

“Russia becoming a global e-Content Powerhouse”

How would you define the meaning of e-Content in your country in terms of its true meaning and practical implication?

e-Content is at the core of any single or multi-media digital application, whether commercial or not. Practically: almost any web, CD, video, or mobile application is built to carry the content to the user or to help the user generate his/her own content. eContent in Russia is mostly viewed as a way to preserve and carry forward cultural or historical heritage, to disseminate lifestyle, scientific, educational and business information in some digitalized or interactive format, or to provide the user with the ability to create and share his own content and interact with others in various contexts and settings.

factfile

Population of the country: **142.2 Million**
Total Number of Internet connections: **29 Million users / 18 million home Internet connections**
Total Number of Telephone lines: **43.9 Million / 33.2 million in private apartments**
Total number of Mobile connections/users: **88 Million private users**
Total number of households having TV/cable TV: **118 televisions per each 100 households**
Total Number of PC installations: **14 Million home computers**
Total number of websites: **Over 1,000,000 domains registered, roughly 500,000 websites**
Total numbers of universities: **1,090**
Percentage of literate population: **99.9%**
Percentage of educated population: **99.9%**; High School or above: **76.4%**
Percentage of youth population: **14.9%** aged 14 and younger
Internet hosts in Russia: **4.822 Million (2008)**
(<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>)

5 pillars

of e-Content development in Russian Federation

- ↳ Commercial viability of quality eContent
- ↳ Best practice dissemination
- ↳ Media convergence and innovation
- ↳ Public-private partnerships
- ↳ ICT infrastructure development

Q What is the current status of eContent in your country - across all industry and aspects?

The eContent industry in Russia is currently in its early stages of development, but quickly gaining speed. While small-scale efforts have been made by the public sector over the past ten years to develop eContent in the eLearning, eCulture, and eGovernment areas, the private sector has concentrated its efforts over the past five years on the more commercially-viable eBusiness and eEntertainment areas (mostly via Internet and mobile/wireless media). And while the public sector institutions have access to vast amounts of non-digital content and to tremendous knowledge bases in all areas of interest (but lower technological, design, and, often, financial resources), it is the private sector that possesses truly world-class technologies and resources to properly transform that content into products (but, alas, less access to the underlying content or desire to digitalize it without the proper funding). Since the two streams of effort have gone parallel to each other, rather than combining forces, Russia has thus far failed to produce a significant number of world-class eContent multimedia products (with notable exceptions of Russian video games and a small number of sponsored CD-ROMs and websites produced in the past several years).

At the same time, it is difficult to overlook the potential for Russia's eContent development: a rich and vibrant content base (historical, scientific, educational, cultural, etc.), design and technology resources recognized for their skills internationally, a developed ICT infrastructure in major cities, a highly educated multi-cultural technology-adept population. Should these factors combine to work together, Russia is bound to leapfrog several stages of eContent development and become one of the world's top eContent producers.

Q What area of eContent is best developed in your country? For example, e-health, e-biz, e-culture, e-gov, e-entertainment, e-learning, e-science, or e-inclusion?

Of the eight WSA categories of content, the best developed are eBusiness and eEntertainment, mostly because these are the two areas with most commercial value for the private sector. The past two years also saw significant development in the eGovernment, eCulture and eLearning categories, due to both government efforts and private initiatives to produce quality eContent in those areas. Further development of other eContent topics is more dependent on both public and private initiatives for eContent production in those realms and, as such, these are less evolved in Russia at the moment (despite the existence of some shining examples of quality eContent in those categories, as well).

Q Which sector in your country is more aggressive in developing e-content? Business or Private Sector? Or Government? Or Civil Society?

Russia has parallel development of eContent, being concurrently driven by the private and public sectors. While the private sector is mostly concerned with the commercial value of eContent and, as such, areas of most development there are eBusiness, eEntertainment, and eLearning, to a certain degree, various public-private partnerships and multi-level government initiatives have been launched recently to preserve the cultural and historical heritage, to create digital scientific and educational programs, as well as to utilize the latest technologies to create forward-looking eGovernment resources.

Q How would you describe the gradual progress of development of e-content in your country in terms of its rise? Any timelines?

Russia's extremely rich cultural, historical, educational, and scientific heritage naturally lends itself to vast pos-

sibilities in eContent creation. However, the rise of the importance of new media coincided with great political, economic, and social upheaval in the country. While new technologies were developed and imported often faster than expected, eContent took a back seat to technological development and innovation. Public sector eContent efforts began in the mid-1990's, with the digitalization of a few educational programs and creation of government resources, and continued for the next decade with several small-scale initiatives to digitalize the country's cultural heritage. At the same time, the development of a vibrant commercial multimedia industry, beginning in the late 1990's, naturally led to a rapid development of the more commercial areas of eContent. The past several years saw the launch of both larger-scale public sector eContent initiatives in several categories, notably eGovernment and eLearning, and, more importantly, the creation of partnerships between public and private sector players in order to develop, promote, and evolve Russia's eContent potential. We will undoubtedly see further development of these areas over the next decade, with Russia becoming one of the global eContent powerhouses.

Q Can you list the major initiatives, which influenced and aggravated the development of e-content in your country?

While a number of direct initiatives, both public sector and NGO, have been announced and launched in Russia to develop eContent, they have thus far had little major impact on large-scale developments. What has had major impact, however, is increased interest of both the public and the private sectors in eContent development, with the effort being driven by all levels of government, as well as by private individuals and corporations. The combination of increased government attention and greater business involvement in eContent, rather than any "organized" initiative, will further drive and ele-

vate the importance of eContent over the next several years.

Q How would you describe the major bottlenecks on the path of e-content development in your country?

The major bottleneck to faster and better quality eContent development in Russia is the current lack of significant funding that specifically aims at quality eContent development. Many public sector institutions possess immense amounts of content and knowledge, while private sector development companies and individuals possess the proper technologies, skills and resources to transform, package and market that content. Should those two sectors unite for a common cause and be supported by funding and incentives that enhance participation of multimedia industry leaders in eContent initiatives, breakthroughs in eContent development in Russia are bound to take place, as has indeed happened in several cases over the past two years.

Q In majority of the countries, e-content development is significantly dependent on ICT infrastructure and ICT facilities. But, in some countries that are quite developed, ICT has become part of daily life and e-content development is primarily subjected to the initiatives of an individual/organization/government, etc. Whereas, in some countries, especially those, which are developing and under developed, e-content development is largely dependent on ICT infrastructure. What is the situation in your country? Please explain in detail.

In terms of ICT infrastructure development, Russia presents a two-fold case: some areas of the country are developed in terms of ICT infrastructure and facilities (Moscow, for instance, accounting for a population of 18 million, has an almost 100% mobile penetration and over 50% Internet penetration, much of it being broadband), while other, mostly rural, areas lag significantly behind. Much of the scientific, educational, techno-

logical, and eContent development has been taking place in the urban areas of the country (the 5-6 largest cities) and it is there that the pace and direction of eContent development currently depends on business and government initiatives. For other areas of the country, eContent development will highly depend on the pace and direction of ICT infrastructure building.

Q How would you describe the ICT scenario in your country? Please describe in terms of infrastructure, penetration, acceptance and policies.

Two ICT scenarios exist in Russia: The more developed urban areas and the less developed rural areas. Among the cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg have the highest ICT penetration (Moscow and St. Petersburg both have mobile penetration of almost 100% and an Internet penetration more than twice the Russian average), with other large cities trailing a bit behind. Development of ICT infrastructure in rural areas depends on their distance from larger cities and their economic conditions. The government is making every effort, both on investment and policy levels, to further develop ICT infrastructure country-wide; several private sector initiatives also exist to increase ICT penetration in less developed areas. ICT acceptance is extremely high in Russia, with its highly educated population, overall technological development and a long tradition of scientific/technological research.

Q How do you see the future of e-Content development in your country?

Several scenarios exist for the future of eContent in Russia, with the outcome depending on public and private initiatives and roles in development of eContent and the eContent industry per se.

The potential and foundations exist for development of a truly world-class eContent industry in Russia:

- (1) An abundant non-electronic content base, building on rich and diverse historical, scientific, educational, and cultural heritage, supported by a vast number of eminent experts, academicians, historians, and scientists dedicated to the cause of preserving and developing that heritage, as well as an established structure of world-class research institutes and universities;
- (2) World-renowned skills in design and technology, with Russia quickly becoming one of the technology outsourcing locations of choice for programming, mobile, artificial intelligence, and R&D activities and Russian designers being in high demand in the East and West alike;
- (3) A well-developed ICT infrastructure in major cities and one of the fastest growing economies, providing for the ability to both generate and consume quality eContent on the local level;
- (4) A highly-educated (99.9% literacy rate, 75+% of population having graduated High School or above) multicultural and multilingual population, able to produce, consume and appreciate quality eContent.

With these basics in place, factors that will have the most profound influence on the development of eContent in Russia will be the potential for cooperation between the public and private sectors and the availability of funding for eContent development. Should efforts to establish effective cooperation between stakeholders of eContent development fail to come to fruition and eContent remain for separate / parallel development by the public and private sectors, the benefits of content availability and technological advances / business skills will not combine, leaving the industry to muddle along at relatively slow organic growth rates. However, should such efforts succeed and the private sector be further incentivised to join forces with the government as the engine for eContent development and growth, Russia is capable of becoming one of the leading eContent producers and transformers in the world, leapfrogging a number of development stages for the industry.

Q Please explain which medium is the most preferred medium for e-content development? Print? Or TV? Or Internet/Web? Or Radio? Or Mobile/Wireless? Or a combination of some of these?

Since technology / media is a means for delivering eContent, the medium most preferred for eContent development depends on the kind of content it is meant to carry and the audience

it is meant to reach to. For instance, educational eContent is better suited for more interactive media (such as the Internet / interactive CDs/DVDs, interactive television). eContent targeted at less educated audiences may be better carried via television, while that which is meant to reach remote areas may be better served by radio.

In general, though, the trend is toward media convergence and the

best examples of eContent will utilize an appropriate combination of media for a more effective content delivery. In Russia, the most effective interactive media are the Internet, mobile, and interactive TV and, as such, a combination of these three would likely produce the best results and be the three preferred media for eContent development.

Best Practices

E-BUSINESS

Face Control: Professionals' Ratings (www.facecontrol.ru)

In countries where "official" ratings are often less than objective, it is often very difficult to determine true standings within various professions. Most people looking for a specialist usually rely on recommendations from friends or other professionals. This project tries to combat that trend by providing a very objective and independent rating of "professionals by professionals" within many professional occupations - from veterinarians to yoga instructors, from tennis pros to lawyers, from architects to doctors. It provides biographies and contact information for each of the professionals, has a multitude of video and audio interviews with top specialists in their fields, and provides information that may be of interest to those professionals themselves. The project's philosophy is that "people are more important than brands" - as such, it gives recognition to professionals,

rather than institutions, finally giving credit where it may be long overdue. The project is exquisitely designed, displays wide use of multi-media content and provides a much needed service to anyone looking for a particular specialist. The unique business model behind the resource, combined with its wonderful "look and feel", can be easily replicated to other markets, thus making it a great best practice example in the eBusiness category.

E-CULTURE

Faberge - Lost and Found

The famous Faberge Eggs, considered a Russian national treasure, were finally returned to Russia last year. This wonderful CD-ROM not only provides complete details about each of the handcrafted masterpieces, including pictures, illustrations, and 3D animations, but also enables the user to get a real sense of the spirit of the time during which the eggs were crafted and the people behind the masterpieces. Unique film

footage from the early 1900's combines with restored photographs and narrated texts to provide the feeling of history. A detailed history and bibliography for each of the masterpieces, from creation to its return to Russia, adds to the resource's content base and makes it a great best practice example in the eCulture category.

E-ENTERTAINMENT

Dom-3 (www.dom3.ru)

A true example of media convergence, Dom-3 is a combination of an online role game and a multi-functional social network, modeled after life in Moscow. The virtual city's inhabitants live virtual lives, finding jobs, making friends, buying apartments, and falling in love. As such, all players participate in the creation of a model contemporary world, one that is very closely tied to the real world, but does not include violence. The prototype for Dom-3 is Dom-2, one of the most popular and longest-running reality

shows on Russian television, where contestants try to "find their love" - as such, a large part of this virtual project is also played by the match-making service closely tied to the game. The game also encompasses a number of mobile services and is tied to the television show, where the most popular contestants from the show also get their own characters within Dom-3 that interact with other players. The project's 3D graphics were developed by Russia's leading gaming company and are extremely well crafted, making this combination of a role game and social network ever more popular. For its excellent execution, strategic premise, and true media convergence this project was awarded a WSA Jury Distinction 2007.

E-HEALTH

StopSPID.ru (www.stop-spids.ru)

This multimedia project aims at combating AIDS in Russia through information and support and is part of a major public-private partnership effort under-

taken in Russia in that area. The resource provides targeted multi-media content for various groups (patients and their families, general population, educators, etc.), enables communication between users, and educates every visitor. Most importantly, it provides support and information about the disease to those segments of the population who most urgently need it and helps dispel various myths about AIDS so prevalent in society, thus serving the aims of disease prevention and ignorance eradication. Well-designed and well-structured, using multi-media appropriately, this project, aside from being a very good eContent resource, obviously possesses large strategic value for Russian society.

E-INCLUSION

Infoblago.ru
(www.infoblago.ru)

Russia is a country where a rich tradition of charity was "paused" for 70 years and is now in the process of rebirth and rejuvenation. This multimedia

resource first gathered information about and then provided an interactive platform for hundreds of private charities around the country, while enabling anyone in need of help to find assistance through this website. Aside from providing this much-needed interactive matching service, the website provides multi-faceted information about charity for individuals, corporations and charities themselves, gives attention to the people behind the work, and serves as the overall platform for many private charitable organizations. The resource was created as part of the "Year of Charity" declared by the Russian federal government in 2006, but continues expanding its functionality and its educational, functional and humanitarian work, serving as an excellent example of the use of multimedia toward the greater good. The project was declared a WSA 2007 Winner.

E-LEARNING

General History: Grades

5-8

This history learning tool, currently used in almost 30,000 Russian schools makes the history learning process more interactive and entertaining. Russia's best history teachers participated in the creation process, thus ensuring that the resulting CD-ROM is not only a best practice in eContent, but also a best practice in eLearning. In addition to texts and pictures, the CD-ROM provides students with opportunities to put together their own multimedia presentations and reports, saving them for classroom use, learn while playing games and solving puzzles, perform comparative analysis of primary sources on a vast number of topics, work with interactive maps and timelines, listen to narrated lectures, take tests, participate in scripted role games to truly make history come alive. Teachers also receive a vast array of instruments for class preparation and use. As such, this multimedia disk truly serves the most important purpose of all - puts the fun and wonder back into learning - and thus serves as an

excellent best practice example for the eLearning category.

E-SCIENCE

Virtual Atomic Energy Museum (<http://museum.rosenergoatom.ru>)

This virtual multi-media museum portrays the history, faces, and science behind Russia's (and the world's) development of atomic energy, providing a fascinating view of everything surrounding the "peaceful atom". The museum exhibits a very impressive array of multi-media content, from texts to video interviews, from pictures to animation, much of it gathered and digitized or created specifically for this project. The resource combines large quantities of well-structured content, interactive elements and a beautifully crafted interface, thus making it not only the best virtual resource on its subject, but also a best practice example in its category for both Russia and the world. The project was declared a WSA 2007 Winner.