

Google helps offer vastly faster Internet in Cuba

March 21 2016, by Michael Weissenstein

Google is opening a cutting-edge online technology center at the studio of one of Cuba's most famous artists, offering free Internet at speeds nearly 70 times faster than those now available to the Cuban public. President Obama says Google's efforts in Cuba are part of a wider plan to improve access to the Internet across the island.

The U.S. technology giant has built a studio equipped with dozens of laptops, cellphones and virtual-reality goggles at the complex run by Alexis Leiva Machado, a sculptor known as Kcho. President Barack Obama said Sunday that Google was also launching a broader effort to improve Cubans' Internet access across the island. Neither he nor the company gave details.

In an exclusive tour of the site with The Associated Press on Monday, Google's head of Cuba operations, Brett Perlmutter, said the company was optimistic that the Google+Kcho.Mor studio would be part of a broader cooperative effort to bring Internet access to the Cuban people.

"We want to show the world what happens when you combine Cuban creative energy with technology that's first in class," he said.

The studio will be open five days a week, from 7 a.m. to midnight, for about 40 people at a time, Kcho said.

The project has limited reach but enormous symbolic importance in a country that has long maintained strict control of Internet access, which

some Cuban officials sees as a potential national security threat. Officials have described said the Internet as a potential tool for the United States to exert influence over the island's culture and politics.

The connection at the Kcho studio is provided by Cuba's state-run telecommunications company over a new fiber-optic connection and President Obama's comments indicate that the new Google-Cuba relationship was negotiated at the highest levels of the U.S. and Cuban governments.

Perlmutter declined to comment on any broader plans by the company, but said that the Kcho center would feature upload and download speed of 70 megabytes per second, blazingly fast in comparison with the public WiFi available to most Cubans for fees of \$2 an hour, nearly a tenth of the average monthly salary, for an hour of access at roughly 1 megabyte per second.

Kcho said he was paying for the new connection himself but declined to say how much he was being charged.

Google has been trying for more than a year to improve Cuba's access to the Web with large-scale projects like those it has carried out in other developing countries. Kcho has long maintained close relationship with the Castro government and became the first independent source of free Internet in Cuba last year when he began offering free WiFi at his studio.

Soon after, the Cuban government announced that it was opening \$2-an-hour WiFi spots across the country in a move that has dramatically increased Cubans' access to the Internet, allowing many to video-chat with families abroad and see relatives for the first time.

Cuba still has one of the world's lowest rates of Internet penetration.

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Google helps offer vastly faster Internet in Cuba (2016, March 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-google-vastly-faster-internet-cuba.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.