Project Report

Project Title: Guyana public Internet access survey - pilot

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Executive Summary

Internet cafes are widely used in Guyana but no survey had been done of their use and operation. Improving the quality of service of these access points, most of which are already sustainable, would facilitate access by many especially those who are unable to afford their own computer.

A pilot survey was done of two areas, one urban and one outside the city covering nearly 2% of the population. Eight internet cafes were found and visited.

The survey found widespread internet calling using VOIP as well as browsing. Both wireless and DSL connectivity was used with DSL being more reliable.

Almost all the cafes were receptive to receiving technical assistance to improve their service and most had problems of some kind, misuse of equipment and viruses being the most common.

Background

In Guyana since the Internet was introduced in 1996, access has become highly desireable or even essential to many whether for reasons of study, business, entertainment or, in the case of many youth, social reasons.

Many Guyanese, especially those who cannot afford a computer, access the internet using a public access point and the most common of these is the commercial internet cafe. In a study by F.J.Proenza[1] internet cafes are identified as an important type of sustainable telecentre[2] in areas of sufficient population density though most researchers would not classify internet cafes as being necessarily telecentres. However most of what he says is valid still valid. The definition of a telecentre is the subject of on-going debate and not within the scope of this study.

It known from personal experience that many rural internet cafes are run by people with limited technical knowledge. Partly because of this they have various difficulties providing a good service such as connectivity problems, virus problems, users abuse etc. It is possible that with some assistance such cafes would be able to offer a better service to users.

At present there is a lack of systematic information about public access points and their use as no surveys have been done as far as we are aware so that interventions to try and improve access would be hindered by lack of data.

This project is intended to be a pilot for a larger survey more national in scope and to provide some preliminary data. It is intended to locate and survey a sample of public access points, mainly internet cafes, in terms of their services and usage.

The pilot project also aims to establish what problems they are experiencing and whether the cafe owners are receptive to assistance in providing a higher quality of service to larger numbers of users.

Methodology

Two areas were identified for the survey, one urban and one outside the city:

a) Campbelville (area bounded by Sherrif Street, Dennis Street, Railway Line and Middle Walk)

b) Mon Repos village, ECD

A survey was then done to identify internet cafes and other public access points in each area. These were then visited and staff interviewed using the form developed for the purpose (see Appendix).

For each cafe found the survey aimed to determine:
- i. the type of service provided (browsing, VOIP etc)
- ii. numbers of users
- iii. type of connectivity (dialup, wifi, DSL etc)
- iv. type of business (commercial, public service etc)
- v. technology used (VOIP box, PC etc)
- vi. needs / difficulties experienced

The populations of the areas were determined using published data from the Guyana Elections Commission (2006) which was readily accessible. First the number of electors was determined for each area and then further calculations done using the total number of electors (493,000, to the nearest thousand) and the total population (751,000 Census 2002, to the nearest thousand).

The results were then tabulated and analyzed. Given the small size of the sample generalisations have to be treated cautiously.

Using the unsupported assumption that the average user going to browse at one of the internet cafes does so once per week, it is then possible to roughly estimate the total number of such users per area and for the country as a whole. We did not consider those making VOIP calls to be 'internet users'.

Results

A total of eight internet cafes were found, five in Campbellville and three in Mon Repos. No other public access places were found nor any schools with a lab providing access for students. There were two schools in Campbellville and one in Mon Repos.

One of the cafes (in Mon Repos) had a website.

Services provided

	Campbellville	Mon Repos
Browsing	5	3
VOIP phone calls	5	3
Photocopying	1	3
Printing	1	1

Numbers of users per day

	Campbellville	Mon Repos
Range	25-60	10-15
Average	41	18
Area total	205	54

Proportion of users browsing

	Campbellville	Mon Repos
Range	10-40%	20-40%
Average	20%	27%
Est. area total users/day*	41	15

* Calculated from above data (users per day and % browsing)

Proportion of users making calls

	Campbellville	Mon Repos
Range	40-90%	40-80%
Average	63%	73%
Est. area total users/day*	129	39

* Calculated from above data (users per day and % calling)

Connection type

	Campbellville	Mon Repos
DSL	4	1
Wireless	1	2

Connection reliability

	Campbellville	Mon Repos
DSL	89%	90%
Wireless	70%	80%

Technology

All used a combination of MS Windows PCs for browsing and VOIP boxes.

Costs

All charged between G$200 and G$260 per hour for browsing.

Problems

The problems reported were many and diverse with only one site reporting no problems. They are summarised as follows:

Type of problem	Number reporting this problem
Misuse of equipment	3
Viruses	2
Theft of small items	1
Power – voltage fluctuations	1
Need more knowledge of blocking web sites	1
Need more knowledge of PC repair	1
Need more knowledge of PC management	1
Need more knowledge of VOIP	1
Need more knowledge of networks	1

Populations

Using data from the Guyana Elections Commission the number of electors in these areas were found to be 5279 and 3931 respectively, totaling 9210 in all. Given that the total number of electors was 493,000 this represents approximately 1.87% of the population of electors. Given that the population of Guyana was 751,000 it was therefore estimated that the total populations of the two areas were 8042 and 5988 respectively, totaling 14,030 in all.

Using the unsupported assumption that the average user going to browse at one of the internet cafes does so once per week, it was then possible to roughly estimate the total number of such users per area and for the country as a whole as follows:

Campbellville

Users (browsing) per day = 41

Users per week (6 days) = 246

which will be the approximate number of users for the area assuming one visit per week on average

Approximate % of population of the area = 3.1%

Mon Repos

Users (browsing) per day = 15

Users per week (6 days) = 90

which will be the approximate number of users for the area assuming one visit per week on average

Approximate % of population of the area = 1.5%

If Mon Repos were taken representative of Guyana as a whole then the total number of internet cafe users nationally would be approximately 11,000.

Conclusions

Although a small pilot survey some tentative conclusions are suggested:

1. The cafes all relied on internet VOIP calls for much of their business perhaps even more so out of the city.
2. The number of users was not high with the cafes out of the city having about half the activity of those in the city.
3. About a quarter of users browsed the net, most of the rest making VOIP calls.
4. The numbers of internet users using the cafes were estimated at about 3% of the population for Campbellville and 1.5% for Mon Repos.
5. In the city DSL connections were predominant but outside the city wireless was the most common.
6. DSL connections were found to be more reliable than wireless but none were free of problems.
7. All cafes used a combination of MS Windows PCs for browsing and VOIP boxes.
8. All cafes charged between G$200 and G$260 per hour for browsing.
9. Most cafes were experiencing problems of some kind, the most common being misuse of equipment by users and viruses.
10. Almost all cafes were receptive to receiving technical assistance of some kind.

References

1. Proenza, F.J. "Telecenter Sustainability: Myths and Opportunities", 2004
http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ict/rc/ItemDetail.do~397168?intcmp=916&itemId=397168&itemId=397168

2. Wikipedia – definition of telecentre
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telecentre

Appendix A

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Guyana public Internet access survey – pilot

Survey sheet 1

Name of cafe/facility:

Address:

Email: Website (if any):

Name of person giving info:

Services provided:

    browsing ( )   VOIP ( )

    copying   ( )   Other

Users:

    Number / day

    Percent browsing

    Percent VOIP

Connection:

    dial-up   ( )   DSL ( )   Wifi   ( )

    Reliability: 100% ( )   95% ( )   75% ( )   Very poor ( )

    Problems:

Technology:

    VOIP box   ( )   Wifi LAN   ( )

    PC – Windows   ( )   PC – Linux   ( )

    Special software:

    Other:

Costs:

    Browsing/hour

Problems/help needed:

Information collected will be treated confidentially