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Technology: How much does your business rely on the Internet?

Broad reliance on the Internet means that unsound policies have the power to harm every organization

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In the two short decades since it became available for commercial use, the Internet has come to occupy a unique position in the business world. Novelty has quickly given way to an unthinking reliance. Like electricity and running water, the Internet is presumed to be available on roughly the same terms in the future as it is today.

Unthinking reliance invites unanticipated risks. More thought should be given to how deeply the Internet is embedded in an organization's business plan, and to the Internet policies on which that plan relies.

In determining how deeply the Internet is embedded in a business or strategic plan, it may help to ask some probing questions. How would the sudden loss of email affect communications within your organization and with customers, suppliers and distributors? What would an interruption in such communications cost your organization? How would the disappearance of your website(s) affect marketing? How would the unavailability of the web affect research (including legal research) and other essential operations?

Such questions should prompt a searching reappraisal of the take-it-for-granted approach that many organizations understandably fall into. One of the Internet's chief virtues is that it just works. But behind its rugged exterior lie a few facts that every counsel should know:

- The Internet functions as a global network because of unified technical standards and policies

- Those standards and policies, which affect the functionality of email and the web alike, are primarily decided and administered by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)
- ICANN invites all stakeholders—governments, businesses, NGOs, and individuals—to participate in the formation of such standards and policies

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