

Chapter 7

An Overview of Internet Developments and their Impact on E-Government in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The usage of the internet has grown over recent years in South Africa but at a very slow rate. This is the result of several challenges facing the growth of the Internet in South Africa. These challenges are mostly related to the lack of infrastructure for the Internet, high cost of computer technology and service provider challenges. The paper provides an overview of the Internet usage and its impact on E-Government in South Africa. It examines regulatory issues pertaining to the Internet. It also examines Internet growth in the business and government sectors. In the government sector, the Cape Online Strategy, is an initiative by the provincial government of the Western Cape in SA, is an example of a global trend towards greater levels of interactivity between government and citizens. This initiative is an excellent example of how Web-based solutions can be used to deliver certain services to citizens. Another excellent example is an E-justice initiative undertaken by the Department of Justice. The initiative aims at promoting a more efficient system of Justice in SA. The paper also provides an overview of the challenges to Internet adoption in South Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Many countries worldwide are constantly creating exciting ways in which to use the Internet. South Africa (SA) is no exception. The SA government has launched an e-government policy which is aimed at creating a government that works better, costs less and is results-driven. It is clear that the reinvention of the SA government is tied to the proliferation of the Internet. The Internet is perceived as an instrument to enhance service delivery performance in the South African public service. The internet is also perceived as an essential tool to 'catch-up' to the information age of the developed world and to close the digital gap in SA.

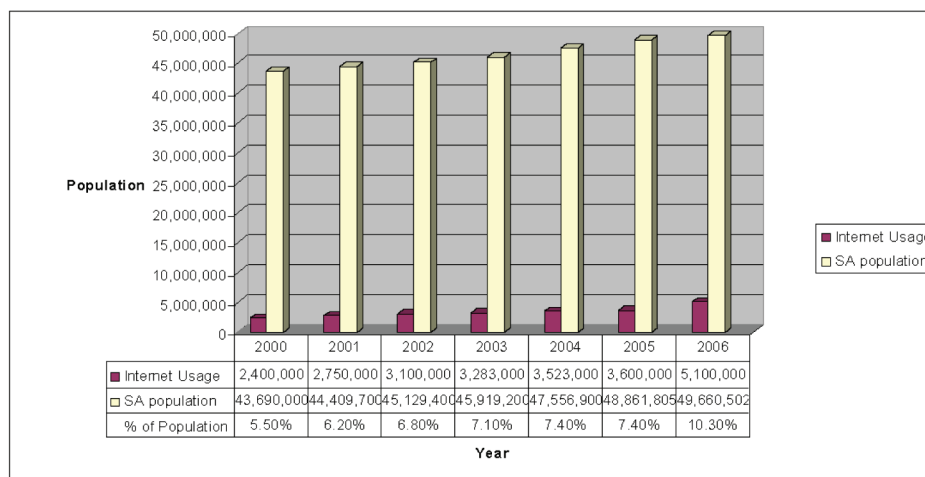
The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of internet usage in South Africa. It also considers development arising from the internet usage in SA. This paper does not attempt to provide a synoptic overview of all internet initiatives in SA. Instead it mainly provides a snapshot of recent key internet initiatives in SA. Against this background, a qualitative analysis is used.

Internet Usage in South Africa

From a communication perspective, South Africa has 4.729 million landline telephones in use and there are 33.96 million mobile cellular phones. The South African telephone system can be described as the best-developed and most modern network in Africa. The South African telecommunication network consists of carrier-equipped open-wire lines, coaxial cables, microwave radio relay links, fibre-optic cable, radiotelephone communication stations, and wireless local loops (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

The Internet user base in South Africa is growing year by year – but at a very slow rate. Figure 1 shows the Internet usage and population statistics for South Africa. From the year 2000 to the year 2006 we see, proportionately, that the usage of the Internet by the population of South Africa is very low. From this slow growth in the Internet user base we can conclude that there are several challenges facing the growth of the Internet in South Africa. Some of these challenges are related to infrastructure for the Internet, cost of computer technology, and service provider challenges.

Figure 1. Internet usage in South Africa (internetworkstats.com, 2007)



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