

Don't panic South Africa, the internet is coming

By  Alan Knott-Craig

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It's easy to get mopey and depressed when you read the papers. Violent crime. Rampant corruption. Failing education. Weakening rand. How will we possibly tackle all the problems our country faces? How can we create more jobs, equip the youth to participate in the economy, fix our leadership crises? Don't panic!



Alan Knott-Craig

The good news is that you don't have to do anything. The internet will save the day. The internet is information, and access to information solves all problems ([except the problem of no Cremora in the refrigerator](#)).

Not enough jobs? Don't panic. The World Bank says that for every 10% broadband penetration you have 1,28% growth in GDP0. SA only has 20% broadband penetration. That leaves 10,24% of untapped GDP growth! More internet means more economic growth means more jobs.

Worried about the lack of entrepreneurs? Don't panic. The internet opens up a world of entrepreneurial opportunities in the digital economy, allowing people to build online businesses, to telecommute and to access entirely new markets. More internet means more entrepreneurs means more startups means more jobs.

Feeling disillusioned with your leaders? Don't panic. #PanamaPapers is just the latest manifestation of 'The Age of No More Secrets'. If you're doing something dodgy you can be sure that your parents, your kids, and your taxman will find out. You'll be caught. More internet means more transparency means less corruption means better leadership.

No textbooks, schools and teachers? Don't panic. Khan Academy, Wikipedia, Siyavula and a plethora of online educational initiatives make it easy for kids to educate themselves. No need to wait for Superman to save the day. The youth can save the day for themselves. More internet means online teaching means online textbooks means educated children.

No access to healthcare? Don't panic. There are hundreds of healthcare websites that provide information on every condition known to man. You might not be able to get prescription drugs online, but you can at least self-diagnose without walking 20km to your nearest clinic and waiting in a queue for hours. More internet means more medical information means better health.

Tired of traffic? Don't panic. Internet access allows for tele-commuting, allowing people to work from home, stay off the roads, and alleviate traffic congestion. More internet means less traffic means less road rage.

Scared of crime? Don't panic. A US study showed that the number one reason the majority of convicts committed crime is because they thought they could get away with it. With Facebook there is no getting away with it. An example: The manager of a guest house in the Eastern Cape recently had a guest who'd rung up a bill of R20,000 and then left without paying. Turns out he'd given fake information, so they posted a photo of him on their Facebook page. Two months later a patron spotted the conman at a casino in Vereeniging, reporting him to security. The police were called and he's now in jail. More internet means more crooks being caught means less crime.

Slowly people are waking up to the fact that there are no more secrets (see above The Age of No More Secrets). If you lie, or steal, or cheat, watch out: your mom, your dad, your siblings, and your community will find out.

The internet is coming, it can't be stopped. The only question is how long will it take for all South Africans to have access to fast broadband? The good news is: faster than you think! The City of Tshwane is in year three of a project to deploy free Wi-Fi to within walking distance of all 2,9 million citizens.

This is not AlwaysOn Wi-Fi (which is always off). It doesn't require a PhD and ten minutes to log in. It doesn't promise 'free' and then give you a generous 10MB of data, just enough to download two emails. It doesn't give you speeds that recall the [days of dial-up](#). Tshwane gives you 15MB/sec, 500MB per day, no login-in required, free Wi-Fi, with 780 sites and over 1,6 million devices having already connected.

The dream of internet access as a municipal basic service is already happening, today. If Tshwane can get it right, then the rest of South Africa can get it right. If the rest of SA can get it right, then one day all South Africans will be within walking distance of free Wi-Fi.

Our country has a bright future. Everyone will one day have fast internet. Everyone will have the same opportunity to learn, work, and make their voice heard. Everyone will have access to all the information. Until that day comes, don't be glum.

Look around you. We have no natural disasters. We have beautiful weather. We have friendly people. We have electricity and water and sewage and courts and hundreds of other services which most people in the world do not have. Don't take our beautiful country for granted. And don't let the negative stories get to you.

A friend of mine visited Australia for three weeks in December and almost didn't come back after reading the deluge of negative stories coming out of SA, thinking the country had completely fallen apart and there was chaos on the streets. He returned home only to find that, in fact, nothing had changed. His business was still going well, his kids still went to school... plenty of problems, but nothing worse than it was before.

The news is noise. Don't let the noise distract you. South Africa is our home, there are no alternatives.

We are a country of many nations: Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiPedi, Sesotho, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, siSwati, Tshivenda, isiNdebele, Christian, Muslim, Hindi, Jewish, Baha'i, atheist, black, white, coloured, Indian, old, young, capitalist, communist, socialist, vegan... a rainbow nation. But we are not one nation, yet. We need universal access to the

internet if we are to become one nation.

'Isizwe' means 'nation', so we created a petition at [Project Isizwe](#), lobbying the government to accelerate the deployment of free Wi-Fi in public spaces. Sign our petition and we'll submit your signature to your local politician in advance of local government elections on 3 August 2016.

Go ahead and sign at [Project Isizwe](#), and spread the word!

The future is bright, free Wi-Fi will save South Africa.

Read the [original article](#) on *The Big Almanack*.

ABOUT ALAN KNOTT-CRAIG

Alan Knott-Craig is a South African entrepreneur and author. He is the founder of Project Isizwe as well as executive chairman of Hero Telecoms, Ever Africa, and Happimo NPC.

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