Internet In Russia Essay, Research Paper

Russia has always been a country full of contradictions, as it was said once in a movie: ?They weep when getting married, and sing going off to war.? Large cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, are showing off the latest models of executive cars (always full option) and open up new boutiques of top couturiers almost daily. Nevertheless as soon as one gets outside the urban area, running water is considered a luxury.

Technology as a whole was never Russia?s strongest asset. This means that some technological advances considered a ?must-have? in the west are still ignored in this country. For example, the quality of agricultural machinery is almost at the pre-historic level. While at the same time the range of household technological supplies is greater and more advanced than in most European countries. It is only what is heeded prosperous to have, that is being developed and spent money on.

Computers were known as ?a tool for the wizard? for quiet some time in Russia. University students used typewriters for their papers up to 1996 at least. Even nowadays, lots of government organisations and some students still don?t use computers for the paperwork. Internet was literally unheard of in the masses until around 1995. I find it ironic that one of the first and most scandalous hacker incidents happened in Russia. In the early nineties a young man from St. Petersburg broke into a Swiss bank computer system. The crook ended up messing with millions of dollars. When the incident went public, the people didn?t understand the concept of online communication or Internet services, the only thing that was talked about was the dollar amount that could have been stolen.

The first spread of Internet use among the non-scientific population was for commercial purposes. It is when russian entrepreneurs understood the importance of communication and publicity, especially towards the west, that Internet providers found a source of income in Russia. As in most fields of technological advances, after the first push the wheel of demand instantaneously gains its speed. In the span of three years 86% of non-government organisations based in large cities had a web page.

Even though the above seems to show an immense change, there is still a boundary between Russia and the rest of the world, even on the web. There is such a thing as a ?Russian Internet?; most russian users don?t go beyond that. The most obvious reason is a language barrier, as well as the letter difference. Unfortunately these are not the only reasons for the lack of interest towards the ?foreign Internet?; since Russia is an enormously large country, most of its inhabitants feel that it is the whole world. Most of these people will never have the chance to go anywhere outside of Russia, so they show ignorance towards the life and events outside of it.

In order to be able to surf on the Russian Internet and be able to take advantage of all the information offered, one has to have a bilingual keyboard; with both Russian and Latin alphabets. The names of the sites are using Latin letters, that is the requirement to get on the World Wide Web. The information is usually in Russian. This causes a problem, because if one doesn?t have a special translating system installed, the russian letters turn into chaotic symbols and it is impossible to have access to the information on this site. Some sites are getting a double version, for both Russian and English-speaking users; they are the ones that are aimed at the west.

Anyone who has ever gone on the Internet has used such browsers as ?Yahoo? or ?AltaVista?, they obviously help one to get around the net and find relevant information. There are Russian equivalents of these search engines, based on the same system of usage. The first Russian Web Directory was ?Russia On The Net?, it still exists, but it is rarely used, since more advanced systems have been developed. The most well known browser is ?Aport 2000?. The reason for its popularity is the automatic translation of foreign sites into Russian, as well as the automatic compatibility to any computer system. Another reason is the ability for the user to type in the information in English and get the feedback in Russian. ?Aport 2000? is giving Russian users the ability to surf on the ?foreign internet? and overcome the language barrier, unfortunately a user that is not familiar with the Russian language is unable to use this particular system.

Other famous Russian search engines are ?Yandex?, often used because the looked for words are highlighted in red, ?Rambler?, ?AU?, ?Deol WebGuide?, ?City Line?; and a special web directory for visitors of the country called ?Russia for Visitors?.

Internet is used not only for information retrieval, but also for leisure and communication purposes. Chatrooms are as famous among Russian users, as they are in the rest of the world. For the same old reason, as a language barrier, Russian people prefer to go to Russian chatrooms. The most used ones are: ?Chatpage?, ?Bessedki? and ?KPOBATKA?. You find people using both Russian and Latin letters to spell russian words, depending on their keyboard capacity.

In the past year great advances in the Internet have happened in Russia. Today almost all of the famous bands and singers have a website, where the fans can enjoy their latest albums and singles. The bands attach a personal note to the users, explaining that it?s obvious that these songs are going to be copied to the MP3?s. The users are asked to make a donation of $ 0.20 per song to the band, so that it would be possible for the singers to continue making music and have new releases. The example of such a band is ?Mummy Troll?. I know from personal experience that there are young people who make these donations, so the notes are not made for nothing.

There has been a growing amount of privately owned newspapers in Russia since 1992. Most of them can?t afford to put all of their articles on their WebPages. Some of them don?t even have WebPages. Nevertheless there are Internet magazines that get updated every day, that feature the most relevant articles from numerous newspapers. One example of such magazine is ?Meranga?. It features not only newspaper articles, but also online radio shows and news, the top 20 of the Russian Pop music, etc. Newspapers owned by large companies, or the ones supporting a powerful political group have the capacity to put all of their article on their sites, such as the newspaper ?KOMEPCAHT?.

Until approximately two years ago, television and radio shows used a pager to get feedback from their viewers and listeners. The first television show to get an Online Internet Service was ?MTV?, in Russia it is a show, not a channel like in Europe; even though it is the same corporation. Unfortunately very few people use this service, most prefer to use the telephone and sent a message through the pager service.

Another famous Internet Online service is for the channel ?NTV? for the programme ?Segodniachko?. It is the programme that deals with recent events on a personal level; the literate translation is ?Todayko?, which comes from the word ?today?, and that is the way one can find it on the web. This particular Online Service has a great importance to the Russian people all over the world. There are only two Russian television channels that can be watched all over the world ?OPT? and ?NTV?. It is often the only connection for lots of Russian people who are living outside of the country with the opinions and events in Russia. For the people living in foreign countries it is easier and cheaper to use the Internet, while for the people in Russia it is easier and cheaper to use the phone. Since both services are available, people can communicate and exchange opinions across the continents. The reason for me being so supportive of this particular service, is that I took part in the discussions when important and disturbing events happened in my country: i.e. The war in Chechnya, the president elections; and I felt closer to my country because of it.

Russia is in the beginning stage of the capitalistic economy, which means that there is no monopolisation of the market. There isn?t an equivalent of UUNET as in Belgium, or America On Line. When I looked up the Internet Service Providers in Russia on the web, it gave me a list of six pages long with 188 names. The reason for so many is because Russia isn?t very centralised, and people prefer to invest or pay to someone who is geographically closer. For example people in Kamchatka, which is the eastern side of Russia would feel very uncomfortable to transfer their money to someone in Moscow, which is more than 10,000 km away. If they had a problem with the Internet connection it would be costly and almost impossible to reach them by phone. The problem from the side of the provider, is that to base an office in every region in Russia is too costly. The most widespread provider in Russia is INSAR. In Moscow there are more than a few, the most used ones are CityLine Ltd., Matrex, Elvis telecom, Demos. These providers service the whole city and a few regions close to Moscow. There are also providers that service specific districts in Moscow; an example of such is Ramenskoye Internet Service Provider. Examples of Internet Service Providers in the rest of Russia are: PO ?Sibiteks? which works around Siberia, KamchatSvyazinform WWW which services Kamchatka, ISP in Kingisepp Leningrad region which services St. Petersburg region, Nizhniy Novgorod Information Networks which services the city of Nizhniy Novgorod, etc.

Most of the universities in Moscow and other big cities are involved in the foreign exchange programmes. This makes a WebPages a necessity. Some universities offer an english version, while some leave it to the reader to translate the information. Moscow State University has an English and a Russian WebPages with detailed information about the history of the university, the teaching professors, as well as information about the campus and the living arrangements. Other examples of such west orientated universities are: Plechanovskiy Academy, Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, Moscow Economics State Institute, etc.

Even though most of the modern students are familiar with the Internet, universities still can?t afford to provide free usage of computers connected to the web. There is no such thing as a ?computer room? like in Vesalius, where students can research and keep up with current events through the web. The reason for that is the fact that in Russia users have to pay $ 0.12 per Kb for every page they read on the World Wide Web. This is considered unaffordable since most universities are officially free, and an average salary is 4,000 rubbles, which is approximately $ 135. For the same reason Internet is still accessible to the privileged only, and of course scientific workers.

Government organisations don?t give any information that would be available to the citizens on the web. Every district has a central office, called ?Zhek? a left-over from the communist way of life, which deals with electricity, renovation, pension incomes and other civil aspects of every day life. I had to deal with the structure and regulations of the above organisation recently, since I was formalising the ownership of my apartment. Only in the central district ?Zheks? they use computers to fill in the forms, while in others they are all done by hand. Internet is unheard of, unused and this innovation isn?t planned for the nearest future.

This is the case with all government civil organisations: schools, hospitals, post offices. The ones closer to the upper levels of the government, the FSB, the quarters of the Duma, the White House are obviously using high technology for their work, unfortunately none of it is available for the average public. There are two reasons for this, which are interconnected. The first one is the fact that average Russian citizen, let alone a pensioner, doesn?t have the means to use the Internet nor the knowledge, so it is easier to use the telephone. The above average Russian citizen doesn?t use government services. He or she would go to a private hospital, send the children to a private school and have the lawyers deal with the rest. All of the mentioned above privately owned organisations have a WebPages and do give information on the Internet. The second reason is, the official charges for government services are extremely low. An example of such is: the cost of having a ≈200 msq. Apartment incl. water, gas, electricity, telephone (which is still an abonnent cost basis charge of 45 rubbles, or $ 1.5 per month and one can call unlimited amount of times and hours in Moscow, if one calls outside the charge is per minute but also at an unsubstantial price) and tax is ≈900 rubbles, which is approximately $ 30. War veterans and households with more than three children pay only 15% of the cost. There are also other permissions for invalids and pensioners. The money paid officially is not sufficient to make use of the Internet, which is paid by WebPages Kb since the telephone connection is extremely cheap.

There is another side to government services being so cheap, they are scarce. The way it?s connected to Internet usage is the following. There is a law that unless the premises are registered for use for a company based for trade or other related purposes not more than one telephone line is allowed. Some new-based districts on the outskirts of Moscow are still waiting for the telephone lines to be installed. Mobile phones, which could also be used as a connection to the Internet, are also strongly regulated. There is a law that mobile telephone usage for private purposes isn?t allowed. Which means that a household can?t have one, only a company or a firm can. Selling and buying isn?t controlled, but if one is stopped by the police, which is almost inevitable since the explosions in September ?99, and there is no official permission for the mobile phone, it is confiscated.

In my attempt to write about the spread of the Internet in Russia I cannot come to a fair closing without mentioning the RUSLANet project. It is based and carried out by the St. Petersburg State Technical University. The project is a future library system for the Northwest of Russia, so that libraries in these regions can have access to and from the world wide information resources. It was started two years ago, and involves careful planning, sponsor searching, lots of PR skills, as well as computer science knowledge. Today the project is at the following stage: the OPAC (which supports multi user access for any access level simultaneously) has been realised, fulltext databases, hierarchy of WBs, WWW server, search means for Internet clients. This is only the first step in the whole project.

The second phase is about the development of practical interlibrary communications and dispersal of the developed and creates greater availability of the service to numerous libraries in the region. This project is going to bring incredible advantages to the scholars of that region. The boundaries of access are going to step back if not disappear all together. This project is going to allow libraries to go on the net without Internet direct connection. Which is going to be done through the master server. The RUSLANet project is going to eliminate some of the difficulties I have mentioned before in this paper. This network is going to allow Internet to be used not only for entertainment or commercial purposes, but for educational purposes too, like it is being used in the west.

Even though Russia doesn?t use all of the advantages of the web, the country is known for its? speedy decisions and changes. We were struggling for almost seventy-five years and look, our kids are also eating Kellogg?s Corn Flakes for breakfast, just like in the west. Who knows, maybe give us another seventy-five years and we can order pizza through the Internet, just like in the west. Unfortunately the majority of the population falls into the average category, so the government has to look out for them. Now with the new economical programmes, may be Russia will be able to finally get out of the poverty. With the rise of the general living standards, there will also be a rise in modern technology usage. Maybe that will be the time when Internet users will prefer to use a Russian web browser, because it is more advanced, and will base their email on the Russian net, who knows?

Works Cited .

www.aport.ru

?AIF Liubov??. Moscow, 2000: vol. 3: pg. 9.

www.mumiitroll.ru

www.gorussia.about.com

Plemnek A., Sokolova N., ?RUSLAnet ? a New Generation Library System Project in Russia?, The Electronic Library, Vol.14, No. 4, August 1996.

Plemnek A, ?Current and Perspective Tasks of the Open Library Systems Center?, Transactions of SPSTU, No. 1, 1996.

www.au.ru

.

www.aport.ru

?AIF Liubov??. Moscow, 2000: vol. 3: pg. 9.

www.mumiitroll.ru

www.gorussia.about.com

Plemnek A., Sokolova N., ?RUSLAnet ? a New Generation Library System Project in Russia?, The Electronic Library, Vol.14, No. 4, August 1996.

Plemnek A, ?Current and Perspective Tasks of the Open Library Systems Center?, Transactions of SPSTU, No. 1, 1996.

www.au.ru