



NetPoints Limited rc:410059

Electricity and the internet: two markets, one big opportunity!

The markets for rural energy access and internet connectivity are ripe for disruption – and increasingly, we’re seeing benefit from combining the offerings. Today, new business models are emerging, breaking market barriers to jointly provide energy access and broadband connectivity to consumers.

As highlighted in our business model, access to internet has the potential to boost growth, expand economic opportunities, and improve service delivery. The digital economy is growing at 10% a year—significantly faster than the global economy as a whole. Growth in the digital economy is even higher in developing markets: 15 to 25% per year .

To make sure everyone benefits, Access Devices and coverage needs to be extended to the roughly four billion people that still lack access to the internet. In our prototype, NetPoints has recently tested its products (Industrial Panel PCs, energy efficient low energy PCs that could be delivered by Solar with out any excess energy consumption) to provide internet to remote populations.

But as cool as our solution might sound, these innovations do nothing for the one billion people who still live off the grid... and don’t have access to the electricity you need to use the internet in the first place! The findings of the *Internet Inclusion strategy* is put this nicely: “without electricity, internet is only a black hole”.

That’s why efforts to expand electricity and broadband access should go hand in hand: close coordination between the energy and ICT sectors is probably one of the most efficient and sensible ways of making sure rural populations in low-income countries can reap the benefits of digital development. This thinking is also reflected in a new generation of disruptive ICT infrastructure projects.

The challenge? People who lack both electricity and internet are often overlooked by traditional operators because they are typically considered either too remote or too poor. Several smaller players are now stepping in to serve these neglected segments of the market and challenge the way internet and electricity are delivered.

In rural Africa, some of these innovative service providers are working to increase INTERNET Penetration by combining solar panels with energy efficient Industrial PCs to provide internet connectivity. In the same vein, We just recently tested our grant winning Solar Powered Internet Kiosk developed with a 24hour Computer access points/ WiFi access points too that can be powered with small solar systems. Using a different model, we plan to offer a new type of Computer based installation, a change in technology that reduces the electricity requirement. For remote communities, bundling a public Computer access point with a solar and battery mini-grid is another affordable option.

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In addition to offering electricity in a new way, Distributed Energy Service Companies (DESCOs) should start bundling pay-as-you-go solar electricity and mobile or wifi services. For example, we have partnered with 9Mobile Networks, one of Africa's largest mobile telecommunications company, to integrate GSM, mobile money systems and financial platforms that allow customers to rent-to-own solar home systems, APPLIANCES and pay for electricity through mobile phones.

One of them is competing policy objectives. In Nigeria, for instance, energy availability in rural areas is lower than connectivity, therefore energy and broadband providers may want to prioritize different areas when looking to expand their services. Our team will play an important role here, disseminating good practices, policy advice, and market analytics.

Better harmonization between internet providers and power companies will go a long way in addressing the rising demand for high-speed internet and reliable electricity. With support from Investors, our team is working with ICT and energy experts across our network to support our disruptive business models, including most importantly those that bundle energy and internet access.

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