

GARY COOK

# OPINION

## Greenpeace: ICT companies must provide political leadership – not just innovation

Companies in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector must work harder to overcome the political opposition of the dirty-energy companies that seek to slow or block a **clean-energy revolution**. There is too little of this type of aggressive advocacy from the ICT sector today.

**WE ARE ADDICTED** to the fossil fuels that are warming our planet. Breaking that addiction in time to protect the Earth is both the biggest challenge and the greatest opportunity of our time. I have worked on climate change for 15 years, but some of the fastest action I have ever seen has occurred during the past two years. During that time, I have focused on understanding and promoting ICT's role in turning this global threat into a transformational second chance for the economy, our energy choices, and the environment.

In 2008, the Climate Group's SMART 2020 report quantified that ICT solutions have the potential to drive a reduction of at least 15 percent in global greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2020. The corresponding business opportunity, combined with ICT's impressive track record of driving rapid transformation in other sectors, sets ICT brands up to play a critical role in advancing the clean-energy transformation needed to solve the climate crisis.

This transformation will not happen without a fight – but given the innovation and speed at which ICT has applied itself elsewhere, I believe it is possible. In fact, the scale of deployment for the renewable energy and energy savings needed to stabilize emissions – an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 – cannot be achieved without the rapid deployment of ICT energy solutions.

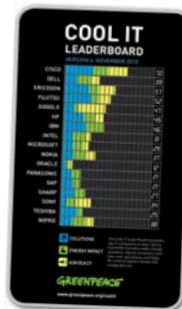
Although Greenpeace is best known as a fierce opponent to corporate polluters, the organization also works in cooperation with big business when corporate leadership is ready to transform its actions on behalf of the environment. These business partners can range from global food-product manufacturers to timber companies. ICT has a strategic role to play in dealing with climate change. We at Greenpeace wouldn't be

doing our job if we didn't encourage the sector to fully embrace the opportunity to help avert a climate crisis and transform our economy through clean technology and innovation.

### GROWING CONCERN

We created the Cool IT Leaderboard to track the progress of ICT companies toward achieving targets for economy-wide greenhouse gas reductions. We need transformative action, not incremental steps. This means that we require solutions that can be scaled to a deployment level commensurate to the challenge. It also means that ICT companies need to get serious about the management of their energy consumption and how they can reduce their own global-warming emissions. Most importantly, it means that we need steady leadership and regular, dedicated ICT advocacy for policies that will drive the deployment of energy-saving technologies.

Telecom services, for example, can help "green" the power grid by making it more energy efficient. However, more data on how ICT is having an impact is needed, as well as more investment in R&D and deployment of solutions. Our most recent IT Leaderboard evaluation recognized Ericsson, Cisco and Fujitsu for setting the bar in this regard. The companies provided clear case studies, supported by solid assumptions with pre- and post-intervention data on the greenhouse-gas savings potential of their solution technologies.



**The Cool IT Leaderboard tracks the progress of ICT companies.**



However, my colleagues at Greenpeace and I are watching, with growing concern, the expansion of ICT's own energy footprint. As cited last year in our Make IT Green report, if – based on data from 2007 – the total electricity consumption of the world's internet and telecommunications networks were compared with the total consumption of the countries of the world, the internet and telecommunications networks would be the fifth-biggest consumer. Worryingly, the energy consumed by internet and telecommunications networks is projected to triple in demand by 2020. Energy efficiency is an important first step, but does not by itself amount to being "green"; you need to look at where the energy is coming from, particularly when overall energy demand is growing as fast as the ICT industry's energy requirements. Companies can take critical steps to reduce this demand, but ultimately the power grid will only get "greener" if we work together to change the policies that govern it.

#### **MUCH MORE WORK TO BE DONE**

In India and elsewhere in the developing world, we are seeing wireless networks "leapfrog" the wired communication model, but they are also leaping far beyond the electricity grid, relying primarily on polluting diesel generators to power them. Pilot projects are underway to power these networks with renewable sources of energy, and even to provide renewable energy services to the surrounding community with excess capacity. However, we need to work together to get governments to set policies that will drive clean telecom investment across the board. Phasing out diesel-fueled generators would be a clear first step.

A clean-energy revolution can be built on the innovations and infrastructure of the ICT sector, much as the industrial revolution was

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enabled by the fossil-fuel industry. For a transformational shift to occur, the ICT sector must work collectively and in partnership with other parts of the cleantech economy to overcome the political opposition of the dirty-energy companies that seek to slow or block a clean-energy revolution. Strong and consistent engagement with government decision-makers is needed, but – with a few exceptions – there is little evidence of this type of aggressive advocacy from the ICT sector today.

ICT companies have been incredibly innovative, and completely transformed how we work and communicate with each other. Now they have begun to take on the biggest transformation challenge of all: changing

the way we produce and use energy. Ericsson has begun to take up this challenge, and has been near the top of our Cool IT Leaderboard ranking in 2010. However, there is much more work to be done and Greenpeace is looking to Ericsson and others in the ICT sector to be a critical and long-term partner. These companies could provide both the technological innovation and the political leadership to drive the policy changes we need to protect our fragile climate. ●

#### **References:**

- Pathways to 80 percent by 2050, outlined in the Energy [R]evolution scenarios by the European Renewable Energy Council and Greenpeace International.
- Make IT Green, Greenpeace International, available at [www.greenpeace.org/coolit](http://www.greenpeace.org/coolit)