

Internet Neutrality: Welcome to Legoland

Kirk Christiansen – a Danish carpenter – never imagined that his workshop would be the birthplace of one of the largest toy companies in the world: Lego. His idea: creating plastic blocks that could be connected to each other.

The controversial debate on internet neutrality and the profits of internet-based companies that are "connected" to the networks of telecommunications companies has resurfaced with a vengeance. All eyes are on Google, synonymous with new online business models. Their outstanding performance is due to a strategy based on controlling the user's experience through increasing coverage of links in the value chain, from applications to terminals.

Let's return to Lego. Its building blocks are primarily part of a system, as are the links in the telecommunications value chain. Each new set of Lego pieces is fully compatible with the rest of the system. Apple understands this concept, which allows them to think outside the box and create an innovative business model for launching the world's most respected personal electronic device, and which has forced telecommunications operators to share a piece of a pie that they have traditionally kept to themselves.

The forces that govern the telecommunications "Lego" have changed. But like Lego pieces, they possess an appropriate level of interconnection and in turn are easily separated to create new games. You need to rethink the role of each actor in the ecosystem and the possibilities of integrating their capabilities. The ultimate reality is that the market will buy more Lego pieces, the more attractive the experience their games offer.

This is a challenge that will provide new opportunities for all the actors involved. The success of internet-based companies is bound up with the capabilities provided by telecommunications companies through their networks. For their part, telecom operators must remain the driving force behind the industry in this context without giving up their advantages and must be supported by an adequate regulatory framework. Some of the strategies that these companies already have in place or that are on the agenda of these companies, such as opening their networks to third parties for the development of new applications and business models, should lead the way.

At the end of the day, networks are the foundations of any "Lego" in this sector. The intelligence of these networks must be used in order to incorporate other valuable building blocks into them that will maintain the prominent role of telecom operators in this exciting cluster.

The name "Lego" comes from the Danish "*leg godt*" meaning "plays well." Welcome to Legoland.

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