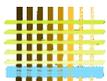


Economic Revitalisation: A NextGen Perspective

Written by David Brunnen for NextGen
Monday, 10 December 2012 08:56

The fabric of the economy is a complex weave.



We are all familiar with the great Silos of State - health, education, energy and many more.

Nationally we departmentalize them; they are reflected in regional and local administrations. Market analysts, regulatory watchdogs and the media report on their every move. The familiar 'silos of state' are here represented by vertical lines and serving them all are the essential utilities of roads, energy, water and now digital connectivity.

There is no shortage of top-down initiatives to restore UK growth and development. Lord Heseltine's report ('No Stone Unturned'), Local Enterprise Partnerships, Super-connected Cities, 'Sub-National Economic Regeneration', Smart Communities – the active encouragement of localism by all national governments is not a new idea.

What is evident in the complexity of managing our cities is equally applicable in smaller towns and rural communities. Whenever they reach out for technological solutions – demanding, for example, better connectivity or smarter metering – it soon becomes apparent that simply including the local digital networks as an essential part of infrastructure is not enough.

Applied Digital Infrastructure

Studies of advanced cities and communities around the world show at least five strands of '*applied* digital infrastructure'. The essential connectivity layer enables active programmes in each of these five strands. If the strands are pulled together they add prosperity across every aspect of the way places and their communities work.

In the work of revitalizing economic growth all of these locally managed strands must be

championed to exploit the underlying digital infrastructure. Places that that prosper have projects in all of these arenas.

1. **Open Data** is most obviously evident in new mapping capabilities – exposing, to everyone, the anatomy of the place – and when this combines both public and commercial data sources the scope for smarter decisions is hugely increased. Central government has long understood the thirst for easier access to public data and now the corporate sector is beginning to appreciate the value of openness and collaboration. The Ordnance Survey has not been slow to promote tools for better mapping – and we gain much by easier and more-accurate visualization of ‘the state we are in’.

2. **Expertise** – increasing the local availability of skills and talents for employment is another critical factor in inward investment and boosting business prospects. This is not just about training clever clogs with computers. Digital connectivity has an impact on training and education across all sectors and from a local perspective it is the work of FE Colleges and companies like Pearson that contribute most to the challenges of matching employment opportunities to available skills.

3. **Innovation** – understanding and promoting the local *capacity* for innovation is not the preserve of a few R&D spin-outs or the Local Enterprise Partnership. Local acceptance and encouragement of innovation – a willingness to embrace change – is a hallmark of a smarter community. Innovation is often a series of small steps and most of these will look like the removal of some small everyday hassle or inconvenience – and that removal is possibly the greatest beneficial byproduct of the digital economy.

4. **Inclusion** – Digital Inclusion programmes are best delivered by local people for local people and the need is huge. We have far too many communities where people (and enterprises) are disconnected, disengaged and disadvantaged and the ‘Digital by Default’ plans for public services will highlight these gaps. The general theme, however, applies equally well to all aspects of participation in the life and work of the community, and the role of employers in encouraging engagement should not be overlooked.

5. **Advocacy** – the fifth and final essential strand is perhaps the least understood but is the most powerful force in promoting and marketing a local identity. A thriving local economy attracts inward investment. It retains its children. It gains sporting success. It provides a flag to wave in international markets. It needs the same marketing professionalism that might be

Economic Revitalisation: A NextGen Perspective

Written by David Brunnen for NextGen
Monday, 10 December 2012 08:56

devoted to some major brand and should use the full range of digital media channels.

Going beyond broadband - these five are the essential strands that must be championed if local investment in utility connectivity is going to translate into economic growth and societal development. These five strands will also inform the design requirements for local access networks and the way they are managed.



Throughout 2013 our NextGen exhibitors and speakers will be asked to reach beyond the challenges of utility digital infrastructure investment – itself the largest national engineering effort since the switchover to AC electricity and address the issues of ‘*Applied Digital Infrastructure*’ – for all cities, regions and rural communities adapting to the opportunities of a digital economy.

Notes:

This paper is informed by:

1. NextGen12 session ‘The Rise of Intelligent Cities’ (Alan Mayo, Raj Mack and Michael Mulquin): <http://www.nextgenevents.co.uk/events/nextgen-12/agenda>
2. ICF publication, ‘Seizing Our Destiny’: <http://www.groupe-intellex.com/editorials/18-gi-global/383-seizing-our-destiny.html>

For more information contact Marit Hendriks or Andrew Macdonald via NG Events Ltd: <http://www.nextgenevents.co.uk>

Economic Revitalisation: A NextGen Perspective

Written by David Brunnen for NextGen
Monday, 10 December 2012 08:56
