

International Federation of Multimedia Associations

Introduction

The International Federation of Multimedia Associations (FIAM) is following with interest the extensive work done by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) since its inception. It wishes to contribute to the ongoing debate and discussion by focusing on the experience and lessons learned by FIAM and its Internet and multimedia association members worldwide, in the field of digital content production and dissemination.

FIAM acts on behalf of its members to advance the cause and interests of Internet and multimedia around the world. It does so by promoting and strengthening international cooperation and business relationships among its member associations, whose members are mostly small and mediums enterprises, and ensuring the solidity of its associative network. The Federation also assumes an active advocacy role with respect to international business and policy issues affecting the multimedia industry at large.

FIAM and its members associations are very much concerned by the technological, social, cultural and commercial issues related to digital content production and distribution. As industry, we cannot help but take notice of the revolutionary effects and consequences brought about by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in general and internet and multimedia applications in particular. Where resources are plenty and the digital divide not as acute, these technologies and applications are being adopted wholeheartedly in all facets of economic and social life by individuals and organizations alike.

FIAM contribution to a WSIS Declaration of Principles

Allow citizens of the world the opportunity to access and use Internet and multimedia tools and applications for their own benefit and enjoyment and contribute in return to society at large, all in the spirit of preservation and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Yes to the Information Society but who gets to participate in its achievement?

WSIS has identified four principal key partners who will work together to address the challenges of the Information Society: governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector and civil society (i.e., NGOs). This taxonomy reflects the diversity at stake. FIAM would like to ensure however that under the notion of civil society, the role and place of the individual user, for whom these technologies and applications are constantly being reinvented and developed, is brought to light.

The needs of the individual user is central to most sectors of our industry (digital media, interactive TV, e-learning, gaming, etc.). The individual user, for professional and/or personal reasons, seeks technologies and applications that he can make his own (appropriate/incorporate) and that will improve his enjoyment of digital technologies and where applicable his economic fortunes.

Where do we think the multimedia industry can contribute to attaining the Information Society?

The Multimedia Industry can contribute to the process of attaining the Information Society by paying close attention to the needs of ICT users in both their personal and professional environments, while remaining conscious of the divides which characterize user as well as their respective national or regional multimedia industries.

In countries where resources do not allow for a wide dissemination of ICT, the multimedia industry is constantly adapting itself to the technical and economic limitations of the system by producing and integrating a wide array of proprietary and open source software and applications into low-cost hardware (PCs, mobile devices, etc.).

In countries where resources are more plentiful, the industry is concerned by increased user enjoyment of interactive products and applications for the individual and the enterprise alike. We encourage these trends and ask WSIS to delve into these issues as it formulates an overall action plan for a more equitable Information Society.

WSIS to pay special attention to:

1) Digital Content: Original, Diverse, Localized

Ensuring that Internet and multimedia users are offered digital content that is diverse, localized and of quality is central to the concerns of both the private and public sectors in all countries. This means **1)** ensuring that governments and multimedia companies work toward making available the creative talent capable of delivering such content (training and learning), **2)** increasing financial support for multimedia companies to produce and innovate, in particular in these days of market letdown and financial resource scarcity (compare Canadian, Australian and Costa Rican experiences), **3)** steering governments toward adopting national programs and policies conducive to digital production and promotion, and finally **4)** ensuring people's capacity to have access to such content through improved connectivity (comparison of international initiatives).

2) E-government to Spur Internet and Multimedia Tools and Applications Development

FIAM calls upon WSIS to influence governments and other related agencies worldwide toward a higher and faster integration of Internet and multimedia tools and applications in the daily lives of their citizens. This means ensuring that governments act as locomotives for a larger dissemination of internet and multimedia tools and application and for the production of quality digital content. The interaction between citizens and their governments will then be mediated through higher technology access and usage. ICT is already helping citizens be better informed of their governments policies and programs in all facets of economic and social life. Citizens can also receive numerous web-based services in return such as permits and registration of all types, filing for unemployment insurance, filing for income tax, postal agency services, etc. This interaction between government and its citizens can occur in numerous areas social and economic life such as in the provision of educational and health services to name a few.

3) Focus on Talent and well trained ICT Resources

The notions of Information society and knowledge are intrinsically related and the process by which information is transformed into knowledge is called learning. This practice finds expression in e-learning and developing countries need properly trained personnel to insure a solid growth in local content production. WSIS has to make human resource development a priority, across the user/producer spectrum. Enlightened efforts by regional and national players worldwide are already setting the stage for a better prepared ICT sector, ready to take on the challenges of ever-changing industry. FIAM believes that ongoing efforts by international, national and regional organizations to further promote skill specialization, multimedia training, quality standards in education, profile standardization, on-the-job training, etc. are key. It is also important that WSIS look into the issue of quality of work as very little is known about how internet and multimedia companies are affecting trends in work mobility, freelancing and the professionalization of the ICT industry. Focusing on human resources in the hi-tech field is of utmost importance to developing countries as well where the rapid adoption of technologies means greater access to international markets, technological leapfrogging and outsourcing contracts, all examples of incentives to counter the so-called hi-tech brain-drain.

4) Intellectual Property and Piracy

FIAM believes that WSIS is an appropriate forum to re-evaluate intellectual property laws with regards to Internet and multimedia applications and products and ensure that said legislation responds to real societal needs. As internet has become an increasingly popular tool for the exchange of digital products and services, creators and producers of software alike are redefining the manner by which digital content is distributed, commercialized and consumed over the Net. FIAM and its associations are acutely aware of the need to establish a balance between fairness and affordability between those who own intellectual property and those who use and consume digital products (issue of fair use). This call for balance means copyright laws that are sensitive to the economic and social realities of national markets (through differential pricing in poorer countries, for example). In return, countries where intellectual property is not fully guaranteed have to set in motion policies and mechanisms whereby digital products and software are better protected within their national boundaries. Close international cooperation between WIPO and national governments and industry is needed.
