

Inevitable tech boom in Cuba could lead to huge IT potential

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Cuba is in for some big changes, as the island nation sees embargoes lifted and presidential visits ongoing. No change may be more imminent than a massive tech boom, which will lead to huge shifts in the nation's economy.

During Obama's historic visit to Cuba – he is the first president to visit the island since Coolidge in 1928 – the president spoke about forthcoming tech advances in the country, brought on by Google.

"Google has a deal to start setting up more Wi-Fi access and broadband access on the island," President Obama said, according to an article at Forbes. "Change is going to happen here, and I think Raúl Castro understands that."

As the U.S. government works to re-build a relationship with our island neighbor, and American industry works to wire it for the future, enterprises – particularly in tourism, hospitality and retail – will want to watch this space.

With travel now permitted to the country, American hotel chains could make their way down south, bringing with them American creature-comforts like Starbucks or other restaurant chains. That said, so much of the potential to advance Cuba, and for U.S. companies to thrive there, depends on stable IT infrastructure. It's hard to know how quickly or entirely Wi-Fi might take over the island nation, but the wireless economy in Africa could serve as a case study.

According to a 2014 article from The Guardian, poor landline infrastructure resulted in wireless being an ideal way for Africans all over the continent to keep in touch. "People in Africa use mobiles for online activities that others normally perform on laptops or desktop computers as the technology overcomes weak or non-existent landline infrastructure in large swaths of the world's poorest continent," The Guardian explained. "Declining prices of handsets and data, along with faster transmission speeds, mean Facebook, Twitter and cash transfer services can reach both the growing African middle class and the remotest rural areas."

Given how cheap and accessible the technology is, it boomed, and is predicted to keep up (especially considering recent moves by Orange and Google to keep up the wireless revolution there). "The number of mobile broadband connections in Africa is expected to reach 1 billion in 2020, up from 147 million in 2014 and 222.34 million at the end of 2015," FierceWireless reported in late 2015. And while growth may be slowing, there's no denying the huge mobile advances Africa has already seen.

In Cuba, the lack of existing providers and no apparent competitors looking to wire the country means Google could act fast and be readily welcomed. Drastic technological changes often require a cultural shift, which will be interesting to see play out. - Alyssa, @FierceAlyssaH