

## Growth of Innovative Applications: Objectives - Keys for the Achievement of Digital Convergence



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It is unfortunately true that Greece has delayed tragically in understanding the importance of Broadband Services and in following the course of European and global developments in this sector. However, in recent years, our country has been following a clear-cut strategy for Digital Convergence which has resulted in significant progress: Not only does Broadband penetration currently exceed 10% (in comparison with a mere 0.1% reached in 2004) but Greece has also been ranked as the country with the highest yearly increase rate in Broadband connections worldwide.

However, although they are indispensable requisites, the creation of infrastructures and the increase in connections do not suffice for the purposes of fully exploiting Broadband capabilities.

The content needs to be developed too by offering services which will transform the advantages of new networks into actual benefits for users.

At present, there is a vast field of applications encompassing every aspect of financial and social activity. Other countries have already developed innovative services, such as interactive information, tele-education, tele-medicine, e-entertainment, as well as e-business applications, with e-commerce and on-line banking and financial services.

Needless to say, there are unlimited possibilities offered on the level of public administration services where the use of new technologies allows higher speed, transparency and lower cost to citizens and businesses.

In Greece, TAXISnet presently enables thousands of citizens to electronically submit their tax statements. Moreover, in recent years, the number of statements submitted through TAXISnet has increased at a higher rate than the number of regular Internet users:

Such an increase confirms the fact that offering an electronic financial service becomes a means towards increasing Internet penetration.

The development of the content, along with the infrastructures, constitutes the most critical point in the effort to exploit information and communication technologies:

The more useful Broadband Internet becomes for citizens and businesses, the greater is the demand for new connections; the more innovative so-



lutions and possibilities are offered in the daily activity of citizens and businesses, the greater the interest is in new connections.

Consequently, the question that arises is: What should be done in our country so that the enhancement of Broadband content and the provision of more innovative services will be facilitated?

Digital Services offered to citizens by the state are not enough. There is a need for the creation of a new, dynamic market of services through mobilization of the private sector within an environment which favors new investments and, mainly, by implementing new ideas.

It is particularly encouraging that the Digital Strategy currently implemented by the Government comprises several

elements (data, facts) which steer it in the right direction. Moreover, it is expected with particular interest the implementation of the strategy by the Ministry of Transport and Communications for the creation of fiber optic networks which will reach the end-users in large urban centers; as well as the use of wireless Broadband Networks will reach the end-users in remote areas.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of all of the above actions will prove to be limited unless a complete and clear-cut legislative framework governing the telecommunications market is also formulated in our country.

This legislative framework should be characterized by real competition and the presence of crystal-clear rules that

will leave no margin for any form of privileged utilization, arbitrariness, or lack of transparency.

The completion and modernization of our institutional framework, aligned with the European Union directives is necessary for the creation of a healthy and dynamic market of Broadband content.

At present, the development of innovative Internet services constitutes one of the main prerequisites for the real convergence in our country with the rest of the modern world.

The more promptly we act in implementing this need and, mainly, the more effectively we move in that direction, the greater the benefit for the market, the users, our economy, and our quality of life will be.