

# Flat world requires new telecommunications thinking

Have you read Thomas Friedman's "The World Is Flat: A Brief History Of The Twenty-First Century"? It's a fascinating look at how more connected the human race is becoming every day.

The expanding global connections result in many ways from the incredible telecommunications advancements of recent decades.

Friedman argues that where you are on the globe doesn't much matter anymore in business terms. We're all linked, converging our economies and exchanging information in real time. Modern telecommunications and data services mean Louisville can do business with Shelbyville, Ky.; Seattle, Washington; or Seoul, Korea on virtually equal footing.

## What's holding us back?

As Americans, we naturally assume the United States is at the forefront of this telecommunications revolution. A recent ZDNet story listed the "top five wired nations" in terms of technology innovations and Internet community. In order, they were Singapore, Denmark, Canada, Sweden and, in fifth place, the United States.

What's holding the United States back? Our telecommunications markets, unlike in other competitive or soon-to-be-competitive countries, still are being driven by regulators, rather than by consumers.

This means that American telecommunications innovation is forced to move at a snail's pace, when our innovation needs to move like a cheetah in the 21st century global economy.

For example, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 — only 10 short years ago — barely acknowledged the Internet. Now the Internet is a vital part of many Americans' daily lives and a huge force in our national economy.

Do you carry a mobile phone that can access the Internet or has a camera built into it? Do you have your home or business networked to share one high-speed Internet connection over several PCs? Do you make high-quality phone calls over the Internet at home or at work?

Who would have thought in 1996 that any of us — many of us — would say "yes" to these questions in 2005?

## Legislation should stimulate telecom industry

As the owner of a Web software-development company, I know firsthand how critical it is that legislation stimulate the telecommunications industry, not strangle it. American consumers are demanding the latest technology almost before it is introduced to the general marketplace.

Kentucky took a significant step forward more than a year ago, when the General Assembly

passed the Broadband Parity Act of 2004 to encourage high-speed Internet investment and expansion in our state. Thanks to that legislation, our state is making great progress on full broadband Internet availability for all Kentuckians.

Although that legislation was a big step, there's still much to do. Lawmakers at the state and federal levels need to continue updating our telecommunications laws for the 21st Century economy.

In Washington, the Broadband Investment & Consumer Choice Act (S 1504) is model legislation for this type of policy.

Policymakers also can look at the wireless industry as a proven model. A minimal regulatory approach by the government has led to competitive pricing and lightning-fast innovations, all driven by consumer demand for the best products at the best prices. The marketplace governs the wireless industry, and it works.

And these technologies are being introduced worldwide, not just here in the United States. Countries embracing and encouraging these technologies are positioning their businesses for global success.

We need to look to the future. The youngest American workers today understand the importance of telecommunications technology. It's that next generation who will be economically stifled if the wrong decisions are made today in the new flat world we live in.

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## Guest Comment

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