



## Cambodia – a land of opportunity

**When it comes to hopping onto the information highway, Cambodia is working hard to catch up to other ASEAN countries. China dominates the region with about 50 per cent of Internet users. But since 2000 other Asian countries have experienced phenomenal growth. For example, June 2010 data from the Internet World Statistics website show that between 2000 and 2010, Internet use in neighboring Vietnam grew by 12,034.5 per cent to 24.2 million people. Growth even in Myanmar outpaced Cambodia with Internet use leaping by 10,900 per cent to 110,000 people.**

In Cambodia, the percentage of Internet users in the past 10 years increased by 1,200 per cent to some 78,000 people or 0.5 per cent of the population.

Social and political events in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made early ventures into the information technology (IT) sector impossible. Between 1970 and 1998 the country faced social and civil upheaval: invasive U.S. bombing during the American-Vietnam War, internal conflict culminating in the Khmer Rouge genocide (1975-79), occupation by Vietnam (1979-1989) and civil war (which ended in 1998). Events and political instability shattered Khmer civil society. The infrastructure, education system and economy were in shambles leaving widespread and ongoing poverty

and illiteracy especially in rural areas of the country.

The signing of the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict in Paris in 1991, the arrival of the United Nations Transition Authority Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992 and first national elections in 1993 heralded the beginning of the country's reconstruction and redevelopment. The international community has been generous in supplying expertise and financial aid to the Cambodian government in its efforts towards peace, security, rebuilding institutions and establishing a stable economic environment.

But the devastation of the earlier years remains profound. The Asia Development Bank Factsheet (as of 31 December 2009) estimates that in 2007 one quarter of the population was living on less than \$1.25 USD a day and since the 2008 global financial crisis that situation has not improved. Supporting evidence can be found in numerous reports including a UNESCO report on education strategy for Cambodia (2010): "the poverty rate still remains high and the growing gap between the rich and the poor—especially the gap between urban and rural areas—remains a challenge."

### Redevelopment of telecommunications

With so many pressing needs and limited funds, leaders in the early 1990s had to make some hard choices when it came to telecommunications. In 1992 the country had "only a little over 4,000 fixed lines" about 80 per cent of them in Phnom

Internet usage and population statistics for Cambodia

Year	Users	Population	Penetration
2000	6,000	12,573,580	0.05 %
2007	44,000	15,507,538	0.3 %
2009	74,000	14,494,293	0.5 %
2010	78,000	14,753,320	0.5 %

Source: www.internetworldstats.com, 2010

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Penh (ITU Toolkit). "Cambodia opted to develop mobile communication technology to address the telecommunication needs of its rural people; it became the first country in the world to have more mobile telephones than fixed telephones," noted a 2004 report prepared for the Trade and Investment division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ST/ESCAP/2336). The result is that mobile technology dominates and is affecting the expansion of Internet services in Cambodia. "In fact Internet take up remains disturbingly low, one of the lowest penetrations in the region," wrote technology consultants Budde Communication in its Cambodia forecast. The report noted that by March 2009 there were 4.3 million mobile subscribers or 29 per cent of the population, whereas the number of fixed-lines remained relatively static.

In another report, Budde Communication noted that since more people own mobile phones than computers, there are huge opportunities for mobile data services to bypass the infrastructure and offer access to the Internet.

"The MPTC (Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of Cambodia) decided in 2000 that it was time to open up the Communications market in Cambodia and since then have licensed several major Mobile, VoIP and ISP operators to achieve competitive rates for the Cambodian people," Minister H.E. So Kuhn told people gathered for the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day in Phnom Penh on 17 May 2010.

In 2009 the government released a revised draft of the Law on Telecommunications that would regulate the sector and set rules for issues such as pricing, interconnectivity and

infrastructure sharing. But it has yet to take steps to enact the law. It's a bit like the American wild west. "Unregulated and overcrowded" is how Charlie Lancaster described the situation in an article written for the *Southeast Asia Globe*, 15 March 2010. With a population of just 14 million, Cambodia has nine mobile providers, four fixed-line operators, more than 30 Internet (ISP) services. By comparison "Vietnam with a population of 80 million, has fewer than 10 and Hong Kong, a major Internet hub, has only a handful," Lancaster wrote.

Vigorous competition among mobile companies in Cambodia along with the availability of inexpensive second hand phones has made mobile communication accessible throughout the country. Mobile operators offer low call prices, value added services and are aggressively expanding their network coverage (see chart below). Pre-paid mobile services in Phnom Penh in June 2010 were \$5 USD a month or less due to various promotions. Many of these services included mobile Internet and multimedia messaging services (MMS), which are affordable alternatives to expensive home computers and fixed Internet service. In June 2010 a new low end Nokia mobile phone cost \$25 USD.

**Cambodia – key telecom parameters**

Category	2009	2010 (estimated)
<b>Fixed-line services</b>		
Total number of subscribers:	54,200	60,000
Annual growth	26 %	11 %
Penetration (population)	0.4 %	0.5 %
Penetration (household)	1.5 %	1.5 %
<b>Internet services</b>		
Total number of subscribers:	34,000	45,000
Annual growth	112 %	32 %
Penetration (population)	0.15 %	0.20 %
Penetration (household)	0.8 %	0.10 %
<b>Mobile services</b>		
Total number of subscribers:	5.3 million	6.5 million
Annual growth	40 %	16 %
Penetration (population)	37 %	44 %

Source: Budde Communication, 2010

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A December 2009 report prepared for UK Trade and Investment, an arm of the British government, estimates that the number of subscribers in Cambodia's mobile phone market will grow at an annual rate of 50 per cent.

"Thanks to low prices, mobile phones have become indispensable in Cambodia, preferred over traditional communications including landlines and the postal service. With poor transportation infrastructure and a shortage of electricity coverage, mobile phones are the most convenient appliance, offering a range of services including radio, music, videos, and even Internet access," wrote Sopheap Chak, a technology blogger, graduate student of peace studies at the International University of Japan and manager of Cambodian Youth Network for Change, in *UPI Asia Online*, April 23, 2010.

The growth of mobile technology is understandable given the paucity of fixed-lines. In 2008 the World Bank found that few people owned personal computers (0.4 per 100 people) and even fewer had fixed Internet (0.1 per 100 people). In the provinces Internet service tends to be slow and unreliable. High Internet connection costs of about \$40 USD a month are a deterrent. Instead, on-the-go urban dwellers such as young entrepreneur Anna Nov, the general manager of Ang Khmer Group, a translation, interpreting, advertising and public relations company in Phnom Penh, juggles various mobile phones and service plans.

At dinner in Phnom Penh in June 2010 when asked about mobile service in Cambodia Ms. Nov opened her purse and set six mobile phones on the table. "Two others are charging at home," she explained. Each phone, she said, has a purpose. One is to receive calls from clients. The other is to make calls to her employees and freelancers. Another phone is to call clients. There's a phone dedicated for family and one for her friends. She is actively involved in social networking and frequently posts comments, photos and interesting links to Facebook and other sites. Ms. Nov takes advantage of the discounts and promotions offered by the nine competing mobile phone providers for services such as free text



Entrepreneur Anna Nov has eight mobile phone accounts  
Photo by Kim Kierans

messaging and rebates and accessing mobile wireless broadband. She says the competition is so fierce and some deals are so good that she doesn't pay for the service on some of her phones.

Urban dwellers are well served with landlines, low cost Internet, 3G, MMS (multimedia message service), mobile Internet and in Phnom Penh an extensive Wi-Fi network. More than 80 per cent of the population who live in rural areas have little or no access to computers or the Internet and look for connectivity through mobile phones.

"The major factors influencing access to the Internet (in rural areas) are availability of electricity, cost of equipment, and cost of connection. The rural people rely heavily on radio and television for information," wrote Pan Sorasak and Chriv Kosona in *Digital Review of Asia Pacific* in 2009. "In rural areas, 90 per cent of the population does not have access to generated electricity and power is supplied by 12-volt rechargeable batteries." The authors noted that while Internet charges at private shops in Phnom Penh can be as low as 25 cents, hourly rates at Internet shops in other areas of the country can range from \$1-\$4 USD.

MPTC Minister H.E. So Kuhn said in May 2010 "It is expected that by 2016 100 per cent of the communes will have basic and dedicated ICT services" and he pointed to the successful e-program for rural empowerment and community health and the e-program for education. Many of those messages will be delivered over mobile phones.

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**Mobile operators**

As of September 2010, nine mobile operators offered coverage to 14 million people:

**MobiTel** was established in 1997. It is the country's largest telecom with a customer base of 2.17 million in March 2009 (around half of the market). MobiTel operates 3.5G technology in the capital and EDGE nationwide and has service covering over 85 per cent of all cities, towns and villages.

**Hello Axiata Co Ltd (HACL)** formerly Telekom Malaysia International (Cambodia) Company Limited (TMIC) Hello Axiata (renamed in March 2010) received a 35-year concession in 1996 to provide services on the GSM 900/1800 frequency band. Hello has network coverage across the country (all cities and provinces) and along the main trunk roads, covering 86 per cent of the populated area. Hello deploys GSM, GPRS and EDGE technology. Figures released by the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications in June 2010 put Hello Axiata in fourth place with 491,146 subscribers.

**Mfone Co. Ltd.**, also known as Camshin, has been in Cambodia since 1993. In the beginning, the company provided only fixed phone wireless local loop (WLL) technology and subsequently introduced GSM 1800, 900 and WCDMA 2100 services. Mfone is said to be the third largest telecom with more than 1 million subscribers and network coverage across the country.

**Cambodia Advance Communications Ltd (CADCOMMS)**

CADCOMMS or qb was one of the newest entrants in the telecom sector. It received a licence in 2006 and launched its services in March 2008. qb is using a technology platform called 3G technology with HSDPA, or 3.5G, which gives subscribers access to the Internet, including online TV. It has expanded coverage beyond Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, Siem Reap, Preah Sihanouk, Takmao and Battambang towns.

**Viettel (Cambodia) Pte. Ltd.**, or more commonly known as Metfone, a subsidiary of Vietnam based Viettel, launched its services in October 2008 in all 24 provinces in Cambodia. Despite being one of the newest market entrants, Metfone has aggressively expanded its network coverage. It is also the first company to launch all Internet ADSL, IP Lease Line, VoIP, Mobile and Wireless Fixed Phone services. Viettel is currently ranked the second largest operator in the country, behind MobiTel, by the number of subscribers (2.5 million).

**Latelz Co., Ltd (Smart Mobile)**

launched its full-scale services in early 2009. It is aggressive in its marketing strategy, offering competitive pricing, service packages and promotions. The company has also signed a deal with one local bank to allow "Top Up" through ATMs and an arrangement with another company, Wing, to provide the country's first mobile phone payment services. All these services are relatively new in Cambodia.

**Excell** launched its business in July 2008. It was the country's first operator, providing a new standard of mobile telecommunications CDMA 2000 1x EV-DO. However, the company only has network coverage in Kandal province with 40,000 subscribers. It has plans to expand its network in Takeo and Siem Reap provinces.

**Beeline**, a subsidiary of Russia based VimpelCom, entered the market in 2009 with aggressive promotions and marketing campaigns. Its network covered 21 provinces as of August 2010. At its first anniversary celebration in May 2010 the company said it has 370,000 active subscribers. Beeline has signed a contract to build a GSM network in Cambodia over the next five years with China's Huawei Technologies

**Applifone Company Ltd. (Star-Cell)**

Star-Cell, a subsidiary of Cyprus based Timeturns Holdings launched its services on October 2007. It is one of the fast growing companies and has network coverage in 11 provinces or about 37 per cent of Cambodia's total population. Star-Cell recently teamed up with Ericsson to introduce solar-powered base stations with satellite transmission to Cambodia.

(Sources: Home pages of mobile providers; Cambodia Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications; and UK Trade & Investment report *Telecommunications Cambodia*, December 2009)

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Political parties and NGOs recognise the importance of mobile SMS text messaging in difficult-to-reach areas of the country and used the technology during the 2007 Commune Council elections and 2008 National Elections. "Political parties use SMS text messaging, the cheapest and most effective way of widely spreading their message, for political campaigns. Also civil organizations that monitor elections use SMS to communicate among themselves," wrote Sopheap Chak in *UPI Asia Online*, April 23, 2010.

She recounted how the National Election Commission, with support from the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), banned texting on the last day of the 2007 campaign to "prevent parties from using text messaging to mobilize rallies, thereby ensuring a quiet environment for voters." In the 2008 campaign, she credited SMS messaging partly for the CPP election victory.

"This is because a nationalistic movement coincided with the election campaign, due to a border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand over the Preah Vihear temple. This generated political approval of the government, which publicly denounced any invasion of Cambodian territory. Mobile phone text messages circulated saying, 'Khmers love Khmer and should boycott anything Thai or with Thai writing on it.'"

Peou Chivoin, a media theory lecturer whose research specialty is the Internet and social capital, attributed the popularity of mobile phones to the fact that Cambodians prefer "interpersonal" relationships and most people have at least two mobile phones.

**Blogging – a slow trend**

That could explain why Cambodians have not embraced blogging en masse with the same fervor as neighbouring Asian countries. "It's a matter of investment of time," Peou Chivoin explained. "There's also the problem with language and thinking about what to write." Furthermore, he said, the open source Khmer – Khmer Unicode – has many problems. What he has observed is that many young people start blogs and then quit, leaving a small but fiercely dedicated group of young men and women to provide thoughtful commentary on issues facing the country.

*"From a perspective of a Cambodian, Cambodia's democracy is still young with restricted freedom of expression and media control; I do feel that blog is one of the most exciting and innovative technological tools to exercise the right to expression as well as other fundamental rights. We can share news, express our opinions, communicate with other fellow bloggers for any campaign purposes through blog. It's a great tool in use even in a situation that other means of communications are restricted,"* said Ms. Sopheap Chak, blogger and human rights activist.

Source:  
<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/06/26/cambodia-riding-the-wave-of-change/>

Interestingly, most of the influential bloggers write in English, not Khmer. The following list is in no way complete but provides an entrée into the blogging world of Cambodia.

**Tharum Bun** has the distinction of being the first blogger in Cambodia. His first post was on in 2004 (<http://us.asiancorrespondent.com>). The 28-year-old writes for *Asian Correspondent*, is a contributing author to Global Voices, (an international community of bloggers who report on blogs and citizen media from around the world <http://globalvoicesonline.org>), and a journalism fellow at *The Phnom Penh Post* through a Sasakawa Peace Foundation scholarship.

**Kounila Keo** ([www.blueladyblog.com](http://www.blueladyblog.com)) is a freelance writer for UNICEF Cambodia, writer and editor at large at *LIFT Magazine*, *The Phnom Penh Post* and AFP journalist. She blogs about politics, environment, human rights, social issues and press freedom.

**Details are Sketchy (DAS)**

(<http://detailsaresketchy.wordpress.com>) has been blogging anonymously since June 2006. DAS told Tharum Bun in an interview (September 3, 2010) that she or he started blogging "to provoke some informed debate." The full interview with DAS can be found at (<http://us.asiancorrespondent.com/tharum-bun-blog/meet-cambodia-s-anonymous-blog-author-details-are-sketchy>).

**Sopheap Chak** started blogging in 2007 ([www.sopheapfocus.com](http://www.sopheapfocus.com)). The 25-year-old is a frequent contributor to Global Voices



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where she writes about technology, human rights, gender and other issues. She's a graduate student in peace studies at the International University of Japan and manager of Cambodian Youth Network for Change.

**K I Media** an aggregator site is "dedicated to publishing sensitive information about Cambodia". (<http://ki-media.blogspot.com>).

**Diana Saw**, a Singaporean living in Siem Reap, provides a forum for people in that part of the country (<http://cambodiacalling.blogspot.com>).

The blogging community has a small but strong female presence. As researcher Lyda Chea noted in a paper "Empowering Women Psychologically in Cambodia through Blogging," presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre in Singapore, 21-23 June 2010, the presence of women in the blogosphere of Cambodia is breaking down the stereotype of the Internet as a "male dominated" space. "It is then very intriguing to see how Cambodian women, whose voices are culturally and traditionally suppressed, have made use of blogging."

Ms. Chea is a senior undergraduate in Media Management at the Department of Media and Communication (DMC), and in English Language Teaching at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Her research interests are in issues pertaining to ICTs and education, as well as gender and development.

For her research she interviewed 15 female bloggers and analysed the content of their blogs. She supplemented her research with an online survey of 71 Cambodian bloggers. Her online survey revealed that women represent about one third of bloggers (26 respondents) and 80 per cent blog in English. They are young, with 80 per cent aged between 20-29 and 15.4 per cent younger than 20. The majority (65 per cent) live in Cambodia while the rest work or study abroad. "Most noticeable, however, is high educational level among the bloggers. Half of them are graduate or postgraduate students and 38.5 per cent are students at undergraduate or below bachelor's level. The remaining 11.5 per cent are high school students," her paper noted.

Ms. Chea found that the blogs broke down into two types: the personal journal blog where women wrote about things that interested them such as music, books and fashion and the journalistic "gatekeeper" blog about social and political issues. Her research found that the personal journal blogs generated more comments and created a greater sense of community among women than the journalistic gatekeeper blogs, which generated higher numbers of site visits.

"This is because people reading posts in the 'journalistic gatekeeper' blogs mainly want to get information, not necessarily to comment. However, the blogs receive a lot of attention from the media because the owners write articles and give critical reflection on either political or social issue of the country, which the media can consider as their topics. Therefore, in the media the female bloggers who run the 'journalistic gatekeeper' blogs are popularly known."

Unlike Vietnam and China, Cambodia's "journalistic gatekeeper" blogs have escaped censorship, probably because the Internet has yet to achieve the status of a "mass medium." But that could be changing. In February 2009 Prime Minister Hun Sen closed online gambling operations to "make social reform, strengthen public order, and improve social morality". In early 2010 the government said its company Telecom Cambodia would set up a state run exchange point in its fight against online pornography, theft and cyber crime. Bloggers are naturally concerned because Telecom Cambodia would also have powers to block access to individual websites.

After 10 years of publication first in print and then on the web *The Mirror* run by the tireless volunteer efforts of Norbert Klein transformed itself on 1 September 2010 into a news and information blog ([www.cambodiamirror.org/](http://www.cambodiamirror.org/)). The site will no longer publishing translations of articles and headlines from the Khmer press into English due to funding issues. However, Norbert Klein will continue to operate the website

He writes: "The goal remains the same: to regularly provide an overview of major dynamics in Cambodian society, and by doing so to facilitate dialogue between different opinions and positions. *The Mirror*

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will continue to reflect a wide variety of sources of information, including some from outside of the country, with links to background information. There will be references to events and issues and observations as they come up.”

#### Innovative media

With such low Internet penetration in Cambodia, it appears mainstream media feel no urgency to hop on the web. Only a few of the 100 or so Khmer language newspapers including *Koh Santepheap* (<http://kohsantepheapdaily.com.kh/>) have a web presence where they post stories and photographs from their print publications. There is no forum for comments on their sites. Surprisingly, the English language *Cambodia Daily's* website ([www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily](http://www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily)) is dated and the most current stories were features from July 2010.

It's a mixed bag when it comes to broadcasters' presence on the Internet. Cambodia Television Network (CTN) ([www.ctn.com.kh/](http://www.ctn.com.kh/)) is the most progressive. On the site you can find up to date video and news reports. Others have let their websites get out of date. As of 5 September 2010, news on TVK, the state broadcaster, was dated 17 June 2010 while TV9 has information from 21 January 2010. The website of Phnom Penh Municipal TV offers a schedule of programming.

Innovation is coming from foreign entrepreneurs who see the untapped potential for publishing in Cambodia.

#### Case study 1: Southeast Asia Globe – regional success



When one thinks of headquarters for a glossy, high-end magazine Singapore and Hong Kong come to mind. The *Southeast Asia Globe* breaks the stereotype. Each month a staff of 12 – including four editorial people – produces the 100-page magazine out of its office not far from the Independence Monument in Phnom Penh. The

16,000 print run is distributed to business leaders and expats and sold for \$4 USD an issue at news stands and select hotels in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Each issue focuses on the people and issues that affect business and lifestyles of Southeast Asia.

The target audience is entrepreneurs and business people. “We try to go into business and the economy. It's not the biggest group of people, but it's probably the most relevant group for us in terms of advertisements,” explained co-founder and managing editor, Arne Deepen, a tall thin boyish-looking man with wavy honey brown hair that falls past his ears. Our interview took place at the magazine office on June 19, a public holiday to commemorate the birthday of The Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk. Deepen moved to Cambodia from Germany in 2006 after working in the magazine business for five years in layout, graphics and as a photo editor. He was lured to Cambodia by a former magazine colleague from Germany, Tassilo Brinzer who had the idea to start a magazine.

“It's (Cambodia) not a bad place to start a magazine, it's a lot cheaper here,” Deepen said. “You can set up your business, grow slowly, solidly and then go to other countries.” The *Southeast Asia Globe* moved into Thailand in the fall of 2009 and for five months printed a Thailand edition of the magazine as well as one for Cambodia. In March Brinzer, the *Globe's* editor in chief, announced the Thailand bureau would remain in tact but the magazine would return to a single print edition for the region.

“We have found that readers and advertisers are more interested in the region than in a single market such as Thailand, where the political situation is often cited as a reason for lower marketing investment, and Cambodia, which alone is considered too small a market for a large regional investment,” Brinzer told *The Bangkok Bugle* on 2 February 2010. With 80 per cent of its revenue coming from advertisements that is an important consideration.

Instead, in March 2010 the magazine launched a regional multimedia e-magazine. “It is designed for the new generation of

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e-readers such as the iPad and others. We are the first publication in Southeast Asia doing this, and certainly we're the first to include video features in a similar-to-print digital magazine within Asia." It can be found at [www.sea-globe.com](http://www.sea-globe.com). The website features a new story from that month's magazine every couple of days. Subscribers get the full online edition of the magazine.

"I think in Cambodia at the moment I think we have hit our threshold," Deepen said. The magazine had been approached to open a bureau in Vietnam, Singapore and even China, but none of those options was on the horizon, Deepen said. The company has branched out into marketing and held special events three times a day during the World Cup in June. They will host a food festival and organise the two-day Oktoberfest in Phnom Penh.

**Case Study 2: *The Phnom Penh Post* – building local capacity**



Anyone familiar with the history of veteran newspaper businessman Ross Dunkley knew that when he signed the deal on 22 December 2007 to buy *The Phnom Penh Post* there would be changes.

Dunkley, a straight-shooting Australian with energy to burn, has spent more than 19 years kicking around Asia and there's nothing he loves more than a good challenge. He's taken on more than most. He was the first foreign investor into Hanoi in 1991. He started the *Vietnam Investment Review*, an English language weekly, added a Vietnamese edition and created Vietnam Air's in-flight magazine. He sold the business in 1994 to Kerry Packer, Australia's richest man and stayed on as managing editor, leaving in 1997 just as the Asian financial crisis hit.

After taking time off to tend the children while his wife worked he set his sights on Burma (Myanmar), making monthly trips there throughout 1999 and 2000. When the military junta opened the door Dunkley slipped through the crack and has the distinction of being the first and last foreign media partner to operate in the country.

Myanmar Consolidated Media (MCM) of which Dunkley is the CEO and editor in chief, is the largest private media company with some 350 staff (60 editorial). They work on two national papers in Burmese (circulation 70,000) and English (circulation 10,000). MCM also puts out four other publications: a youth magazine, a sports paper, and a crime and a wheels tabloid. It also has a website, *Times Online*. All operate under censorship. Dunkley estimates that 20 per cent of the stories his reporters write for the *Myanmar Times* English and Burmese editions don't get published, but that doesn't stop them from going after the stories and trying to get them past the censors. His daily papers are a throw back to the heyday of publishing in North America and Europe putting out 100 page papers with up to 16 pages of classified ads. An eight-person local board runs the company and has decision-making authority.

After working with controlling regimes in Vietnam and Myanmar, Dunkley seized the opportunity to expand into Cambodia. Along with Bill Clough, an Australian miner and oil and gas entrepreneur, he signed the deal on 22 December 2007 to buy *The Phnom Penh Post* from its founder, American Michael Hayes. Now Dunkley divides his life between Yangon, Myanmar (Burma) and Phnom Penh.

"In 2009 I made 108 flights between Myanmar and Cambodia. This year so far (as of mid June 2010), 68 trips. I tell people my office is the smoking lounge of Cambodia International Airport."

We arrived at the Post Media headquarters, located in the Phnom Penh Building, a stone's throw from the National Assembly on a Friday public holiday in mid-June. The office was unusually quiet because the paper appears Monday to Friday, which means staff work Sunday through Thursday. Dunkley sits in a cluttered office within shouting distance of the newsroom. "This is the boardroom," he jokes, gesturing at the piles of newspapers, empty coffee cups, and ash trays overflowing with cigarette butts. He stirs his coffee with a red pen. His suit jacket is strewn across an armchair. He wears a businessman's white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a sedate blue tie. Dunkley is a hands-on working executive.



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Often during the interview he darts out to answer the buzzer to let someone in the door.

He put that energy first into taking the *Post* from fortnightly publication to daily in August 2008 and in September 2009 he started a Khmer daily newspaper. Editors of the Khmer edition make their own decisions on local content and international news. Dunkley estimates that 40 per cent of the content is the same as the English edition, along with sports and business. "Two dailies in two and a half years is a lot of hard work." He also supervised the creation of a new weekly sports magazine and *Lift!*, a bilingual weekly aimed at youth inserted in Wednesday papers and also distributed (15,000 copies) to universities. *The Phnom Penh Post* has a vibrant up-to-date web presence with stories, slides shows and blogs, despite the country's abysmal bandwidth and speed.

Salaries are higher than any local print outlets. New reporters start on \$200 a month and top Khmer and foreign reporters and editors earn \$1,000 a month. Dunkley says he doesn't make distinctions between his Khmer and foreign staff when it comes to salaries. He commissioned a typographer living in Cambodia to design new fonts and saved 30 per cent space. Dunkley believes it's the first example in Asia of a newspaper using fonts designed by a local.

Since 2003 Dunkley and his partner have invested \$5 million in Post Media. The rewards, Dunkley says, will come from increases in circulation and ad revenue. "We're patient, but we are not philanthropists and we must get our money back." Rewards have also come in the form of international recognition for the *Post's* quality of journalism. In 2009, *The Phnom Penh Post* picked up two awards from the Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) for excellence in its human rights reporting and news photography. In 2009 it received IRFA Asia Media award for best cross media editorial.

The vision of Post Media as stated in the company's media kit for 2009-10 is "to build Cambodia's first fullintegrated modern media group". Dunkley sees the way to do that is to build local capacity – through

more Khmer reporters and editors in charge of Khmer papers, through his internal scholarships for Khmer staff, by getting the Khmer daily to focus on local, life style, business and international sports and "stop chasing the competition" and to focus on small medium enterprises because "Cambodia is a business story and an NGO story." Post Media sees potential in printing advertising and promotional fliers for business on its four high web presses. And part of integration might include an expansion into television. "CTN (Cambodia Television Network) will swallow me up if I don't."

With his holdings in Myanmar and Cambodia, Dunkley is also toying with the idea of becoming a regional media group but he says expansion would not include Thailand because of its unstable political climate and 30 per cent foreign ownership rules. Post Media is 100 per cent foreign owned but Dunkley would like to have a local partner because he believes he is "holding the paper in custody for Khmer moms and dads" because foreigners live in a "parallel universe" and have no idea of what's really happening.

*The Phnom Penh Post* publishes 8,000 copies a day and each copy has five readers (a total of 40,000). The Khmer edition publishes 10,000 copies a day and each copy is estimated to have four readers (a total of 40,000). "Newspapers are not dying in Asia the way they are in the US and Western Europe. Here they are on fire." □