MEET THE AFFABLE YOUNG CALIFORNIAN ON A MISSION TO BRING INTERNET ACCESS TO SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE

KOSTA GRAMMATIS IS PUMPED UP. 'I MEET A LOT OF adults in their forties or fifties,' he explains, 'and they all ask me the same question: "What's in it for me?" And I'm like, "What's in it for me?" I might get my name in a magazine or two, but that's not what motivates me. What's in it for me is that we can work together collectively to create a better world.'

Big thinking from a man who, until recently, was in his own words 'a naive kid from the suburbs'. He is also, although he's too modest to admit it, a visionary. In just a few years, Grammatis went from being a liberal studies student to building satellites, to engineering the world's first video-enabled prosthetic eye. But it was only after he went to a Deutsche Telekom-funded camp for young innovators in Berlin that his work became motivated by bigger problems.

Rather than try to bridge the gap between third and first worlds via the traditional routes of food, infrastructure and sanitation, Grammatis proposed that free access to information could be a much more effective catalyst for progress. Though he admits the challenge is immense, A Human Right – the non-profit organisation he founded to bring internet access to all – has started to make significant allies, most notably the United Nations.

His current proposal is to harness the huge amounts of unused digital bandwidth in the world's satellites and transatlantic cables. What Grammatis calls the 'bandwidth bank' will be a 'systematic way of deploying bandwidth for humanitarian aid and relief'. In times of crisis, internet access can be as valuable as water: in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 earthquake, Japan's robust internet infrastructure meant 700,000 people were able to make contact via Google's People Finder.

For Grammatis, the future of the web is in these stories of collaboration: "The internet is an empathy machine. The more aware people are of others' problems, the more empathic they become.'

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BY JAMIE LEPTIEN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF SINGER

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