



“G4 versus G8”

by Maurice Lévy, Chairman & CEO of Publicis Groupe and Chairman of the e-G8 Forum

“Is Sarkozy plotting to kill the free Internet?”

This is what a blogger wrote, on hearing about the e-G8 Forum which will take place just before the G8 meeting in Deauville. He added: “I can’t help but be concerned by what the summit might mean, given it’s essentially a closed shop of governments and corporations discussing how to best carve up the online world for us”.

There is a huge cultural gap between the G4 generation, promoters of total freedom on the Internet and governments who they see as regulators, big business apologists and controllers.

The G4 generation is the first truly global generation, able to share content with anybody, anywhere, through all sort of devices and platforms from Facebook to Twitter. The acronym illustrates some of their key characteristics: Global, Google, Generous and Green, and of course it is also a play on the term 4G.

It is an opinionated, empowered, activist generation. Perhaps for the first time since the 1960s, they feel compelled by the state of the world to set the agenda for those currently in authority. But, unlike the radicals of the 1960s, they have a significant chance of prevailing. They know how to use the incredible power of SMS, tweets, posts, blogs, social networks to make their opinions heard. They feel as intimately involved in what’s happening in the most remote place in the global village as on the street-corner in their own village. And they react in real time, to news they hear in seconds through Google, Bing or Twitter feeds.

What is more, they bring a distinctive new vision. They have a generous idea of the world. They want to spend time with NGOs before working in a “normal” business (if this exists for them). They are concerned by pollution, global warming as well as the cynicism of politicians or business people. It is their agenda that is slowly starting to re-make attitudes to more sustainable consumption, and even to create a capitalism of shared value.

This activism is probably why they are asking if there is a plot to kill the free Internet. But ironically, the very idea of the e-G8 Forum which President Sarkozy instigated is to promote free discussion among the Internet people, precisely so they can influence the G8, nourishing the reflections of Heads of States.

The Internet grew by itself from a web of initiatives, from the ideas of fearless youngsters, unafraid of opening new avenues, in the process creating new business models, changing how people relate to each other, communicate, shop, learn, and even in a way changing society. The freedom of the Internet community to create, in other words, is an inherent part of the success of the internet. I believe that the Heads of State know that and respect it. The Internet community has brought creativity, imagination and freedom to large corporations, institutions and governments, and must be allowed, indeed encouraged, to bring more.

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But, for all that the G8 needs the dynamism and creativity of the G4, I believe that the G4 needs the protection and the leadership of the G8. Just as economies can only grow and societies can only flourish with good government, for the internet to continue to grow, blossom and be a free space, rights need to be protected. Rights for authors and producers of content. Rights to privacy and protection for those who might be put at risk, such as children. With rights come responsibilities.

That is why we believe it is so important to start a truly open discussion with all stakeholders, young or old, from mature or fast growing markets, on how to build the future of the internet. The topics to be discussed are numerous: privacy, intellectual property, individual rights, as well as the future of creation and distribution of cultural and artistic content. And, the Internet being global, by nature, these key topics need to be discussed at a global level.

Let's discuss openly and seriously issues like Net neutrality. Nobody owns the internet. It has become a common asset, a formidable asset for humanity. Nobody should even try to manipulate the debate. The conversation is starting and will continue for years.

And these are vital discussions. The development of the internet across the world has been a huge contributor to education and the empowerment of citizens. It has been very successful at providing information and more freedom, as we recently witnessed in the Maghreb and the Middle East. It is not wrong to say that the internet is the most progressive force since the printing press.

In years to come, the roll-out of broadband will also continue to have a major impact on economic growth. In the current economic situation, there are few areas of natural growth, yet the internet provides the ideal space for the initiatives of young, fearless entrepreneurs to promote job creation and prosperity around the world.

That is why the e-G8 is inviting all players including technology pioneers, young entrepreneurs; managers of the technology, entertainment & media industry; academics, market analysts, journalists and bloggers to share their views. Strong and opinionated views are not only welcome, they are an obligation.