

The **5th Street** of the Information Society

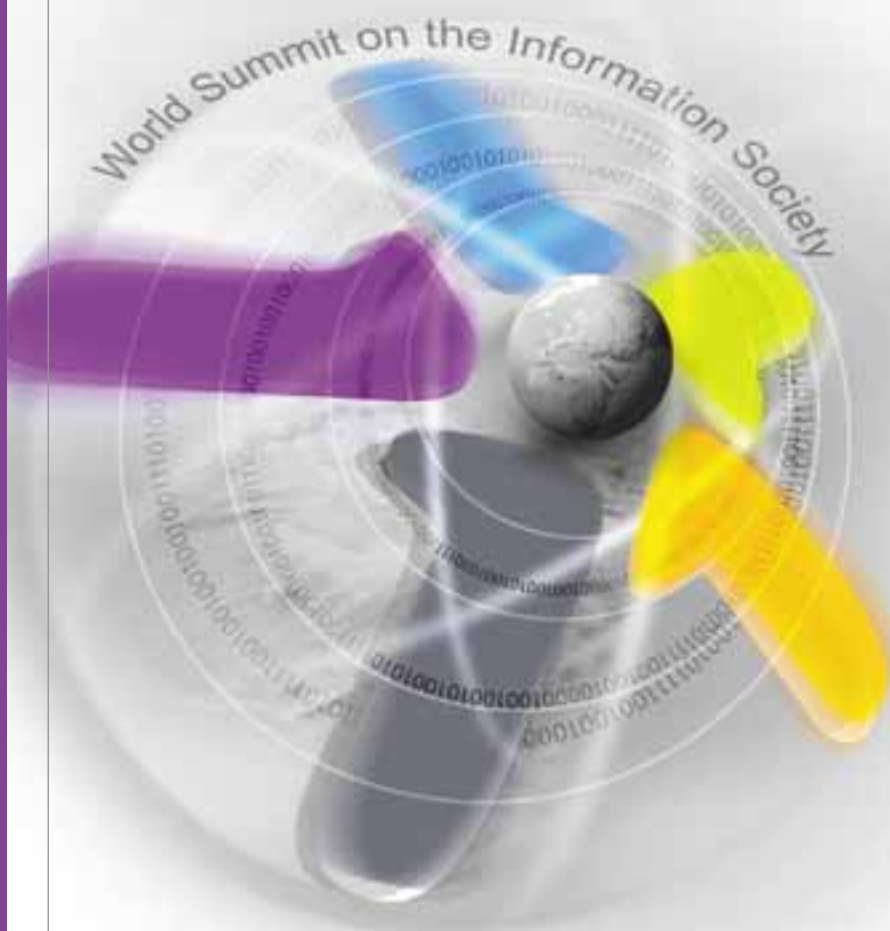
Dr. Younes Shokrkhah

Enhancing communication through media: The street with a medium and message for humanity

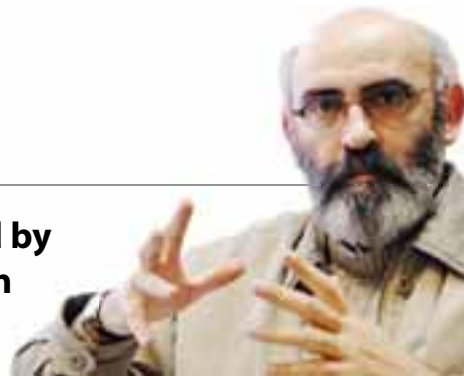
I was there! In Geneva at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) ¹. It was a UN Summit organized by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The Summit was constructed according to a so-called flower petal model, five streets leading to a dialogue or meeting center. WSIS with a series of regional meetings leading into preparatory conferences (PrepComs), followed by a two-phase World Summit: in Geneva, 10-12 DEC 2003 - now finished with a Declaration and Action Plan agreed upon- and then in 2005, in Tunis ². I hope to be there too as the Information Communication Technology consultant of ME Printer.

There is supposed to be a review of accomplishments since 2003 and a renewal of commitments by all the participants. Before smelling that flower or strolling on those five streets, what do you think about this? What kind of image do you have in your mind? Or in other words, where can printing have its pavilion in one of those five streets? Or let me still raise another prickly question: can we have a place there, if yes, which one of those five streets can have a brighter future for us as the next generation printers in Information Society?

Ok! Let me come back to those five streets. They were in fact stretched in a city like place called ICT for Development Platform or ICT4D (9 -13 December 2003 at Geneva Palexpo). The Platform was an important side event at the WSIS, (A large multi-stakeholder gathering, where approximately 500 projects and organizations were presented from more than 50 countries). There were also more than 1000 media representatives from across the globe. You know! ICT4D was a demand driven event. Heads of States, representatives of governments, private actors and civil society brought forward their specific interests. ICT4D had also an offer-orientated function by inviting financing



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Dr. Younes Shokrkhah, a veteran journalist of 20 years and lecturer of mass communication is ME Printer's ICT consultant. He has several books on journalism and mass communication to his credit as well as the translation of ten academic books in these fields. Shokrkhah is also the senior editor of the *Sanat-e-chap* (printing industry) Magazine of Iran and a committee member of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO.

institutions, development agencies, international organizations and suppliers! I missed all print suppliers!

The event in fact represented a global village with a large exhibition area of 16000 m². Getting too far! I was talking about those busy five streets stemming from a central meeting place, with vivid debates, discussions, presentations, workshops, exhibitions and various meeting points to enrich the priority themes of the exhibition. High-level speakers and panels addressed different topics from their own perspectives. Again I missed all members of the printer's tribe!

Five streets built on dreams:

Yeah! It is the time to start the stroll, let's go to Geneva Palexpo in Switzerland in hall 4, next to the summit events in hall 2. Streets filled with dreams are waiting there:

Street 1: ENHANCING HUMAN CAPACITY AND EMPOWERMENT with themes like capacity building, gender, indigenous communities and health
Street 2: FOSTERING POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION with themes like e-strategies and policies, e-governance and e-commerce.

Street 3: INNOVATING FOR EQUITABLE ACCESS focused on access and connectivity, financing mechanisms for ICT4D initiatives and affordable and open solutions

Street 4: PROMOTING LOCAL CONTENT AND KNOWLEDGE with themes such as local culture, knowledge and content, indigenous knowledge and local media

Street 5: STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT focused on humanitarian aid and disaster information system, conflict prevention and resolution, intercultural communication and finally enhancing communication through media.

Well! If you were to decide to have a look or check out a place there, what would your option be? Communication scholars and experts believe those who aren't present here on these five streets, will never have the concept of a digital divide in their minds and are living in an analog era without acquiring necessary and modern entrepreneurial skills, work readiness skills, computer skills and skills for the global marketplace. In my opinion, the fifth street of the information society can capitalize on digital opportunities for even non digitized printing houses and fully bring in digital opportunities for those printers and printing companies who prefer and can devise digital solutions and incorporate their contributions in information society developments.

But beyond this, I have to refer to the dark side of the case too and address a knowledge divide associated with the digital one. Without having a look at human capacity-building to facilitate the acquisition and absorption of skills and spread of knowledge necessary for living in an information society and understanding its mega trends – Now I am walking on Street Number One! - The solution may not be in any non-digital or digital realm. I believe the printing industry even in a fully digitized information society has a lot of options. I think challenges in the way are as much intellectual as they are technical and as the systems theory teaches us, persons are not objects but addresses which make possible the assessment of further communications.

United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, last year addressed business leaders (June 18) at a conference on the role of industry in bridging the global digital divide. In that conference, *The Net World Order: Bridging the Global Digital Divide*, hosted by the Business Council of the United Nations, Annan said: "A digital divide threatens to



Footnotes:

1. *WSIS: Through Resolution 73, the International Telecommunication Union in 1988 placed the request of holding a World Summit on the Information Society on the agenda of the then United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination. The outcome in 1999 was the UN declaration that the ACC as well as a number of other organizations had shown an interest in the Summit being held under the patronage of the UN Secretary-General, with ITU taking the lead in preparations. In 2001, the ITU Council decided to hold a summit in two phases (refer to footnote 2)*
 2. Phase 1: 10 – 12 December 2003, Geneva Palexpo, Switzerland
 Phase 2: 16 – 18 November 2005, Tunis, Tunisia
3. *IT Industry Must Help Bridge Global Digital Divide*
 URL: <http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content/stories/index.cfm?key=272>

exacerbate already-wide gaps between rich and poor.... I hope the industry will broaden its horizon and bring more of its remarkable dynamism and innovation to the developing world ... but Information Technology is not a magic formula or panacea. But it is a powerful force"³.

I want to tell you what I learnt from visiting those five streets: ICT should be used more and be understood by printers to reduce the digital divide between printing industry haves and have-nots. Strolling on the fifth street shows that printers must balance their technological precepts and services with needs, capacities and opportunities arising from the information society and even human values and attitudes of this society. Printers in particular are in dire need of finding workflows and people-friendly technologies and solutions to enable them to communicate with the rest of this prevailing digital world. As an ICT consultant, I am sure that technical innovation can play a critical role in bridging the digital divide, but again I am certainly sure that it is the knowledge of communicating that guarantees survival.

Well! It is evident that ICT has a tremendous potential. But if the printing industry still wants to remain a part of it, then the paramount challenge for remaining will be to create an enabling environment to pursue the goals defined at various levels at WSIS. To me, all streets lead to the fifth

one: enhancing communication through media. Print is a medium and the medium is the message. Print can be used to improve life even in the information society that is going to unfold within a one-time-system: global time.

Up to now, history has taken place within local times, local frames, regions and nations. But now, in the information society, in a certain way, internationalization and virtualization are inaugurating a new universal time that prefigures a new form of life. If printing in different historical phases has been so rich and effective, it is because it has been knowledge-oriented, which is still the case for netizens of the information society. In the very near future, our history will happen within universal time as an outcome of new ICTs.

Let's pray, the black magic creates workflows accessible to various communities, to ensure connectivity and like its historical role, to foster dialogue in lines and between the lines but within a one-time-system.

I told you, I was there in Geneva, in the WSIS, where all participants among PCs, laptops and different digital devices were in an evident hurry to distribute their printed press releases. I missed you there but I hope to see you in Tunis in 2005; to stroll with each other on the fifth street of the information society!

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Agfa Graphic Systems: overall solutions for prepress

Agfa is a world leader in digital and analogue manufacturing systems for the printing and publishing industries. Based on individual customer needs, Agfa's Graphic Systems division prides itself on building customer-driven solutions. It specialises in solutions for newspaper production, commercial printing and package printing. Agfa attained its leadership position in these markets by developing innovative technology that improves both the quality and speed of the print-production process. Agfa was the first to incorporate Adobe PDF technology into the print workflow to streamline the process while maintaining flexible, user-friendly operation. The award-winning Apogee workflow has become the most widely used software in the industry.

Agfa Graphic Systems has been consistent in the implementation of technology that combines precision imaging with low cost of operation, giving its customers a fast return on investment. Such systems include violet- or thermal-lasers and GLV (grating light valve technology) computer-to-plate systems. With more than 25 CTP-installations in UAE, KSA, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt and CTP units in 14 different sectors in Iran, - Agfa is by far the market leader in the Middle East region, in this highly innovative and competitive market.

Agfa's computer-to-film systems are equally innovative; Agfa imagesetters set industry standards, while Agfa recording films are the most widely used in the world. Due to Agfa's strong reputation in the CTF market in the past, it believes in a high potential for CTP-sales in the region as well. In a market, which is rapidly switching over from analogue to digital, the transition towards CTP seems logical. Agfa believes that the switchover will be carried out rapidly in the Middle East as print quality holds a great deal of importance to consumers in the region.

