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«Content online: Europe’s strategy to foster content creation and distribution in the multiplatform media business»

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Conference “creativity.online.fi” organised by the Finnish Presidency

Helsinki, 14 July 2006

Minister, Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to close this conference, the first event in my field of responsibility organised by this Finnish Presidency. This conference has been very timely, as the Commission will launch in a few days a public consultation on the challenges facing us in developing content online in Europe. This will lead to a Communication that the Commission should adopt towards the end of this year. Your contributions and discussions during this conference will provide valuable food for thought in this process.

Convergence of audiovisual media, broadband networks and electronic devices is setting the scene for new opportunities in the ICT and content sectors. It is both creating new delivery channels for traditional formats and opening the path to the development of interactive content and services. Television and radio programmes, films, games, music, books, sport are increasingly available on fixed and mobile platforms. At the same time, new forms of content, partly or largely user generated, and at least with a strong interactive character, are booming. Just look for example at the sharing of videos on internet, at the number of people creating a blog, at news content generated by readers, etc. a large part of Europe's population has already entered the "Wikipedia age"!

As TV, film and music go on-line and mobile, European companies should seize the opportunity to gain ground on the content and access markets. Europeans have the creativity and the capacity to produce content in new formats as well as traditional ones. In videogames, animation and fiction we are good both at creating stories and providing attractive products and services. Large multimedia companies have the potential to become stronger thanks to online distribution. The same goes for our many smaller companies, which will have access to new audiences through lower entry barriers. Add to this our strong position in electronic communication services and ICT devices, equipment and standards and one can appreciate what strong assets we in Europe have to build on.

We can and should take advantage of the new opportunities to improve creation and distribution of rich European content on our continent and worldwide. To succeed, we have – as a matter of urgency - to address the barriers that are inhibiting a wider distribution of online and mobile content.

Europe has to embrace change and move on. We have an opportunity for traditionally separate industries to work together for their joint benefit. If the market for online content is still emerging, it is one of the most dynamic, innovative and fastest growing parts of the content sector. For example, Western European online content markets are expected to triple by 2008. These developments are expected to multiply across the sector, which is already accounting for 8% of EU GDP today.

In this context, I am very proud to have contributed to the adoption of the European Charter for the Development and Take-up of Film Online, which was initiated in May 2005 and agreed by business leaders on 23 May 2006 at the Europe Day at the Cannes Film Festival. This Charter is open to signature by all companies and associations sharing the principles of the commendable practices enshrined in the Charter. Already, 20 or so companies have signed up. Several of them are not directly, or only, in the film business. Sharing in the Charter is therefore an option for all media companies as a reference for the emerging business model of content distribution online.

Minister, ladies and gentlemen,

In launching the Communication on Content Online, the European Commission is pursuing a major objective set out in the i2010 Strategy: completing the internal market for ICT networks and devices and value-added content. All my proposals over the last few months – the modernisation of the Television without Frontiers Directive, the review of the regulatory framework for electronic communications, spectrum policy, roaming, networks and information security - and the forthcoming initiatives such as the 2007 Communication on mobile TV are all internal market oriented. To a large extent, I believe that the completion of the internal market now largely depends on sector specific initiatives such as the ones I have delivered so far.

As to the scope of the Communication on Content Online, we are still in the process of fact-finding, but it is clear to that the Communication should stress the aim of promoting the Competitiveness of the Content Industry. In order not to exclude certain types of content or business models, the consultation preceding the Communication will start with the broadest possible scope, including, for instance, sports rights. Among the specific issues to be examined will be network neutrality, DRMs and interoperability, cross border licences, and awareness raising on the importance of IPRs. In other words: I want an open discussion with no taboos!

Easy platform access and secure distribution of online content remain a crucial challenge. Authors, artists, creators should be able to reap due rewards from their talent and skills. We do have tools that can help implement the rules of the game for the benefit of all. Digital Rights Management (DRM) technologies are a key element to make distribution of content secure. Of course, we need DRMs that are widely accepted. In particular, we need to ensure high degree of interoperability and that DRM or similar technologies are not used to close markets. My services have worked hard with stakeholders to identify the best way forward for the use of DRMs. The Content Online Communication will draw on their input. New online services should be given the best possible conditions to deploy as it is in everybody's interest to enable these new channels of distribution to develop.

Here are some other issues where I would expect your contribution during the public consultation: What kind of business models will develop for online distribution? What solutions for making payments are best both for customers and providers? How should we encourage more efficient rights clearance? What role is there for release windows in the new multimedia, multiplatform environment?

In order to allow stakeholders to give their input, the public consultation on Content online will run on our website until mid-October 2006.

An ongoing Commission study on "Interactive content and convergence" will also contribute to the Commission's strategic thinking on Content Online. It will provide insight as to the roadblocks - potential or real - that are hindering or may hinder the development of digital content services over the next five years.

I look forward to a stimulating debate on content online in the coming months.

Thank you for your attention.