The *eCitizen* Club

A citizen-driven model for advancing best practices in ICT deployment and utilization

Document Summary

This document discusses a potential solution for identifying and advancing best practices in deployment and utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT), within local, national and international footprints. The model builds on key historical insights, as well as a convenient and familiar historical precedent: The auto club.

Learning from the Past

The unfolding revolution in ICT is the latest of five technological revolutions that have disrupted and transformed societies and economies over the last two centuries[1]. The histories of earlier revolutions offer useful insights into the present and future of the ICT Revolution, enabling us to craft more effective strategies for deployment and application of this powerful technology.

The ICT Revolution commenced in earnest in 1971, with mass production of cheap, transistorized electronic microcircuits (chips). Before this came a revolution in transportation technology, commencing in the early 1900s with mass production of automobiles. Three other revolutions had unfolded before this, beginning with the mechanization of industry (the Industrial Revolution) in the 1770s. The Age of Steam and Railways commenced in the late 1820s, and the Age of Steel, Electricity and Heavy Engineering in the 1870s. Together, these earlier revolutions defined the Industrial Age.

The social and economic impacts of technology are best understood by examining *who* a technology has empowered, and how. This immediately reveals an important similarity between the two most recent revolutions, and a fundamental difference from earlier revolutions. Both the Auto and ICT Revolutions have greatly empowered the masses, whereas Industrial Age revolutions principally empowered a relatively small group of industrialists.

Personal automobiles are now ubiquitous in developed nations, and increasingly abundant throughout the developing world. Over 90% of Canadian households possess at least one automobile, and there are more registered automobiles than licensed drivers. This technology is enormously popular because it is relatively affordable and very empowering. Most people are embracing modern information and communication technologies for the exact same reasons, especially people born after 1970 who have more or less grown up with these technologies.

Just as they did with automobiles, societies are now struggling with the challenge of putting ICT to safe and constructive use. Responsibility for meeting this challenge is commensurate with degree of empowerment, meaning that people who benefit the most from ICT – citizens – should bear the greatest responsibility. Fortunately, among the countless legacies of the Automobile Revolution, we find a convenient and familiar precedent to build upon.

Driving Best Practices in ICT: The Auto Club as a Starting Point

A century ago, nascent automobile industries stood poised to revolutionize transportation and completely disrupt a longstanding status quo. Having proven to be a considerable nuisance in the hands of irresponsible operators, automobiles had already become the subject of consternation and regulation. Even before the turn of the 20th century, major cities were imposing speed limits and other regulations in an effort to mitigate the social and economic cost of early motoring.

[1] Perez, Carlota (2002), *Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital: The Dynamics of Bubbles and Golden Ages*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA USA: Edward Elgar.

Larger cities had the highest concentrations of drivable roads, and this is where motorists converged. They soon began organizing into local member-based auto clubs to share a common passion for motoring, and to pursue common needs and interests:

- ***More and better roads, access and services.***
- ***Better automobiles, regulations and (most importantly) operating practices.***

The Toronto Automobile Club was the first motor association in Canada. The club formed in 1900, and immediately began lobbying the Ontario government to raise urban speed limits from 8 mph to 10 mph. More clubs soon emerged in Hamilton, Ottawa and Kingston, and all of the Ontario clubs banded together in 1907 to become Canada's first provincial motor association, the Ontario Motor League. Local clubs were emerging in other provinces, and twelve clubs from across the country collaborated to form the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) in 1913.

National auto clubs are now among the largest organizations in the world. In Canada, the CAA represents over 5 million individual members by way of the nine regional member clubs that control the CAA and collectively operate 148 offices across the country under the CAA banner. Along with clubs in over 100 other nations, the CAA is a member of the Alliance Internationale de Tourisme. This organization enables greater access to roads, services and information for club members traveling internationally.

Almost 800,000 people in British Columbia and the Yukon are members of the B.C. Automobile Association, and over 900,000 Albertans are members of the Alberta Motor Association. Individually and collectively, through their strength in numbers, these organizations have helped to stimulate and support some of the most important developments in Canadian transportation since the turn of the 20th century. These include development of the road systems that connect Canadian communities to each other, and to the air, sea and border ports connecting Canada with the rest of the world.

ICT users across Canada and around the world share the following needs and interests:

- ***More and better networks, access and services.***
- ***Better devices, regulations, and operating practices[2].***

For obvious reasons, the auto club model seems a practical starting point for an organized approach to fulfilling these needs and interests.

The *eCitizen* Club: A Draft Outline

An automobile user is commonly called a driver or motorist. An ICT user isn't commonly called anything (yet), but for the purpose at hand let's call them an *eCitizen*.[3] Another potential name is *iCitizen* (sounds like an ancient Roman) or perhaps *Internaut* (perhaps a bit too techie).

What are best practices in deployment and utilization of ICT, and how can we best support and advance them? These questions define the ideal context for building and operating an organization to support eCitizens and society at large in recognizing and exploiting the constructive personal, social and economic utility of ICT.

To be most effectiveness in identifying, supporting and advancing best practices, an organization must be member-based with a membership comprised of eCitizens from the broadest possible range of backgrounds. Such an organization can best maintain relevance, legitimacy and effectiveness as the breadth and depth of ICT use expands.

[2] Better operating practices are obviously more critical for motorists than for ICT users, but hacking, identity theft, cyber-bullying and a host of other social issues point to a need for better ICT user practices.
[3] 'e' is an acronym for *electronic*. A competition might turn up more suitable names than *eCitizen*.

Basic Principles

Members People interested in using ICT for benefit of self and society (eCitizens).

Mission Support club members in using ICT for benefit of self and society.

Vision Club as a local/regional/national leader in economic/societal development.

Values

Inclusive	(open to anyone)
Independent	(no industry or political affiliations)
Not-for-profit	(no shareholders)
Democratic	(one member, one vote)
Transparent	(no secrets)
Reasonable	(pragmatic vs. dogmatic)
Strategic	(creative, forward-looking)
Responsible	(socially, environmentally)

Member Services: Where the Rubber Meets the Road

To attract and retain members, an eCitizen club would need to deliver relevant, effective and affordable services to its members. Strong parallels between motorist and eCitizen needs and interests suggest that reviewing auto club business models would be a practical place to start in crafting a business model for an eCitizen club.

The table below summarizes the core services provided by auto clubs, and analogous services that could be provided by an eCitizen club. Based on immediate needs and interests, a particular club could develop a few of the most relevant services as a core on which to build, and add services as it grows.

Across Canada and in many other nations, better networks, better regulations and better (e.g., more affordable) services are most likely to be the rallying interests for clubs. It therefore seems certain that local, regional, national and international clubs would grow in tandem.

Auto Club Member Services	Potential eCitizen Club Services
Research, Education & Advocacy	
• Rights and protections for motorists	• Rights and protections for eCitizens
• Expanding and improving road and highway networks	• Expanding and improving broadband telecommunication networks
• Improving roadway access & operation	• Improving network access & operation
• Improving the safety, utility and energy efficiency of automobiles	• Improving the safety, utility and energy efficiency of ICT
• Operating and maintaining automobiles	• Operating and maintaining ICT
• Protecting your automobile	• Protecting your ICT
• Protecting your identity	• Protecting your identity
• Buying, selling & leasing automobiles	• Buying, selling & leasing ICT
• Recycling & disposing of automobiles	• Recycling & disposing of ICT
• Understanding automobile technology	• Understanding ICT
• Understanding fuel pricing	• Understanding power pricing
• Adopting alternative (renewable) fuels	• Adopting alternative (renewable) power
• Regional road reports	• Regional network reports
• Warnings and advice for int'l travel	• Warnings and advice for int'l travel
• Preferred travel destinations	• Preferred web resources
• Preferred vendors ('CAA approved')	• Preferred vendors ('eCitizen approved')
• Guidance for seniors and the disabled	• Guidance for seniors and the disabled
Training, Testing, Licensing & Assistance	
• Training, testing and licensing of automobile operators	• Training, testing and accreditation of ICT operators
• Testing and certification of automobile	• Testing and certification of ICT

roadworthiness • Roadside motorist assistance • Dangerous driver rehabilitation	taskworthiness • On-site eCitizen assistance • Cyber-pirate/-hacker/-bully rehab.
Insurance & Other Services • Insurance for autos and businesses • Affinity programs (CAA card) • Loyalty programs (CAA dollars)	 • Insurance for ICT and eBusinesses • Affinity programs (eCitizen card) • Loyalty programs (eCitizen dollars)

Conclusion

Modern ICT is transforming economies and societies around the globe. Careful strategizing and planning, based on what we have learned from the past, could help ease the detrimental effects of the social and economic disruption that accompanies technological revolution.

The eCitizen Club is a proposed solution to this challenge, building on what we can learn from over a century's worth of history and experience with the Automobile Revolution. If anyone reading the document is interested to explore this opportunity, please contact me at the coordinates below.

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