

Grenada Creates History, Sets Course for Internet-based Development

Grenadians to benefit from launch of the first Internet Exchange Point in the Eastern Caribbean

ST GEORGES, GRENADA. 17 MAY 2011.

Grenada is now better positioned to take advantage of the revolution in technology and truly move toward the establishment of a knowledge based economy. This, according to Senator Arley Gill at the launch of the Grenada's Internet Exchange Point, GREX, is the first such facility in the Eastern Caribbean and marks a significant milestone for Grenada's development.

The Senator described the Internet Exchange Point (IXP) as a facility that allows for the free exchange, or "peering", of domestic Internet traffic between Internet service Providers (ISPs).

Speaking at the Grenada leg of the Caribbean ICT Roadshow hosted by the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), Minister Gill, who has responsibility for Information and Communication Technology in Grenada, noted that the establishment of IXPs is essential to encouraging national development and technology-based economic growth.

GREX allows local ISPs to interconnect directly, locally, at no cost, rather than by purchasing expensive transit services from foreign ISPs. Grenada's ISPs who take advantage of interconnection, or "peering" at GREX to deliver their local traffic, will reduce the portion of their Internet traffic which must be delivered via their out-of-country transit providers.

"Countries all across the world have realized and exploited the benefits of IXPs. Establishing an Internet Exchange Point in Grenada is expected to bring several benefits for our Government as well as for our citizens and business community", stated Minister Gill.

The Grenada Internet Exchange Point (GREX) is a singular achievement for the Caribbean island state of just over 100,000 residents. Several speakers at the GREX launch explained that over the next several months consumers could expect to the roll-out of new services and improved quality for high-bandwidth applications such as peer-to-peer file sharing, online video and audio streaming and gaming.

Dr. Spencer Thomas, Chairman of the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, and a central figure in facilitating the process stated, "The NTRC see the role of the regulator as fostering

investment and growth in the telecommunications sector.” He added, “We believe that encouraging development of Internet-based services, accelerating the development of Caribbean content and reaping social benefits from technology is dependent on reducing Internet connectivity and bandwidth costs and improving quality of service to all citizens. GREX is a key component to achieving our goals.”

Dr. Thomas commended local Internet Service Providers LIME and Columbus Communications for working together to make the GREX initiative possible. He also singled out for praise Bernadette Lewis, Secretary General of the CTU and Bevil Wooding, an international expert with the US-based non-profit organization Packet Clearing House (PCH), for their role in the process. CTU and PCH have embarked on a region wide campaign to raise awareness and provide support for building National IXPs and developing critical Internet resources.

“The initiative to establish IXPs in the Caribbean has found ready support from regional Governments and ISPs who are recognizing that IXPs must be deployed across the Caribbean if we are to develop the kind of domestic Internet economy necessary to spark new levels of indigenous innovation, local content creation and industry growth,” explained Wooding.

Mr. Bevil Wooding, a feature speaker at the event, described IXPs as an internationally recognized mechanism for achieving cost and service gains and ICT sector growth. He shared that building an IXP is a technically trivial exercise, however, building the level of trust and collaboration requires new levels of cooperation between the stakeholders.

Wooding, who also serves as the Program Director for the CTU’s Caribbean ICT Roadshow, noted that over the past sixteen years, PCH has built or supported more than one third of the world’s 300 IXPs.

Bernadette Lewis, Secretary General of the CTU, was strong in her commendation for the historic launch. She stated “The absence of IXPs in the Caribbean leads to the depletion of scarce foreign reserves from economies and societies in the region that can ill afford this hemorrhage.”

She reiterated her organisation’s long-term commitment to regional development, stating, “Through the CTU’s Caribbean ICT Roadshow we plan to expand our outreach to Governments and help policy-makers understand the changes to the regulatory and business environment that an IXP can bring. We are also prepared to work with ISPs and industry stakeholders to identify new opportunities for technological innovation across the Caribbean.”

GREX’s two major Internet Service Providers LIME and Columbus Communications, committed to collaborating on the next steps toward establishing an Internet Exchange Point in Grenada.