

Remarks

by

Professor Hopeton S. Dunn, PhD.

Chairman of the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica

and

Director of CARIMAC, UWI

at the

Microsoft Jamaica ICT Seminar: 'Jamaica Empowered'

Terra Nova Hotel, Kingston,

May 5, 2016

Salutations:

Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Graham

Mr. Ricardo Agosto, Country and Territory Manager,

Ms. Laycya Baxter, Corporate Account Manager,

Colleagues, Speakers and Other Corporate Executives of Microsoft

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

Let me thank Microsoft for inviting me to make a few remarks at this important seminar called Jamaica Empowered. The combination of astute business strategies and cutting edge enabling technologies can indeed be empowering for the enterprise, the employees and the country.

I see from the programme an elaborate range of presentations and demonstrations from Microsoft. And that should provide a rich vein of data and insights, during what promises to be an engaging daylong event. I am sorry that I will not be able to stay throughout but I will seek out the presentations. I urge all who can remain to do so, and to share the information widely with your organization.

We at the University of the West Indies do have a history of collaboration with Microsoft, most recently through a well-attended symposium on **data privacy and the cloud**. The company's representatives have also often been in attendance at our annual conferences on **Cyber Security, hosted by the UWI's Mona ICT Policy Centre**. So we welcome today's opportunity for further collaboration, and endorse your stated mission to help to empower Jamaica and our enterprises through the many innovations for which Microsoft is so globally renowned.

Emerging Innovations

It is an understatement to say that we live in an era of constant change. Innovations in artificial intelligence, new applications in robotics, smart grids, big data and the so-called internet of things, are all radically changing the business landscape, reshaping the nature of work, the scope

of enterprises and redefining the responsibilities and challenges of business leaders. The rise of social media, citizen journalism and the continued growth of new digital outlets for content on the Worldwide Web, have all had a noticeable impact in the sphere of the traditional communications media.

The recent takeover of the **Gleaner Company's** 180 year-old newspaper business, and its other media operations by the **Radio Jamaica Group**, is a testament to the disruptive character of these innovations and the changing fortunes of some businesses both locally and globally. It is the same factors that caused disruptive changes at such former corporate stalwarts as Encyclopedia Britannica, Kodak and others. It is this same kind of change that propels traditional 'telecom companies' in Jamaica and elsewhere to re-structure and now compete as media and not just as telecom enterprises, using acquisitions and internal re-configurations to diversify.

Customer service

As these changes take their course, the quality of service to the consumer or subscriber must remain at the forefront of the strategy for these competing tele-media enterprises. Cable, Internet and telephone providers in Jamaica cannot afford to lose sight of the expectations of customers to receive responsive and high quality customer service. We have seen a lot of customer complaints in recent times, despite the introduction of number portability and existence of limited competition. If cable and other providers continue to attract such widespread complaints, then the regulatory bodies will doubtless have to consider stricter service level agreements and greater enforcement for the protection of subscribers and in the public interest.

Content, Access, Services

In the hyper-connected environment that we live in, citizens and the global market appear to demand three things the most: **dynamic content, widespread and affordable mobile access, and high quality services**. Equipment such as PCs, smartphones, tablets, connected TVs, smart cars and other IP-enabled hardware commodities, are the proliferating platforms from which content

and new applications are now being launched and accessed as part of the 'Internet of Things. The more the channels for output and interaction, the greater the demand for **content**.

And, as competition mounts among global providers, the search also intensifies for new subscribers and markets. This is an area in which an empowered Caribbean people can excel: through the expanded production of high quality content using some of the new technology tools, such as ones being provided by Microsoft.

We cannot fore-ever remain primarily technology consumers. We must innovate and become **pro-sumers**, engaging in both production and consumption, especially of programming taking advantage of our creativity, locale and available sources from big data outputs. Local hardware products and soft productions can help generate additional markets, and create newly evangelized youth entrepreneurs, helping to transform business processes, improve balance sheets and enhance social lives and economic livelihoods.

Microsoft Transformation

It is interesting and reassuring to see that MICROSOFT, which was a foundation stone of this global digital revolution, is **reasserting** its presence through newly inspired leadership at the top of the company, and via new innovative products and competitive services globally. **Artificial intelligence** and new insights in **robotics** appear to be among the predicted waves of the present and future. Microsoft's latest headset gear combines real world images with 3D holographic perceptions to create 'augmented reality' in a product called **HoloLens**. It could radically transform how we look at, and see the world.

Another product, the **Microsoft Surface** tablet continues to be lauded for its usability and intuitive design, and we know of other creative innovations, such as drones and smart cars that will advance our **re-imaging** and **re-imagining** of the world.

Access Issues

But as we sit together to discuss the important role of technology in new business and domestic applications, we must also remember that even older technologies are still not easily accessible to many people in our population. By some accounts, more than half of the Jamaican population still do not enjoy stable internet access from the home. Fresh research on this is underway at UWI, but as of now, the picture is not a proud one. And those who do gain broadband access from their mobile phones find the cost of access to be prohibitive.

Despite the fantastic innovations available globally, Jamaica cannot be easily empowered without more widespread internet access at affordable prices and without improved media literacy. I am proud of the work being done by the Broadcasting Commission in this area. Broadening the base of knowledge and access and providing new affordable tools can all help to transform markets, renew educational experiences, revive industries such as agriculture and fisheries, and assist start-up enterprises and small businesses. These should be our real measures of empowerment.

We need to see continued cost reductions for internet access and computer equipment, the removal of taxes and duties from certain categories of computer products, and better public-private partnerships to empower our youth and enterprising citizens to take better advantage of the available technologies.

We also need greater consideration of the cost and availability of **assistive technologies** for persons with disabilities and special needs, **including** wider availability of the specialized screen reader called **JAWS** at lower cost, to improve internet access for the blind.

Primacy of People

Because while the technology hardware and software are important, we must not lose sight of the importance of people as users and subscribers. Robotics and artificial intelligence are unstoppable but must be pursued with due regard to the continued primacy of human beings.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to again congratulate Microsoft for hosting this event and for its continued engagement with Jamaica and the Caribbean region, for progress. I urge the company to sustain and intensify this outreach, especially to our business community, academia and our youth. In that way, we will together achieve the shared goal of **enterprise renewal and people empowerment**, to which we all aspire.

Thank You!