Cisco Blog > Author Biographies



# Richard Allan

United Kingdom and Ireland Cisco

Richard Allan is senior manager of government affairs for the United Kingdom and Ireland. Richard leads Cisco's policy work on advanced technologies in the EU and also supports policy work in the Nordic region. He recently stepped down from his seat in the U.K. Parliament where he was IT spokesman for the Liberal Democrat party and an active Member of Parliament (MP) since 1997, working on ICT policy issues.

During his time as an MP, Richard worked on issues ranging from digital convergence; implementing provisions of the U.K. Telecommunications Law that created OFCOM; assessing the development of the Internet and electronic commerce and the impact of the development of the Internet on traditional communications industry and policy structures. He speaks and writes regularly on a broad range of technology-related subjects and takes a particular interest in the development of e-democracy and e-government. In October 2004 he was appointed as an academic visitor to the Oxford Internet Institute.

Prior to serving as an MP, Allan worked for the National Health Service from 1991-1997, developing information systems to support primary health care and as a field archaeologist. He has a B.A. in archaeology and anthropology from Pembroke College, Cambridge, and an MSc. in information technology from Bristol Polytechnic.

# Richard Allan's Articles



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## Public Services Summit

December 15, 2008 - 0 Comments

Several hundred people representatives from the public sector in around fifty countries came together in Sweden last week in an event organised by Cisco and the City of Stockholm. The

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## LONDON – Next Generation Access in the UK

June 11, 2008 - 1 Comment

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## Child Safety on the Internet

March 27, 2008 - 2 Comments

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February 5, 2008 - 1 Comment

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## Public Services Summit

 Richard Allan

December 15, 2008 - 0 Comments

- Several hundred people representatives from the public sector in around fifty countries came together in Sweden last week in an event organised by Cisco and the City of Stockholm. The theme this year was "Sustainability, Innovation and Inclusion." The summit is specifically targeted at senior policy advisors and key decision-makers in education, healthcare and government and focuses on ways the internet and networking technologies can change the way you do business. A recurrent theme at the event was how to enable innovation in large organisations such as those which tend to predominate in the public sector. Maintaining an innovation culture is also an issue for large companies in the private sector so this is a rich theme for the mutual exchange of ideas between technology companies like Cisco and colleagues in government. I contributed to the event with a specialist session on the Power of Information agenda. This is a UK government developed strand of work that aims to promote innovation in government services by enabling people to make creative use of government information sources. For more information, please see the official Cisco Website at www.cisco.com/web/learning/le21/le34/nobel/2008/index.html or to read the social media record of the event, please visit www.cisco08.com.

High Tech Policy

# LONDON – Next Generation Access in the UK


Richard Allan
June 11, 2008 - 1 Comment

The debate about next generation access networks in the UK continues to develop apace. This week, the Broadband Stakeholders Group held a conference on next generation access called 'Beyond Pipe Dreams'. Two interesting new reports were published at the conference which are relevant for considerations of investment in new access networks more generally.The first report looks at how we can evaluate the economic and social value of a next generation network. While the second report looks at models for public sector intervention in next generation broadband. The discussion at the conference placed as much emphasis on the potential quality of next generation broadband packages as on their raw speed. Characteristics such as symmetry, low latency, predictability etc. were seen to be essential for developing innovative services which could be delivered over broadband. This is an interesting evolution of the debate taking us beyond the simpler numerical modelling of bandwidth requirements that has done before to try and define the demand for better access networks.

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# Child Safety on the Internet
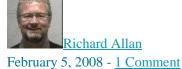


Richard Allan
March 27, 2008 - 2 Comments

LONDON, UK – A substantial report called 'Safer Children in a Digital World' was published today by the Byron Review which set up by the British Government last autumn. The report looks at child safety in respect of video games and their use of the internet. The report contains a number of recommendations for the technology industry to consider. The overall tone is very constructive and practical. It makes it clear that there are no simple regulatory solutions but that the best outcomes will be achieved where there are partnerships between government, industry and parents working together. It points out that there is no such thing as a risk-free environment so we must also help children to gain the resilience they will need to deal with problems when they occur. When commenting on the report, its author, Dr. Tanya Byron, has been complimentary about the internet industry's willingness to engage with her on these sensitive issues, and of the partnership work that is already taking place. As well as UK specific initiatives, there are some good global examples of industry supporting child safety such as the Family Online Safety Institute.

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# A Step Towards IPv6
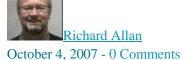
Richard Allan

February 5, 2008 - 1 Comment

EUROPE – A step forward has been taken in the transition to the larger internet address space, IPv6, this week with news that computers can now find each other without having to use the old IPv4 addressing system at all. This has been exercising policy makers for some time as you can see from the policy section of the very helpful IPv6 Task Force website, though it's interesting to note that much of this work is now a few years old. The European Commission has been very active in this area and supports a European IPv6 Task Force. It will be interesting to see how governmental activity ramps up again on this issue over the next couple of years as we get closer to full implementation.

High Tech Policy

# Radiohead's Great Experiment



Richard Allan
October 4, 2007 - 0 Comments

LONDON, UK – While policy makers spend a great deal of time on issues related to copyright in the digital age, some of those with copyrighted material to distribute are testing novel business models. The latest, and perhaps one of the most significant, of these experiments is Radiohead's offer of their new album as a digital download on a 'pay what you think it's worth' basis. All forms of attempting to protect the digital material are set aside and, instead, the band plays to their fans' sense of fair play. The band themselves say that they don't know how this will work out but there is certainly massive interest in it and their website has had some technical problems as a result. It will take some time for all the lessons from the many models being tried to be worked out. What will be interesting to see is the extent to which these will continue to rely on legal measures such as copyright law or technical measures such as digital rights management. In the meantime, enjoy the music, which should be good, and which you can legally download from here.

High Tech Policy

# Next Generation Access Debate Hots Up

Richard Allan
September 25, 2007 - 0 Comments

LONDON, UK – Recent public statements by UK Minister Stephen Timms MP and telecoms company BT herald a significant shift in the debate on next generation access networks in the UK. In the past discussion has focused on the technical and cost reasons that make rolling out a new fibre-based access network in the UK very difficult. Now there is a sense that it is in the national interest to move from this position of 'too difficult/expensive to do' to one of 'this must be done – how do we make it happen?'. The difficulties remain but the call is now for all stakeholders collectively to work out how to address them. This is being led by Stephen Timms MP, a Minister well known for both his expertise in and passion for ICT, who is to organise a Summit on Next Generation Access. A key milestone in the discussion was the publication of the Broadband Stakeholders' Group report 'Pipe Dreams'. The next stage is a formal consultation that is about to begin on regulation of new network infrastructure by the UK communications regulator Ofcom. For anyone interested in the new services that a faster access infrastructure will enable, this is an exciting time in the UK, as we see signs that there is now the will to keep up with other countries who are making the same transition.

High Tech Policy

# New Communication on Mobile TV

Richard Allan
July 19, 2007 - 1 Comment

EUROPE – The European Commission has just published a communication on Mobile TV in anticipation of this becoming a major new business area. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this is the Commission's support for DVB-H as a common EU standard. While they are not immediately mandating its use, they say that they may seek to do so in future. This seems to run counter to their general policy position of promoting technology neutrality when it comes to spectrum allocation. This subject was debated at a very good recent workshop run by the Portuguese telecoms regulator Anacom. Speakers, including some involved closely with the development of DVB-H, gave presentations on a range of aspects of the development of Mobile TV. The clear consensus view from this workshop was that mandating DVB-H would be a mistake, especially given the fact that both technology and business models are evolving very rapidly.

High Tech Policy

# EUROPE – What to Do With the 'Digital Dividend'

Richard Allan
June 15, 2007 - 0 Comments

LONDON – Like many other parts of the world, European countries are generally on course to achieve a switchover to digital television by early in the next decade, freeing up some radio spectrum that was used by analogue TV signals. Questions are now being asked about what should be done with this so-called 'digital dividend' of very useful radio spectrum. There are both technical and business aspects to this as a whole range of different technologies could be deployed using these frequencies with a correspondingly wide variety of potential business models.UK regulator, Ofcom, has been carrying out an extensive consultation under the banner of 'Digital Dividend Review', that has produced some interesting documents and presentations available from their site. A key decision that has to be made is whether any particular priority should be given to reusing this spectrum for the delivery of television or to make it available for more general purpose technologies like wireless broadband. Traditional UK broadcasters are, naturally enough, of the view that there is a special case for it to be used for HDTV and have formed a lobby group called HDForAll to push this point of view. But this is against a background of the rapid development of new forms of broadcasting using broadband platforms, and of improving capabilities for wireless internet technology. We can expect to see a lively political battle in the UK over the best solution for the use of the 'dividend' spectrum, and similar debates in other countries, as the crunch time for switchover and reallocation approaches.

High Tech Policy

# BBC To Go Ahead with On Demand TV

Richard Allan

May 2, 2007 - 0 Comments

LONDON – The governing body of the BBC has given the go-ahead for the launch of a catch-up TV service called iPlayer later this year. This will allow users to view on demand a range of BBC content within specific time windows. This will be a massive test of a number of policy and technical aspects of using the internet to deliver content that has traditionally been broadcast. Firstly, there is the question of a limiting access to a defined group of internet users. The content should really only be available for free to those who have paid the BBC licence fee (currently 135.50 GBP = approx 270 USD per annum). The BBC have been restricting viewing of other services to date via geolocation of IP addresses and will presumably do the same again. So if I use my home connection in London I would get the service but if I use my Cisco VPN gateway to the US presumably I would be blocked. Secondly, there is the question of demand on the network. UK communications regulator Ofcom carried out a market impact assessment of the iPlayer proposals which predicted that on average broadband subscribers would use an extra 3GB of bandwidth a month consuming this new service. They predicted the cost of this extra network capacity as being somewhere between 400 and 800 million GBP over a five year period. Broadband access suppliers in the UK must find ways to manage this extra demand from a service that does not deliver any revenue directly to them. Finally, this development is not in isolation but is happening alongside other commercial developments in the TV over IP space. The BBC's public service rival in the UK, ITV, has already announced its own plans to deliver catch up TV very shortly. ITV is funded by commercial advertising rather than a license fee. And there are entirely new commercial services like Joost that are on the point of going live. In the broadcasting world
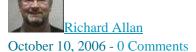
there has been a recognition of differences between channels defined as 'public service' and those that are purely commercial, with rights and obligations associated with the public service status. It will be interesting to see how this plays out in the internet space where no such rules exist.

High Tech Policy

# Gambling Firms Turn Out to be a Bad Bet

Richard Allan

October 10, 2006 - 0 Comments

LONDON – Oh dear, a few months back I wrote about online gambling sites that

> The stock market has expressed its view of the likelihood of gambling regulators effectively controlling behaviour by pouring hundreds of millions of pounds into gambling companies that draw revenue from a sizeable US user base.

And now we see the share prices of these same firms collapse as the US Congress has indeed taken legislative action to block their activities. Whatever the rights and wrongs of gambling as a specific issue, this decision is significant for the future of internet content regulation. Whilst it does not actually prevent access to sites, it asserts the right of a national government to control the online activities of its citizens. In the EU, regulatory activity has focused more on laws requiring service providers and search engines to block access to sites containing material deemed to be illegal. The net effect of both forms of action is that increasingly the internet behaves differently depending on which country you are in. Where this will lead us over the long term is as yet uncertain but it is a trend that is worth watching.

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# New York Times – Not (All) Available Here
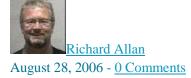

Richard Allan
August 31, 2006 - 1 Comment

LONDON – A while back I wrote about the BBC limiting access to World Cup content to UK only internet connections because of event rights issues. This week, we have seen the New York Times attempt to do the reverse, i.e. block access to part of its website to anyone with a UK internet connection, to avoid the risk of being held in contempt by UK courts for publishing too many details about a *sub judice* terrorism case. There are UK and US angles on this story in The Guardian and The New York Times itself that make interesting reading. Of course, the same VPN connection that links me Cisco's corporate network in the US which prevented me from watching the BBC World Cup content means that I am able to read the full New York Times coverage – a feature of internet architecture that will always make these geographical blocks imperfect. And for those who have UK internet connections, the fact that there is a community of bloggers who like nothing better than to publish controversial content means that 5 minutes work on a search engine will produce dozens of unauthorised copies of the material they are not supposed to be seeing. This is a tricky situation as there is a genuine risk of trials collapsing in the UK if inappropriate disclosure of facts has taken place in such a way as to be deemed prejudicial to a fair trial. There would be a great deal of public concern if someone suspected of a serious offence had to be released because of irresponsible publication, and the contempt laws are there precisely to prevent this from happening. But this historic arrangement is again challenged by the new global communication medium of the net and other countries' different traditions about what can or cannot be published about court cases.

High Tech Policy

# Mumsnet versus Ford

Richard Allan
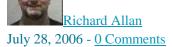August 28, 2006 - 0 Comments

LONDON – A row blew up this month between widely-read childcare expert Gina Ford and a community website used by 250,000 mothers in the UK, mumsnet.com. This has provoked renewed thinking about the legal status of comments made on the internet. Essentially, their hosting provider was threatened with legal action if they did not take down comments made in discussions about Gina Ford and her parenting advice that were deemed by her and her lawyers to be defamatory. The proposed remedy of prior monitoring of thousands of posts a day on a community website was not thought workable by the site managers, so instead they have asked all members not to discuss Gina Ford at all. The statement that Mumsnet have published about the episode from their perspective is well worth reading. As well as having links to relevant documents it explains very clearly the problem they face in trying to host open discussions in the UK legal environment. They point out that the situation would be very different under US law. One way to avoid legal difficulties is to host a site in the US and, perhaps, to set up an offshore company that is legally responsible for the site contents in a jurisdiction where suing for libel is more difficult. This is the path taken by controversial UK political blogger Guido Fawkes. It will be interesting to see how the tensions over libel law will play out as the internet becomes an increasingly significant medium. What is clear is that it is not good for the UK internet sector for there to be legal incentives to place your hosting business outside the country.

High Tech Policy

# The Appetite for User-Generated Content

Richard Allan
July 28, 2006 - 0 Comments

LONDON – The BBC has a highly successful website offering high quality content. This has built up a loyal audience over a number of years and has been supported by significant public funding. They have taken an interest in user-generated content, looking at both citizen reporting and promoting "rip, mix and share" of their own content archives with great projects like BBC Backstage and the Creative Archive. There may be doubters about the value of user-generated content who would question this approach. But a quick look at this chart of comparative audience reach between bbc.co.uk and YouTube.com from Alexa should make everyone sit up and pay attention. The appetite for YouTube's user-generated content is huge and growing and they have, at least on this measure, already shot past the BBC.

High Tech Policy

# Email Anywhere (kind of)

Richard Allan
July 12, 2006 - 0 Comments

LONDON – The British love mobile messaging, sending 3.3 billion mobile messages a month, or nearly two messages per person per day, according to this article in The Register. The particular form of mobile messaging used is, of course, SMS, and it can cost around 10 pence (nearly 20 US cents) per message, though is now often sold in bundled packages that work out much cheaper. There are clearly some very attractive features to this form of messaging. It is expected to be instant, the format necessarily keeps messages short enough to read quickly, the cost creates some form of barrier to inappropriate use, and it has great authentication as you see exactly which number a message is from when you receive it. On the down side, it generally has to be sent on fiddly keys (though T9 is a really interesting way to help with this), and there is the cost again which can be an extraordinary sum to pay to send a very small amount of data. As we see fixed/mobile convergence gathering pace, it will be interesting to see what happens with email/SMS convergence. The mobile messaging solutions that appeal to a mass SMS-using community, such as we have in the UK, will have to take into account existing habits and experiences.

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High Tech Policy

# World Cup: Global Event, Global Network, Local Rights



Richard Allan

June 29, 2006 - 1 Comment

LONDON – The working timetables of billions are affected by World Cup fixtures at present, especially in England as we wait with baited breath to see whether we can end our 'nearly, but not quite' habit of the last 40 years. For this World Cup, the BBC have continued their excellent work innovating with content delivery over the internet and are offering great content including a live video feed of matches. But, they only have the rights to broadcast in the UK so cannot allow this to go to viewers outside the country. They do this by checking your IP address to see whether you are physically in the UK. This is of course only approximate as the IP address we make visible to the public web is determined by a number of factors. In the case of the Cisco corporate network that I am logged onto all traffic clearly comes out onto the public net in the US as I cannot access the video feed. Damn. If this was a deliberate management ploy to stop us watching sport at work then this would be a good cause for worker revolt. But it is just an accident of our technical configuration. Presumably, the converse would apply. If I was logged into a UK corporate network that presented traffic with a UK IP address then I could watch the matches wherever I was in the world. UK-hosted VPN connections for hire, anyone?If you want to check whether you are 'UK' from the BBC's point of view then you can try looking at a highlights video with the video button on a page like this one of the England-Ecuador match. It will either show the clip or explain it is for UK users only.So national broadcast rights, carefully guarded, are the norm in 2006. It will be

interesting to see whether things have changed by the London Olympics of 2012 such that an internet broadcaster is legally empowered to show material about a global event to a global audience.

High Tech Policy

# EU: "Television Without Frontiers" Directive

Richard Allan
February 2, 2006 - 0 Comments

The core regulatory work of the European Commission revolves around the creation of a working single market across the 25 member states of the European Union. The EU has developed a lot of other areas of interest but the economic issues have been a prime concern since its inception. A discussion I was involved in last week highlighted for me the challenges of trying to do this against a backdrop of a rapidly evolving global information society. This was on proposals to revise something called the Television Without Frontiers Directive. The Commission is seeking to impose a basic tier of regulation on all audiovisual services, including those delivered over the internet or mobile phones. Their rationale for this is that it is necessary to ensure that suppliers of these services can sell across the single market without further regulation. The regulatory process will take a while to complete so any new rules may come into force from around 2008-9. This is against a backdrop of Google launching the beta of video.google.com which we can expect to develop significantly, along with a host of other competing services, between now and the new regulations being completed. When the new regulations come into effect these video services will presumably be told that they must comply with the EU-wide regulations or be subject to 25 different sets of national regulation or cease operating in the EU. If, as is likely, there are by then mature global services that are popular with European customers then we can anticipate an interesting power-play between regulators and service providers. The current situation in respect of online gambling may offer pointers as to how this could play out for audio-visual services, with an element of role-reversal between EU and US. UK-based gambling companies offer their services globally and say that it is up to local regulators in countries like the US to enforce their gambling rules on their own

citizens. The stock market has expressed its view of the likelihood of gambling regulators effectively controlling behaviour by pouring hundreds of millions of pounds into gambling companies that draw revenue from a sizeable US user base. Investors in US-based audio-visual content services may make a similar judgement about the ability of EU regulators to impose rules on how their content is delivered or presented.