

**The Internet in the Countries in Transition**

**By Sam Vaknin**

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Though the countries in transition are far from being an homogeneous lot, there are a few denominators common to their Internet experience hitherto:

**1. Internet invasion**

The penetration of the Internet in the countries in transition varies from country to country - but is still very low even by European standards, not to mention by American ones. This had to do with the lack of infrastructure, the prohibitive cost of services, an extortionist pricing structure, computer illiteracy and luddism (computer phobia). Societies in the countries in transition are inert (and most of them, conservative or traditionalist) - following years of central mis-planning. The Internet (and computers) are perceived by many as threatening - mainly because they are part of a technological upheaval which makes people redundant.

**2. The rumour mill**

All manner of instant messaging - mainly the earlier versions of IRC - played an important role in enhancing social cohesion and exchanging uncensored information. As in other parts of the world - the Internet was first used to communicate: IRC, MIRC e-mail and e-mail fora were - and to a large extent, are - all the rage.

The IRC was (and is) used mainly to exchange political views and news and to engage in inter-personal interactions. The media in countries in transition is notoriously unreliable. Decades of official indoctrination and propaganda left people reading between (real or imaginary) lines. Rumours and gossip always substituted for news and the Internet was well suited to become a prime channel of dissemination of conspiracy theories, malicious libel, hearsay and eyewitness accounts. Instant messaging services also led to an increase in the number (though not necessarily in the quality) of interactions between the users - from dating to the provision of services, the Internet was enthusiastically adopted by a generation of alienated youth, isolated from the world by official doctrine and from each other by paranoia fostered by the political regime. The Internet exposed its users to the west, to other models of existence where trust and collaboration play a major role. It increase the quantity of interaction between them. It fostered a sense of identity and community. The Internet is not ubiquitous in the countries in transition and, therefore, its impact is very limited. It had no discernible effect on how governments work in this region. Even in the USA it is just starting to

effect political processes and be integrated in them.

The Internet encouraged entrepreneurship and aspirations of social mobility. Very much like mobile telephony - which allowed the countries in transition to skip massive investments in outdated technologies - the Internet was perceived to be a shortcut to prosperity. Its decentralized channels of distribution, global penetration, "rags to riches" ethos and dizzying rate of innovation - attracted the young and creative. Many decided to become software developers and establish local version of "Silicon Valley" or the flourishing software industry in India. Anti virus software was developed in Russia, web design services in former Yugoslavia, e-media in the Czech Republic and so on. But this is the reserve of a minuscule part of society. E-commerce, for instance, is a long way off (though m-commerce might be sooner in countries like the Czech Republic or the Baltic).

E-commerce is the natural culmination of a process. You need to have a rich computer infrastructure, a functioning telecommunications network, cheap access to the Internet, computer literacy, inability to postpone gratification, a philosophy of consumerism and, finally, a modicum of trust between the players in the economy. The countries in transition lack all of the above. Most of them are not even aware that the Internet exists and what it can do for them. Penetration rates, number of computers per household, number of phone lines per household, the reliability of the telecommunications infrastructure and the number of Internet users at home (and at work)- are all dismally low. On the other hand, the cost of accessing the net is still prohibitively high. It would be a wild exaggeration to call the budding Internet enterprises in the countries in transition - "industries". There are isolated cases of success, that's all. They sprang in response to local demand, expanded internationally on rare occasions and, on the whole remained pretty confined to their locale. There was no agreement between countries and entrepreneurs who will develop what. It was purely haphazard.

#### 4. The great equalizer

Very early on, the denizens of the countries in transition have caught on to the "great equalizer" effects of the Net. They used it to vent their frustrations and aggression, to conduct cyber-warfare, to unleash an explosion of visual creativity and to engage in deconstructive discourse.

By great equalizer - I meant equalizer with the rich, developed countries. See the article I quoted above. The citizens of the countries in transition are frustrated by their inability to catch up with the affluence and prosperity of the West. They feel inferior, neglected, looked down upon, dictated to and, in general, put down. The Internet is perceived as something which can restore the balance. Only, of course, it cannot. It is still a rich people's medium. President Clinton points out the Digital Divide within America - such a divide exists to a much larger extent and with more venomous effects between the developed and developing world. the Internet has done nothing to bridge this gap - on the contrary: It enhanced the productivity and economic growth (this is known as "The New Economy") of rich countries (mainly the States) and left the have-nots in the dust.

#### 5. Intellectual property

The concept of intellectual property - foreign to the global Internet culture to start with - became an emblem of Western hegemony and monopolistic practices. Violating copyright, software piracy and hacking became both status symbols and a political declaration of sorts. But the rapid dissemination of programs and information (for instance, illicit copies of reference works) served to level the playing field.

Piracy of material is quite prevalent in the countries in transition. The countries in transition are the second capital of piracy (after Asia). Software, films, even books - are copied and distributed quite freely and openly. There are street vendors who deal in the counterfeit products - but most of it is sold through stores and OEMs.

I think that intellectual property will go the way the pharmaceutical industry did: Instead of fighting windmills - owners and distributors of intellectual property will join the trend. They are likely to team up with sponsors which will subsidize the price of intellectual property in order to make it affordable to the denizens of poor countries. Such sponsors could be either multi-lateral institutions (such as the World Bank) - or charities and donors.

Sam Vaknin is the author of Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited and After the Rain - How the West Lost the East. He is a columnist for Central Europe Review, United Press International (UPI) and eBookWeb and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory, Suite101 and searcheurope.com. Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>

## Why Schedule a Transition Phase?

By Matt Russ

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The transition phase may be referred to as “off season” training but is not a time to take “off.” Actually, there is no “off” season. The transition phase is the time of year to let your body fully recover, both mentally and physically, while maintaining a level of fitness. It is the time to let those nagging little injuries heal up. The transition phase can last 4-6 weeks and occurs directly after the final peak of the season.

I usually give my athletes a week of rest or very limited training following peak, and then start the transition phase. I give them the most flexibility and autonomy during this period. I tell the athlete to take extra rest days if needed and we schedule a few weeks with consecutive days off. Cross training and other activities are encouraged, especially for runners. I like to give the joints and connective tissue a break from the impact of running and will schedule runs as little as 2x per week. I do not encourage racing during the transition phase other than at a base or non-competitive level. I discouraged a race that requires preparation or volume increase.

A typical transition week will have the athlete working out 4-5 days per week with rest days in between. There is no progression. Volume can be greatly reduced as long as there are brief bouts of intensity. I will cut interval volume way down but never eliminate higher intensities completely to maintain aerobic capacity. I do encourage one longer work out per week at a base level to maintain endurance. Some light strength training can occur, mainly to acclimate the body for resistance training. Reps are high, weight low, and the number of sets small. Core work is emphasized.

Mentally it may be hard for you to transition for the first time following peak. If you are used to higher volume and high intensity and you may feel they are going to loose too much fitness. I have found that athletes who transition a few seasons actually look forward to it and may train even harder leading up to transition. It is the light at the end of the tunnel. I like my athletes coming out of transition feeling a bit under trained and ready for the increased volume in base.

Conversely: taking time off completely means spending a majority of your base season making up for lost ground. Each season should build on the last. If you take 8 weeks off you may find your race times are similar to last years (or worse).

The transition phase is an important part of an annual training plan and should not be overlooked. Be sure you end your season with a transition before you begin the next.

Matt Russ has coached and trained athletes around the country and internationally. He currently holds licenses by USAT, USATF, and is an Expert level USAC coach. Matt

coaches athletes for CTS, is an Ultrafit Associate, and owner of  
[www.thesportfactory.com](http://www.thesportfactory.com)

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