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By [Amy L. Dickson](#)

Right now there are an active 2.8 billion Internet users worldwide. This number comes from [Quartz](#), the digital news organization behind the daylong forum " [The Next Billion](#)" held at the Seattle Art Museum on June 2nd. Participants included thought leaders from Medium, Mozilla, Facebook, DARPA, UNICEF, and IDEO, among others. The forum brought together Internet, mobile, and tech leaders to discuss these important questions:

Who are the next billion users? What do they want? What do they need in order to participate in the global online conversation?

Five key necessities were consistently identified as needed to bring these emerging users online:

1. Devices
2. Content, especially localized into native languages
3. Apps/services
4. Connectivity
5. Power

Though $20 tablets and free connectivity may help boost Internet use and create new markets, compelling use cases are essential to bringing the other two-thirds of the planet's population online. The equation looks like this:

Right Device + Right Place + Right Price + Right *Experience* = Adoption

Global Internet Users, 2012

So what use cases will ultimately bring people into the fold? Three rose to the top:

1. **Education**: Unlocking the power to deliver world-leading educational content and courses to scalable worldwide audiences has never been done before. A large-scale classroom of thousands with access to expertise and materials is now a reality. Whether it's basic programming skills for students in India to advanced genome studies for doctors in sub-Saharan Africa, education will drive Internet adoption above all other use cases.
2. **Healthcare**: Internet connectivity is democratizing the way humans engage with healthcare. New and improved mobile devices can and will be used for telemedicine and telepathology. High-resolution camera phones and smart sensors will empower decentralized community healthcare workers to provide health services to hundreds of under-served patients moving forward. Imagine being able to visualize viruses using field tools as simple as a cell phone. Guess what? You already can.
3. **Commerce**: By creating use cases that generate economic value creation, people will flock to the connected world. All you have to do is change the conversation: What do you want to do? With affordable devices, satellite infrastructure, and local language content, you're going to see an uptick in regional opportunities to make money. A simple example? Coastal Indian fishermen checking tide tables to know the best (and safest) time to fish.

Despite coming at the issue from vastly different angles, one unifying theme emerged in the day's sessions: It's not the device, the power, the cost, or the infrastructure that is most important; it is the user experience. And the only way to deliver on that promise of experience is by viewing the users as the people they are.

Nearly every speaker stressed the importance of listening to people, learning their stories, and understanding their needs, wants, and desires. Much like we believe here at Blink UX, you can never underestimate the value of first-hand observation, qualitative ethnographic studies, and immersive sessions that inform overall design.

The next wave of users must be seen as people, not numbers.

And who are the next billion? They are rural farmers in Brazil. Tuk tuk drivers in India. Community health workers in Malawi. Commuters in urban Indonesia.

Ev Williams

Ev Williams (pictured above, left with Quartz editor, Kevin J. Delaney), co-founder of Twitter and Blogger, founder of Medium, captured it best when he said the following:

> *"We used to think about it (consumer Internet) as features and now we think about it more as experience. That's a progression of value moving up the stack as it tends to do in industries as they mature. If you're in the tech world, the mention of design or designers happens a thousand times a day more now than it did ten years ago. What we're focused on now is much more than functionality. Design, experience, and the aesthetics – the complete package – is building more value on top of the commodities.*

> *That's not to say that the core technologies are done, but even if connectivity and processing and hard technologies froze today, there*

would be at least a decade more of rapid innovation to build on top of what we have. The value never settles – it's going to expand in both directions: The idea that you're going to create a complete experience."

We must make the incredible promise of the Internet understandable to people. Only then will they choose to participate. By making the Internet more humane, more conversational, more relevant, and literally more accessible, the next billion will come.

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