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THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE INTERNET ADDRESS



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Everyone seemed to be excited over the boom of e-commerce at one point of time or another. Even though the dot com bubble has passed, it only brought many of us to realize how serious the world is about going into the age of e-commerce. Despite global economic downturn, countries are spending more money to equip themselves for the information age that has already started.

It's almost regarded as the absolute truth that the most important aspect for a country's e-commerce to blossom is the networking infrastructure such as broadband connections available for the public. Another would be the PC distribution rate among the people as well as the content development.

However if we examine the development of e-commerce very closely, there is an interesting aspect to discover. That is the influence the Internet Address has on the development of e-commerce.

What is Internet Address? An Internet address is a distinctive and unique cyber address of a website/computer. In cyberspace all commercial activities and transactions take place at the websites and companies spend millions of dollars to build and refine their websites to promote greater commercial activities from the visitors of their websites.

Originally Internet was not meant for public or for any commercial activity. It was built solely for the military use and scientific research. Back then, people needed not memorize the Internet addresses so it was all expressed by IP addresses. However, once the Internet was introduced to a mass public, things became different. It was now opened for anyone with a connection to the Net and people started to communicating with one another in cyberspace.

IP addresses were not meant to meet such a demand since it was a mere machine's way of finding one another. Domain names were introduced to fulfill that demand and soon the use of Internet was spread out massively. People now could easily find their desired websites by using the domain names. It was such a break through.

As the use of Internet extended internationally, people from non-English speaking countries started to get involved heavily with the number of Internet users outside North America growing at almost exponential rate.

Soon, domain name has been put into a question since it was only possible to have Internet addresses in English. Some argued that since the world is being globalized as years go by, it is only natural to use English which is considered as the medium of the world's communication. But this argument clearly misses the point that more than about 70% of the world's population do not use English as their mother-tongue language.

Linguistic issues are not some stuff to be taken lightly especially when dealing with something related to daily activities of the people. Since it's never possible to perfectly translate one language to another, being have to tune into a totally different way of thinking process and nuance is almost impossible or at best, will take a very long time.

For an instance, many Asian countries starts from bigger place to smaller place when writing their physical address (e.g.: country, province, city, etc.) while English speaking countries go from smaller place to bigger ones. (e.g.: apartment number, street name, county, city, etc.) Ambiguity of pronunciation can also create a huge confusion. (e.g.: a popular Korean brand, Kia, can be also expressed as "Gia" because that particular Korean word's pronunciation is never exactly a "K" or a "G".

Korea is globally known to be a fast runner in IT industry. It has a great network infrastructure developed and placed during early stages. The rate of broadband and PC distribution among the public is claimed to be one of the highest in the world. Even though U.S. is where the Internet was started, the broadband user rate and PC distribution rate is known to be lower than Korea. Even so, Americans are the most active consumers in cyberspace while Korea still has a long way to catch up the U.S.

Why is that so? I strongly believe it has something to do with English Internet Address system. Economy 101 says the first thing required for any economic/commercial activity to take place is the interaction between buyers and sellers. Easier, simpler and more convenient it is for buyers to approach the sellers, greater the business would become. That is where the problem lies. Current English domain name system limits people and their e-commerce activities. Many are singing about the "User-Friendliness" and yet the very fundamental of being user-friendly is not happening yet.

Another easy way to elaborate would be comparing Internet addresses to the road signs on the Information Highway. Great efforts are put into building sophisticated network infrastructure in developing countries under the object of helping them overcome the digital divide against the English-speaking countries. Great and rich contents in local languages are also compiled and uploaded on the local websites all with the purpose of helping the locals to catch up on the information age and equip them for the real competition. However, what good all these would be if the road signs directing to these great places and destinations are all in English which may only be good for a handful of elites? What would be more wasteful than the most advanced and latest highway if people do not use it? Even more so, if this is caused by the complex and difficult road signs. Eventually this will only help the already developed and information-rich countries because they now have greater access into the local information of developing countries, all thanks to the road signs in English. In other words, neglecting the importance of Internet address will result in a situation which may oppose the original intention of overcoming the Digital Divide.

So, it is obvious for us to believe that having an Internet address in one's native language would be the natural consequence of development. The new generation of Internet address must be able to encompass the real needs of non-English speaking people. It must be simple, reliable, straight-forward and be free of delimitations. It should not be dependant on any specific OS or browser type. Just like the current DNS system, it must be able to operate regardless of OS, browser or application type.

An old Thai lady looking for her son's website by simply typing his name in Thai. A Japanese kindergarten boy connects to his favorite toyshop website by typing the shop's name in Japanese. A Lebanese girl studying in Russia types her boyfriends website address in Arabic. These are not some dream but rather it is the direction we should head as an international community. Because the significance of Native Language Internet Address is not just providing more convenient service to people. The unseen significance is that it will work as the catalyst for great e-commerce activity, it will cause the non-English people to participate in accessing information, and it will help them overcome the gap with developed, English speaking countries together with other development. This will eventually result in building a nation's true IT strength.