting. I am not focusing attention on equipment pitched at “enterprise”

users because these units are typically either leased or purchased under operation-specific plans and have too much functionality that is out of the scope of this buyer's guide and Website.

Why prefer a network-enabled printer

When you have a small network in place at home or in your small business, it is now a good idea to move away from the cheaper “desktop-only” printers and multifunction printer-scanner units which are typically connected to one computer using a USB cable, and move towards a network-enabled printer. These printers connect directly to your home or small-business computer network and are in a position to share their printing or other resources without you needing to have a computer running all the time for this to happen.

Sure, you could connect a desktop printer to a network print server, which is now one of many functions provided by most routers or network-attached storage units. But on the other hand, a lot of the desktop-only units come with software that makes them totally dependent on their host computer and they don't work well with network print servers. In the case of multifunction printer-scanner combos, you may only be able to print to the device's print mechanism – you may not be able to gain access to the scanner, fax functionality or secondary storage.

Multifunction printer-scanner combo devices also benefit from network connectivity because they can allow you use their other resources from any computer in the network. There is even the ability to “push-scan” documents to any particular computer on the network from the printer's control panel as long as you have the manufacturer's software on that computer. This is because there isn't a standard ability to list all available scanning endpoints on a network as yet. Some units can also “mount” the camera-card slots in the printer as network-shared disk drives so you can import the pictures to the computer for “processing”.

The network-enabled printer can work well with the “new computing environment” because the laptop computers that connect wirelessly to the home network can send their print jobs through that network to the printer. This avoids the need to locate the printer and connect up the USB cable to your laptop every time you want to print something out. The printer would be connected to the network via whatever network medium works best for the situation whether it be Wi-Fi wireless; blue Ethernet cable, or HomePlug or MoCA “existing wires” technology. This also allows you to locate the printer wherever you want to, as long as it is connected to your network and to power.

The main exception to this rule would be a portable printer like Canon's PIXMA IP100 which is designed for use as an “on-the-go” printer for a laptop user; or a printer that services a particular desktop computer's computing needs.

Printer Device Classes

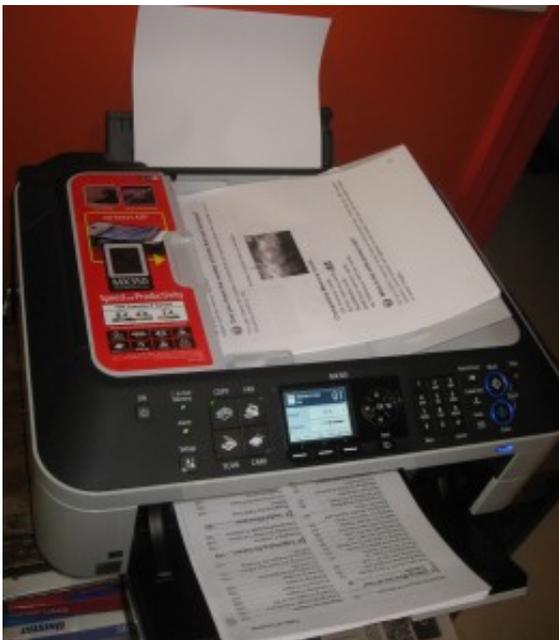
Consumer printers and multifunction devices

Examples: Canon PIXMA MX-350 and MX-870, HP Photosmart series



[1]

HP Photosmart Wireless B109n printer



[2]

Canon PIXMA MX-350 multifunction printer with fax

These are printers and multifunction devices that are pitched at households to use primarily for printing “happy snaps” and other casual short-run print jobs, with occasional large print runs for homework projects and the like. They are often sold through the big appliance chain stores like Best Buy, JB HiFi and Harvey Norman and typically are finished in a cabinet that is attractive for home use. This is a way where manufacturers try to please the “woman of the house” with this class of printer by emphasising the machine’s beauty.

This class of printers always uses inkjet technology and the printing system in most of these printers is typically optimised for printing of photographs. This is typified through the use of photograph-optimised inks including five or six ink cartridges in some machines. In most of these machines, the paper-feed mechanism is optimised to handle “snapshot” prints with some machines like the HP Photosmart Premium Fax having a separate paper tray for 4”x6” paper.

The downside of this is that these printers are costly to run and, in most cases, they have a low duty cycle which will cause reliability problems for business users who run off many documents.

It is also worth knowing that most of the premium devices in this class are pitched as “home-office” printers and have business-ready functionality like integrated fax functionality or high-speed operation. This is although they are optimised for photographic printing and use the expensive consumer-grade photo inks rather than business-grade large-capacity inks.

Small-business printers and multifunction devices

Examples: Canon LaserShot series, HP OfficeJet series, HP LaserJet series



[3]

HP OfficeJet 6500

The printer equipment that is pitched at the small-business market is optimised for speed, efficiency and economy for a high duty cycle.

Most units will use inkjet printing although some models may use a laser or LED xerographic printing technology and one brand, namely Fuji Xerox, uses a “solid-ink” technology similar to how crayons work. This is although the output speed and quality of the inkjet printers is approaching that of equipment based on these other technologies.

There is much less importance on photo quality with most printers in this class because they are optimised for printing business documents most of the time. Let’s not forget that the colour inkjets in this class can do a good quality job of printing photos when given A4 or similar size paper. As well, they won’t have support for “snapshot” paper for use with printing “happy snaps”. Some manufacturers won’t provide a colour display on their low-end small-business models, which then will make it hard to print selected images from a digital-camera’s memory card, although they can print a DPOF print order that you determine on the camera from the camera’s memory card.

Network connectivity and setup

Connectivity

Most network-capable consumer-grade multifunction printers and a few small-business multifunction printers can connect to 802.11g WPA-PSK wireless network either with a built-in wireless network adaptor or a wireless network adaptor sold as an optional accessory. Some of the newer models in each class will properly support 802.11n wireless networks and may work with dual-band networks.

The mid-range and premium consumer equipment and all of the small-business equipment will have an Ethernet socket as a network connectivity path. This will provide increased connection flexibility such as the ability to use the “no-new-wires” technologies like HomePlug powerline or MoCA TV coaxial-cable networks as well as direct connectivity to a router’s or network switch’s Ethernet socket.

Wireless-network setup

Most of the economy consumer-focused models will require direct USB connection to a PC that is running manufacturer-supplied software to allow a user to configure them for most wireless networks. An increasing number of these machines may support WPS-based connection setup from the device’s control panel.

Better-equipped models will allow wireless-network setup for most home and small-business wireless networks at the unit’s control panel. usually with an “SMS-style”, “pick-n-choose” or virtual-keyboard text-entry method for entering WPA-PSK passphrases. Most of these models will not support WPA-Enterprise networks which are based around access to the wireless network based on user name and password credentials.

Network functionality

All of the machines will support network printing and if they have scanners, they will support network scanning. This will be in the form of allowing PC-initiated scanning to be started from the operating-system interface or manufacturer’s software, or device-initiated scanning as long as the host computer has the manufacturer’s software running.

Fax-equipped units can allow a user to send a fax via the network using the printer’s “fax” driver and some of the machines can send a fax to one of the computers in the network as long as the computer is on and running the manufacturer’s software.

Due to the cost-conscious manufacturing practices that exist in the consumer and small-business class of printers, there isn’t the likelihood of the printers supporting “on-device” print-job spooling where the print queues are held at the printer. Instead, the computers that prepare the jobs have to hold the jobs on their hard disks until the printer has finished printing the current job. There may be situations where there will be a “rush to the gate” to get a print job going when a print job is complete and two or more computers have pending print jobs. This feature could be made more available to this class of printer now that the cost of flash memory or hard-disk storage that is enough for this purpose has come in to ridiculously-cheap territories.

The network printing appliance

A new trend that is emerging especially with consumer equipment; and has been spearheaded by Hewlett-Packard is the ability for the printer to become an Internet-connected computer-independent “printing appliance” rather than a printer for computers on the local network. This is aided with a dedicated Web-based “online printing” portal created by the printer manufacturer where you manage this functionality. Here, the printer can be set up to print emails forwarded to a specific email address associated with that unit, print files uploaded to a particular Web page or print from special Web-based applications that are loaded on it.

Large-sheet printing

You may want to invest in a network printer that can work on paper sizes that are A3 or bigger, perhaps to print promotional material on large sheets of paper or to “run-off” hard copies of large spreadsheets.

In some cases, this may become more necessary as organisations that you work with supply their “on-site” promotional material in a “download-to-print” form. This is where you download PDF files of the promotional material from a Website or receive the PDF files as an email attachment, then you print these PDF files out. For these organisations, it is a cheaper option because they don’t have to print out and deliver or post the material to the sites where it is needed and they can focus the material to particular locations in an easier and quicker manner.

At the moment, there aren’t many network-enabled printers that can do this kind of printing, especially at an affordable price. The printers that do this functionality are usually single-function units that are to be connected to their host equipment through a USB or similar connection. There are some exceptions to this rule as mentioned below.

Hewlett-Packard have two network-connectable single-function printers that work with A3 paper: the OfficeJet 7000 colour inkjet printer, reviewed in this site[4]; as well as the Color LaserJet CP5225dn colour laser printer.



[5]

HP OfficeJet 7000 wide-format printer

Brother have introduced a few network-enabled inkjet

multifunction units that can print on A3 paper. One of them, the DCP-6690CW, also has an A3 scanner, which would make it functionally equivalent to the typical office photocopier of the mid 1980s. This is insofar that these units could copy A3 to A3 or do tricks like reducing an A3 document to A4 or enlarging an A4 document to A3. These printers have two paper trays so you can load one of them with A4 paper for regular use as well as the other with A3 paper for those large documents.



[6]

Brother MFC-6490CW A3 inkjet multifunction printer

The best idea for most small businesses who want to fill these needs at the moment would be to obtain a wide-format colour inkjet that is capable of being hooked up to a network, such as the HP OfficeJet 7000. If they have a need to do an increased number of mid-to-high-volume A3 print runs, they may be in a better position to go for an A3-capable colour laser printer. This is in addition to a good inkjet or laser multifunction unit that connects to the network.

Consumables issues

Original-brand consumables vs generic-brand consumables

There is an ongoing issue concerning the use of generic-brand or private-label inks and toners for printers compared with using the inks and toners supplied by the manufacturer under the manufacturer's own brand.

Most printer manufacturers often sell their consumer-market printers on a "razor and blades" model where they sell the printer cheaply but make up on the losses involved by selling highly-priced inks and toners. This is similar to how the razor manufacturers sold low-cost interchangeable-blade men's razors but required that the customers bought their expensive replacement blades to work with these razors.

But there are some third-party suppliers who supply inks and toners that can work in a similar manner to the original-part cartridges and these may be sold direct or through smaller retailers. Some other retailers may sell these inks under one of their own private labels. The main issue with these cartridges is that the ink or toner may not yield the same high-quality output as the original-part cartridges. As well, the printer manufacturer

doesn't cover faults caused by the use of these generic-brand inks in the machine's warranty or service contract.

The output-quality issue may not matter with routine jobs like faxing or printouts of emails, database reports or downloaded PDF documents intended for immediate reading but may matter with quality-sensitive material like photographs, presentation handouts or proofs. Another issue that may be of concern is that some of these cheaper inks may fade over a long time which may be of concern for photographs or documents intended as paper archives. In some cases, particularly with very cheap generic-brand consumables, there may be damage caused to the printer by their use.

On the other hand, there may be companies who will offer to sell consumables that are the same standard as the original-brand consumables but under their own label. It may be in the form of "clean-skins" that are consumables of a standard equivalent to original consumables loaded into "white-label" cartridges or simply consumables built by and for original-brand companies but sold under a private label, both practices that may be more prevalent in the USA and Canada but not so much in Europe or Australia.

It would be worth making sure that if you use generic-brand or private-label consumables that you use those consumables that are known to be good quality and you may have to remember that use of them may be suitable only for "rip-and-read" printing.

Use of aftermarket continuous inking systems

There are some firms who offer aftermarket continuous-inking systems for certain inkjet printer models. These are devices which draw ink from larger containers and feed the ink in to special cartridges that are installed in the printer. They are valued because they improve the printer's economy and allow the printer to run for a long time without the need to purchase or install new cartridges.

Like generic-brand inks, these inking systems are not endorsed by the manufacturers as approved accessories and won't be covered by the printer manufacturer's warranty. So you would need to make sure you are using a good-quality continuous-inking system that is supplied by a reputable supplier.

Another issue worth knowing about with these systems is what is involved with maintaining them. This includes adding extra ink or handling ink or hose blockages; or air-locks as well as preventative maintenance. Some systems may require intensive end-user training and this may be of concern with workplaces where there are many different staff members coming through the business.

What to look for

When you buy a printer or all-in-one, you may find that buying the cheapest model, especially the cheapest consumer-grade model, may be penny wise but it can end up being very pound foolish.

Operation economy

You will need to look for a machine that is cost-effective to run in your operating environment. It may be cheaper to buy the consumer-focused model for your home office or small business, but you will find that these models will become expensive to run because of their low-capacity ink cartridges, whereas the expensive small-business models will end up being cheap to run due to their higher-capacity cartridges.

A good question to ask is whether you will be running many documents out of that machine. This will include, for fax-enabled all-in-ones or units with “email-to-print” capability, whether you will be receiving many documents, including “deliver-by-fax” periodicals, by fax or email-to-print.

Ease Of Use

The machine should be easy to use, especially for what you want it to do. Such a unit will end up being worth using by everyone at home or in the business because they don't have to be involved in performing ridiculously difficult tasks in order to use it fully.

Firstly, you should be able to load paper and ink /toner cartridges without having to spend a long time “fiddling around” with or in the machine. This includes making sure that any lids that you need to open don't require much effort to lift and can stay open without you needing to move a stay in to place. The cartridges shouldn't need any extra effort to insert or remove. These factors are more important for machines used by older adults who may be losing their physical strength.

It also includes easy access to the paper path so you can rectify paper jamming and similar problems.

The print drivers should be easy to install for anyone who is competent with the computer operating system that they use. The instructions should be easy to understand and easy to follow, and the experience should be friendly.

If you use a multifunction printer from its control panel for tasks like scanning, copying or faxing, the display should be easy to read and the controls easy to identify and follow. If you print from a camera card, the machine should have a colour display that can show the pictures so you can choose whichever one to print.

Reliability

The printer should be able to handle a large print or scan job without jamming or saying it's out of paper when there is paper in the unit. This is also important for machines that use extra paper handling like automatic duplexers, multiple paper trays or automatic document feeders.

You may find that your new printer will perform ultra-reliably during its first few years of service but will start to show problems after a good run of documents or as it ages. Here, it may be worth paying attention to the warranty that the manufacturer provides for the machine or specifications like mean-time-between-failures or duty-cycle to ascertain how reliable it is likely to be.

Similarly, the printer should be able to stay on the network while doing large print jobs. This may be a problem with some wireless

models that go “off the air” during a print job. If this is important to you, it may be worth making sure that your printer has an Ethernet socket and purchasing a HomePlug powerline network kit or an extra “homeplug” if you have such a network segment running if you want installation flexibility and reliable operation.

What should I buy

Main printer for the household

An economy consumer all-in-one may be suitable as a first machine, such as when you use the wireless network for your laptop for the first time. This would be more applicable for a single person or couple with light printing needs.

A mid-tier consumer or an economy to mid-tier small-business all-in-one may work well for most households as a main printer where a lot of traffic is expected. It would be also suitable for people who have a home office, whether they work primarily in another location or from home.

A premium consumer or small-business model is worth its salt if you are after the features it offers like high-quality photo printing for example. Some of the premium machines have fax capability which may be important if you need to send or receive faxes from home.

Secondary printer for the household

An economy consumer network printer or all-in-one can come in handy as a secondary printer, such as for children to use in the study for example. It would also go well for use in multi-building home networks where you want a network printer that is local to that remote building.

Main printer for small business

It is much wiser to stick to small-business multifunction models like HP OfficeJets for use in a small business or community organisation. If you intend to expect more printing activity, you may have to consider using a laser-based unit.

The feature set that you choose should be relative to what you expect out of your machine, especially the kind of printing that you may end up doing.

Secondary printer where main printer is a monochrome laser multifunction unit

For occasional colour printing jobs, it may be worth purchasing a network-enabled colour inkjet printer like an HP OfficeJet 6000. You may want to go for a wide-format machine like the OfficeJet 7000 if the kind of colour print jobs are primarily done on A3 or similar large paper sizes.

If you end up doing many colour print jobs, it may be worth looking at a dedicated colour laser printer because of these machines' quick speeds.

Secondary printer optimised for quick turn out of receipts, etc

A networked laser or LED-based printer could do the job well for applications where you need to turn out forms, receipts and similar documents very quickly as part of your workflow. Similarly, these printers may also work well if you do large document runs like what would be expected in a legal office for example.

You may prefer a monochrome unit if the kind of work is primarily forms, receipts, large legal documents and the like or go for a colour one if you do some colour documents such as documents with photographic illustrations.

Conclusion

Once you know what the marketplace is like for your next network-enabled printer and know what to buy for your particular application, you can then choose a printer that will provide you with many years of reliable economical document-printing service.

Links

- [1]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/B109n.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [2]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/2010-06-18-003.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [3]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/OfficeJet-6500-1-front.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [4]
[/2010/03/product-review-hewlett-packard-officejet-7000-wide-for-mat-network-printer/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed](http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/product-review-hewlett-packard-officejet-7000-wide-for-mat-network-printer/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed)
- [5]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/OfficeJet-7000-1.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [6]
http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/2010-07-22-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Product Review – Canon PIXMA MX-870 Inkjet Multifunction Printer

10/08/2010 04:50

Introduction

The network-enabled printer that I am now reviewing is the Canon PIXMA MX-870 which is positioned at the top-end of the home and small-office /home-office range. It is another of the multifunction printers that are starting to complete a “bridge” between the high-end of a manufacturer’s consumer-oriented range and the low-end of their small-business range when it comes to inkjet-based multifunction printers.



[1]

Print Scan Copy Fax Document Feeder Paper Trays

Connections Colour Colour Colour Colour Double-sided 2 x A4 USB Inkjet 2400dpi Ethernet Automatic Double-sided 802.11g WPA2 WPS wireless

Prices

RRP AUD\$299

Inks

Standard Price Black 22.95 Cyan 22.95 Magenta 22.95 Yellow 22.95 **Photo-Black** 22.95

This printer is the PIXMA MX350’s [2] bigger and more expensive stablemate but offers a lot more for the price. Most of the operations are very similar to the MX350, where the main functions are a button away. Even the quick-forms functions are similar in capability to what the MX350, with the support for printing music sheets that have 12 staves for composing and arranging “vocal+piano”, quartet or organ music.

The network connectivity is very similar to the MX350 where it can be hooked up to either a WPS-capable 802.11g WPA2-PSK wireless-network segment or a Cat5 Ethernet network segment. This can then cater for use with “no-new-wires” network segments based on HomePlug powerline or MoCA TV-coaxial technology when used with the appropriate bridge device.

The fax caters for the full requirements for single-line setups like FaxStream Duet (distinctive-ring) or automatic detect with telephone answering machines as well as the traditional dedicated-line setup. It can work “best-case” with colour transmission and reception.

There is even further improvement with receiving faxes where the unit can be set to print on both sides of the paper when it receives a multi-page fax. This feature can be very confusing when the fax is a separate pre-written document accompanied with a cover page or cover letter because the start of the document may be on the back of the cover page /letter.

It is also worth knowing that there is an optional Bluetooth interface kit which allows you to print pictures on your mobile phone using this printer or the MX350. This can also work with the

Improvements over the MX350



[3]

Five separate ink cartridges

One major improvement that I like is that it uses separately-replaceable cartridges for each of the colours rather than a single colour cartridge. Here, you have 5 inks in separate cartridges which makes this printer more economical to operate

Paper handling



[4]

Paper tray at front of the printer

There is a drawer on the front of the machine which is used for A4 or Letter plain paper. This drawer, which is referred to as the “cassette”, is where you would keep regular paper for use in ordinary print or copy jobs and receiving faxes while you use the rear feeder for printing on to special media like coated or glossy paper. When documents are printed from the paper held in this drawer, the paper path is a “horseshoe” path similar to many HP and Brother printers rather than the linear path used by Epson printers and Canon printers, including this one when it uses the rear tray.

There is also an automatic duplexer which I am very pleased with especially if you want to do your own short-run desktop publishing rather than just use it to conserve paper. Here, you don’t have forced margins or scaling involved and you have a very slight registration shift of 1 or 2 mm between the front and back sides of the page. The only limitation is that you have a 20-second per page time penalty when you print on both sides.

The automatic document feeder is also capable of scanning both sides of a page but it does this in a sequential manner. This can still benefit those of us who scan documents like accounts to PDF for electronic archiving.

User Experience issues

You may find that paper won’t load from the front tray and the printer will show “out of paper” errors for that paper source. This can be rectified by running the printer through a cleaning cycle for the paper-feed roller, which you do by pressing the “Setup” button and selecting “Maintenance”, then “Roller Clean” on the “Maintenance” menu.

Windows 7 users will notice that the printer isn’t replicated twice for the “print-to-fax” queue and the regular printer queue. What will happen is that when they click on the printer in “Devices And Printers”, they will see the printer’s Device Stage which is a “branded” user interface for the printer. If they click on the device status line in the Device Stage header to see what is yet to be printed, they will see a drop-down box which gives the user an option between the printer queue and the print-to-fax queue.

Limitations

There is still one problem with the software where the print monitor program can be out of step with printer, especially if the computer and the printer are working across the network.

Another limitation that I have found with this printer is that there aren’t any high-yield ink cartridges available for it, which can be of a limitation if you do a lot of printing or have to provide for a period where a lot of documents have to be printed like end-of-school-year.

Similarly, I would like to see the front paper tray be able to hold more paper, especially if you expect to receive more faxes or do a lot of short-run desktop publishing. As well, I have always said this that the printer manufacturers need to take advantage of flash memory being available at cheaper prices in order to provide for efficient print-job handling.

Conclusion and Placement Notes

I would recommend this printer as another option for a home-office or small-business printer, especially where double-sided printing or scanning are required and the business places importance on fax capability. It would also work well for people who will want to use the automatic double-sided printing function as part of their short-run desktop-publishing requirements.

Links

- [1] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-09-001.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [2] /2010/06/product-review-canon-pixma-mx-350-network-multifunction-printer/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [3] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-09-004.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed
- [4] http://homenetworking01.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010-08-09-003.jpg#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Another dockable NAS system from Seagate

06/08/2010 07:30

News article

Seagate introduces GoFlex Home for household network storage | The Toybox - ZDNet[1]

From the horse's mouth

Seagate -

Product Page[2]

Press Release[3]

My comments

Seagate had previously released a docking hard-disk system under the FreeAgent name, with a USB dock, media-player dock and the DockStar which is a network-attached storage which works with the FreeAgent docking hard disks.

This unit was based around the PogoPlug technology which has an Ethernet-ended network-attached-storage circuit in the same space as a "wall-wart" AC adaptor. It was able to support these functions:

- "cloud-based" file sync
- file backup either with supplied software or operating-system-native software in the form of Apple Time Machine or CIFS

- a DLNA-compliant media server or
- Remote file access from the Internet

Now, Seagate have established a new "FreeAgent" docking hard-disk form factor in the form of the GoFlex, which has some different attributes to the previous standard. Why has this action been taken?

One issue that may be of concern is the desire for Seagate to move from one platform to another but keep a few products going to support those who have the established platform.

Whatever, I would consider this NAS design as being suitable for use with a small network or as a secondary unit for a larger network. One application that I would think of for these units would be as a DLNA media server for a small-business network that has a dedicated server computer running something like Windows Server or a Linux business server build for company data. This unit would, as outlined in "DLNA and UPnP AV in the business[4]", hold media like pictures or videos to show using DLNA-capable TVs and electronic picture frames as part of the business's visual merchandising strategy without putting business-critical data at risk.

Links

- [1] <http://www.zdnet.com/blog/gadgetreviews/seagate-introduces-goflex-home-for-household-network-storage/16571>
- [2] http://www.seagate.com/www/en-us/products/network_storage/home-network-storage
- [3] <http://www.seagate.com/ww/v/index.jsp?locale=en-US&name=go-flex-home-debuts-centralized-storage-pr&vgnnextoid=01b6c6ad70dd9210VgnVCM1000001a48090aRCRD>
- [4] /2009/07/dlna-and-upnp-av-in-the-business/#utm_source=feed&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=feed

Impact of next-generation broadband on regular broadband service

03/08/2010 13:58

La montée en débit des réseaux ADSL se précise - DegroupNews.com (France - French language)[1]

My comments on this article

From my understanding of this French-language article, there had been some reports that the performance of "regular" ADSL broadband service (including the triple-play services) in areas where FTTH next-generation broadband service had been rolled out.

But there are some main factors that could lead to this.

One is that the "early-adopter" technology enthusiasts who would make most use of the Internet would have shifted to next-generation broadband as soon as the technology is available. This would apparently "free-up" the load on the

regular broadband services for most people who may be doubting the need to shift to next-generation broadband.

Another is that the backbones that bring the data to the broadband-service networks, both the next-generation variety and the regular variety would have to be upscaled to cater for increased data traffic caused by the next-generation networks. This would then lead to increased performance for the Internet services.

But the main reason is due to capital improvements on the existing telephone network that have been taking place in order to increase the possible bandwidth available at the customer's door. This has mainly been through revising the telephony-system architecture and eliminating aging and derelict infrastructure in order to improve the performance of ADSL-based Internet services

As I have observed with the UK and France, once you have serious commercial and government interest in developing a nation's telecommunications infrastructure, such as through implementing fibre-optic-based next-generation broadband, there is a strong likelihood that the quality of the nation's Internet service will improve. This can only happen with real competition in the telecommunications sector and a government that is behind real telecommunications improvement.

Links

[1]

http://www.degrouppnews.com/actualite/n5046-adsl-haut_debit-reseau-amenagement-ftth.html?xtor=RSS-1
