

# Letter from Venice: Global Forum 2007 Highlights ICT Creativity and Complexity

By Jay Gillette

“In Venice, everything is complicated . . .” [Global Forum](#) founder Sylviane Toporkoff declared, as this Italian renaissance city hosted two separate ICT conferences, the World Summit Awards 2007 on 3-4 November and the Global Forum 2007 on November 5-6. Two separate and influential ICT organisations aligned their conferences together, for the first time in 2007, for the benefit of the global ICT community.

“And that is why Venice has always been a center of creativity,” Toporkoff concluded. She is [President of Global Forum](#), and professor and director of a graduate business program at the University of Paris. In her welcoming remarks, Dr. Toporkoff emphasized that Venice is now creating an information-industry development plan to augment its main contemporary industry of tourism.

Global Forum has been called the “Davos of IT” after the prestigious annual economic policy meeting in Davos, Switzerland that draws top figures from all over the world.

Information industries-focused Global Forum is both a venue for the state-of-art from a European base, and a conscious professional networking opportunity for the major players worldwide.

Now in its 16th year, French-based Global Forum 2007 brought in political leaders such as the Chancellor of Austria, the President of Benin, USA Federal Communications Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate, Federal Trade Commissioner J. Thomas Rosch, and corporate, government, and academic leaders from Europe, the Americas, China, India and the Pacific.

Worldwide information industry creativity first was celebrated in Venice in the separately sponsored World Summit Awards (WSA) conference, “New Media for a Better World.”

Born from the International Telecommunications Union initiative, World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS), the Austrian-based [World Summit Awards](#) organisation grants annual prizes for “the best in e-Content and Creativity.” The focus is on innovative applications of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to turn “digital divide” into “digital dividend.”

[I covered the awards for Network World](#) separately in its November 9, 2007 edition. The companion [slide show of highlighted winners](#) by is a quick overview of the best of the best.

The winners were feted in a gala celebration together with the opening night of Global Forum conference, which culminated in a concert performance at [La Fenice](#) (“The Phoenix”) Theatre and a dinner in its private dining rooms afterwards.

The theatre is named for the phoenix, the bird that rises from the fires of its own destruction, since the company was burned out in 1774, then its rebuilt theatre burned in 1836. Rebuilt anew, it was completely destroyed once again just a decade ago by arson, in 1996.

Thus rebuilt every time, La Fenice theatre today appears as it did when Verdi’s *La Traviata* premiered there in the 19th century. It looks the same as when the Greek opera singer Maria Callas dramatically established her Italian reputation in the theatre in the early years after World War II. The street in front is named for her. Venice history thus keeps rising up new for you wherever you look.

Senator Pierre Laffitte, founder of the French [Foundation Sophia Antipolis](#), the earliest and arguably most advanced “technopolis,” a high-tech community and industrial complex in the French Riviera, welcomed the delegates as a co-sponsor of the Global Forum. Laffitte has been a tireless promoter of government R&D funding and corporate innovation for 40 years. From a policy perspective, Laffitte is a key player in driving European high-tech competitiveness.

Global Forum’s separate conference continued the organisation’s lasting series of influential conferences. The series moves its venue each year, and for 2007 featured a two-day series of presentations and debates.

Global Forum this year took place on the storied Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, site of two G-7 Summit conferences, a 5-minute boat ride across the water from the Piazza of San Marco. Its bell tower is an architectural echo of the famous St. Mark’s Campanile tower—the two towers view each other over the Venetian lagoon. The island for centuries was home to a Benedictine monastery, whose renaissance buildings, full of Veronese paintings, now host cultural events and serve as a major conference venue.



The [Global Forum 2007 program](#) is accessible by Internet at the organisation's web site, with the embedded links to most of the presentations. The speakers had only brief periods to make their points—my panel was restricted to five content slides apiece. This enforced a fast-paced and intense burst of information from each presenter. Moderators used a warning system based on international soccer. Close to the end, you got a yellow card. Run long, you got the red card and you were gone.

The presentations ranged from strategic to practical, from industry-centered to public policy concerns. Most of [the presentations are on the Global Forum site](#), and a scroll through the Venice program will bring significant competitive and business intelligence for ICT professionals. Among the highlights:

Japanese policy expert Kan'ichiro Aritomi outlined [Japan's ambitious strategic goals](#) not only to embrace information systems and business convergence, but also "aiming to establish the world's leading edge legal system corresponding to digitalization and IP" by 2010. Since Japan's business and governmental systems are far more intertwined than USA and most European approaches, this ambition, if realized, may make Japan one of the most secure bases for information economy business in Asia, if not the world.

Jeff Brueggeman, AT&T's Vice President for Regulatory Planning & Policy, presented [AT&T's view of its broadband](#) future and the regulatory environment it sees as appropriate to the conference theme of Global Convergence 2.0. AT&T reports it now has more wireless than wireline subscribers, and is 100%

broadband in its infrastructure, with 37% of AT&T customers subscribing to broadband services today.

Brueggeman sees huge growth in information movement. He referenced Network World as the source of the forecast that “by 2010, 20 typical households will generate more traffic than the entire Internet moved in 1995.”

Robert Bell, from the New York think tank [Intelligent Community Forum](#), spoke of the contradictions of social impact of the Internet. [Bell reports research](#) that frequent Internet users spend 70 minutes less daily interacting with family, 25 minute less sleeping and 30 minutes less watching television.

Italian Senator [Fiorello Cortiana](#) used the Global Forum to emphasize the need for a user-centered “Internet Bill of Rights.” This is a continuing theme in the international community of interest of the [Internet Governance Forum](#), advancing under United Nations auspices.

For a visiting professional, Venice is a cultural and historical dream city. Buildings on the outside are kept in historical preservation. Inside many are full of modern updates and electrical connections that must meet the latest codes. My rented quarters had a broadband package from [Telecom Italia](#) with high-speed Internet and many more channels of television than ordinarily found in Europe.

Venice is truly a water-based city—there are no cars, trains or buses, except at the edge of the city facing the Italian mainland, where a causeway connects rail and vehicle traffic (cars park in a huge municipal garage). That makes the city surprisingly quiet, especially early in the morning before boat traffic picks up.

All supplies and people movement in the city is by boat. For travel, you catch a public waterbus called a “vaporetto” or an expensive private water taxi. For a cheap ferry crossing, you can cross the Grand Canal on a public gondola powered by two oarsmen for about 75 cents. The tourist gondolas, piloted by a gondolier who must be, by law, a native Venetian, are costly—about \$120 for a 40-minute ride.

Venice nightlife and restaurants generally are expensive, especially now with the weak US dollar. However, young people hang out at wine bars, drinking glasses of good Italian wine outside, lounging and sitting on the footbridges over the canals. You can find good choices if you know where to look.

A colleague recommended [Trattoria Corte Sconta](#), specializing in fresh Adriatic seafood. It is hard to find, but Internet mapping helps you. Then when you get close, you ask some local persons where to find what you are looking for. You will need them. “Lost in Venice” is a redundant expression.

Athens reportedly is lobbying to be the host site for Global Forum 2008. Information for the next meeting is available by contacting the Global Forum, or by monitoring Network World as the news unfolds. Especially for European-focused organizations, participating in this high-powered networking event has dual benefit—you increase your global knowledge-value, and you gain international visibility. And sometimes the seafood is outstanding, if you can find it.

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