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Russia -- Cyber Focus Issue 5

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Russia: Cyber Focus, Issue 5

Cyber Focus provides an overview of developments in the Russian-language Internet (or "Runet"). This edition includes the following sections:

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Snapshot

The Public Opinion Foundation released a study on the Russian Internet audience for the 3rd quarter of 2009. The study found that as of fall 2009, there were 42 million Internet users in Russia, or 36% of the population. Daily Internet users accounted for 21% of the population. Most users lived in the Volga region, Central Federal District, or the city of Moscow. Women made up 33% of the audience and men 40%. Of users, 79% accessed the internet from their homes, 31% from their workplaces, 11% from their friends' homes, 10% through mobile devices, and 7% from their places of study (*Rumetrika.rambler.ru*, 18 December). For the full report, please [click](#).



Figure 1. Number of Internet Users in Russia, 2002-2009 (6 month vs daily use)

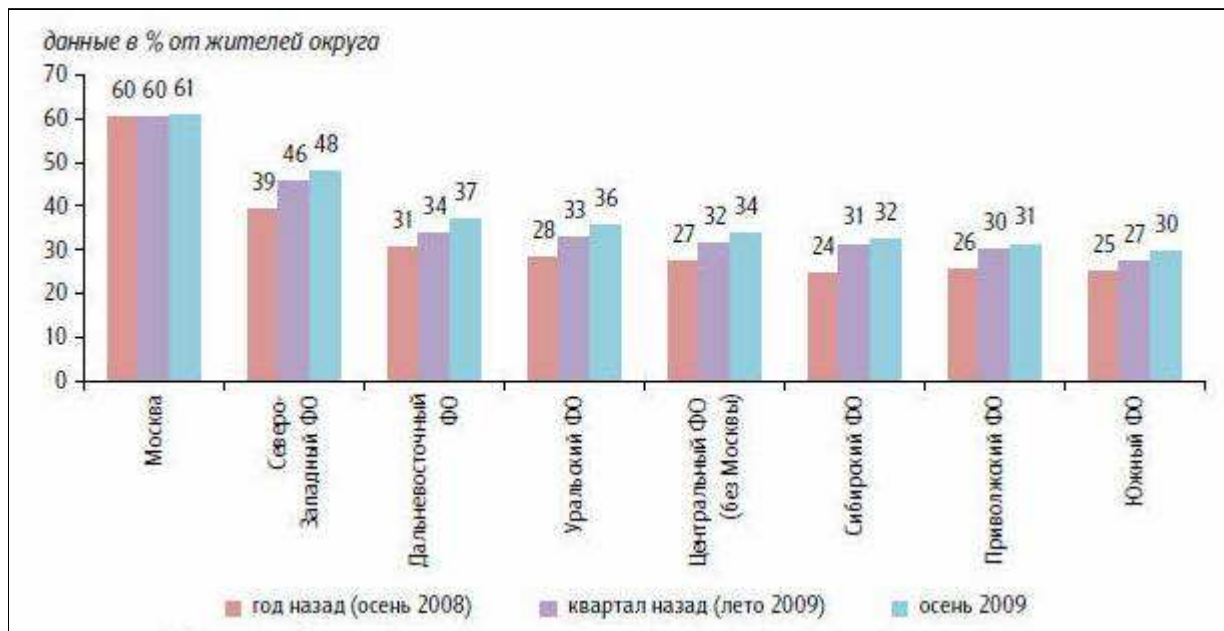


Figure 2. Dynamics of Internet Users by Age Group

CyberSecurity/CyberCrime

Russia's .ru and .su Domains Among Ten Most Dangerous

The .su and .ru domains received 5th and 6th place respectively on McAfee's list of the most dangerous domains on the web. In the .su domain, the biggest problems were phishing sites and malware. In addition to those threats, the .ru domain featured spamming resources ([Lenta.ru](#), 2 December).

FSB Rumored To Be Behind Climategate Email Scandal

British newspaper [The Independent](#) speculated that the FSB may be behind the hacking attack that surfaced controversial emails that appeared to show senior climate scientists had manipulated data. Professor Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, the vice chairman of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change told the paper that the action was a "planned, politically motivated operation" and that the leaked materials were "a carefully made selection of emails and documents that's not random. This is 13 years of data, and it's not a job of amateurs." According to [The Independent](#), the leaked emails were originally posted on a server in the Siberian city of Tomsk, owned by "Tomcity," an internet security business, [The Independent](#) stated. The Tomsk office has a record of issuing statements congratulating local students on hacks aimed at anti-Russian voices (7 December).

Moscow Newspaper Site Claims Hacker Attack

On 4 December, mass-circulation daily *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* website [mk.ru](#) was reported to have experienced a hacker attack. According to [Kommersant](#), in ten minutes, the unknown attackers were able to destroy the website including the editor's interface and the entire archive (4 December). The Editor in Chief, Pavel Gusev later stated that the entire archive had been preserved in a different place ([Gazeta.ru](#), 4 December). He blamed a hacker organization or "special forces" for the attack and stated that the attack came from servers in South Korea ([Kommersant](#), 4 December). However, other sources were skeptical about the "attack."

- [Lenta.ru](#), a popular Internet news service, discovered a Live Internet user, "peugeon," who claimed that the website had warned its advertisers of problems with the site already on 2 December and that the site was hacked from the inside (4 December).
- [Gazeta.ru](#), a popular website owned by LiveJournal proprietor SUP that is often critical of the government, reported that experts believed the problems were likely caused by MK staffers during the website redesign. According to Nikolay Fedotov, the lead analyst for InfoWatch, an information security company, "you can't destroy an archive in that amount of time even with unrestricted access to the server." Nikolay Khozyainov, the director of R.LAB, a data retrieval company, opined that one would have to write over the files on the disk, which takes a great deal of time (4 December).
- [Slon.ru](#), a commentary website edited by former SmartMoney Chief Editor Leonid Bershidskiy, questioned whether Korean hackers were behind the MK website's problems and speculated that the site developers had blamed hackers to avoid deadline problems (4 December).

Russian Hacker May Go to Jail for Cracking Odnoklassniki

Criminal charges have been filed against a man from the city of Ulyanovsk who hacked his friend's personal account on the popular social networking site [Odnoklassniki.ru](#) to replace his user photo with pornographic images. Under Article 272 of the Russian criminal code, unauthorized access of computer systems "shall be punishable by a fine in the amount of 200 to 500 minimum wages, or [...] by imprisonment for a term of up to two years" ([Crime-research.ru](#), 10 December).

Yandex Money Limits Anonymous Payments

Yandex Money has introduced a limit on one-time payments from anonymous users to 15,000 rubles. According to

Yandex, this change was motivated by the enactment of a new federal law (Number 103-F3) and changes to an existing law (Number 115-F3). In order to register with Yandex Money, a user must give the service his first name, last name, patronymic, and passport data or information from another official identification document ([Ruformator.ru](#), 15 December).

State Censorship & Control

Yota Accused of Blocking Access to Opposition Websites

Clients of Russia's WiMAX-based wireless broadband operator Yota were unable to access the opposition websites [Kasparov.ru](#) and [Solidarnost.ru](#) on 6 December, Russian Gazprom-owned editorially-independent radio station Ekho Moskvy reported on the same day (*BBC Monitoring*, 7 December).

- A post by RuNet's best-known blogger Rustem Adagamov (*drugoi*) about problems with access to certain websites through Yota was among the top five most popular entries in the Russian blogosphere on 6 December, according to the Whoyougle rating (*BBC Monitoring*, 7 December). He wrote that he could not access [Kasparov.ru](#), [Rufont.ru](#), [Rusolidarnost.ru](#), [Nazbol.ru](#), [Namarsh.ru](#), and [Newtimes.ru](#). The Russian president's website [Kremlin.ru](#) was also inaccessible, he added.
- Yota responded on 7 December by publishing a [statement](#) from the company's general director Denis Sverdlov in its LiveJournal community in which Sverdlov denied the allegations that Yota had deliberately restricted public access to certain websites. He said the issue was due to a technical problem related to the affected users' IP addresses. However, Sverdlov did acknowledge that Yota blocks access to sites that are classified as extremist by the Justice Ministry such as Chechen rebel website [Kavkazcenter.ru](#).
- On 6 December bloggers circulated an audio file of a female voice -- purportedly of a Yota support representative -- saying Kasparov's and Solidarity's sites are blocked because they are on that list.

Access to all the blocked websites, except the extremist ones, was restored by the evening of 6 December, Russian business daily [Vedomosti](#) reported on 7 December.

YouTube and LiveJournal Blocked in Turkmenistan

[Fergana.ru](#), a privately-owned news agency with a focus on Central Asia's Fergana Valley, reported that "Turkmentelekom," which is government-owned and the only Internet provider in the country, renewed and expanded the list of websites that are blocked for domestic users on 24 December. *Fergana.ru* reported that *YouTube* is now completely blocked as is *LiveJournal*. Further, many foreign companies that have corporate networks are unable to access them and many private users have difficulty accessing sites that are hosted on foreign servers. In 2000, while Turkmenistan was governed by Saparmurat Niyazov, access to the Internet was limited, with the main users mostly within government structures. When the new president, Gurbanguly Berdimukhadmedov came to office, he promised to provide citizens with unlimited access to the web. However, access to foreign sources continues to be blocked. In 2009 the Committee to Protect Journalists added Turkmenistan to the list of countries most dangerous for bloggers and Reporters Without Borders added the country to the list of "enemies of the Internet" (28 December).

Russian Authorities React to Saratov Plague Rumor

On 3 December, Russian police arrested a 22-year old student who was suspected of using his *LiveJournal* blog to spread rumors which lead to panic among residents of Saratov Oblast. According to an article in news website [Gazeta.ru](#), Saratov citizens, already fearful of infection from H1N1, were driven to panic when word spread that the city could be

locked down by authorities and 'dusted with disinfectant' by helicopters, that water was no longer good to drink unless boiled, and that the deaths thought to have been caused by H1N1 were actually brought about by pneumonic plague. Although no other arrests were mentioned in the article, rumors were also reportedly spread by Rumorology, a Saratov-based political gossip news website (3 December).

Information Operations/Warfare (IO/IW)

Intelfusion: Tehran is using Russian Business Network to Track Dissidents

The Iranians turned to either the Russian government or organized crime for assistance because their servers are facing DDOS and DNS flood attacks from Iranian activists. Such attacks are organized quite easily using simple tools that require no technical expertise on the part of the hacktivist (as occurred in the latter half of the Russia-Georgia War).

According to *Intelfusion.net*, "consequent to the request, the RBN configured at least two of their servers to provide name server resolution from *www.crspa.ir* (the CNAME forward entry on the RBN servers) to *crspa.ir* (a CNAME entry on the Iranian server which is an alias for *www.rcirib.ir*). This allows for the resolution of the *www.rcirib.ir* web site during periods when its name servers (*ns1.rcirib.ir* and *ns2.rcirib.ir*), are unable to respond due to attacks by Iranian hacktivists. Both of the *rcirib.ir* and *crspa.ir* domains are owned by The Research Center of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, which gathers intelligence on dissenters from the Internet on behalf of the crackdown." According to Jeffrey Carr, the owner of Grey Logic, which publishes the intelfusion blog, the RBN did not close in November, 2007. He stated: "It went dark shortly after a meeting between agents of the FBI and FSB occurred in Moscow. It remains a key part of the Kremlin's Information Warfare strategy by providing the infrastructure for non-state actors to engage opposition groups in various cyber operations ranging from espionage to network attacks" (7 December). For the full article, please click [here](#).

International Policies & Standards

New .рф Domain Open to Cybersquatters Despite Priority Registration

The Coordination Center of the National Internet Domain decided not to change the priority registration procedure for trademarks in the new.рф domain despite the fact that the current procedure fails to protect the new domain from cybersquatters--users who register a domain in order to sell it later- [Gazeta.ru](#) reported (8 December).

The priority registration of sites for government and trademarks began on 25 November and was intended to prevent cybersquatters from registering domains of famous brands, companies and government bodies. However, a scandal erupted when it was discovered that the procedure left the door open to abuse by cybersquatters ([Gzt.ru](#), 26 November).

- Cetus (Center for Effective Technologies and Information Systems), a company involved in website development and, according to several reports^{[1][2][3]}, linked to Reg.ru, the official registrar, was able to register for such words as секс.рф (*sex.rf*), кино.рф (*movies.rf*), знакомства.рф (*dating.rf*), недвижимость.рф (*realestate.rf*), банк.рф (*bank.rf*), and кредит.рф (*credit.rf*) among others ([Gzt.ru](#), 27 November).

At first, the registration of sites already registered under original conditions was annulled and a temporary stop to registration was declared while an expert commission studied the issue ([Gzt.ru](#), 27 November; [Cnews.ru](#), 30 November), but the Coordination Center later decided not to change the procedure or to annul the registrations of trademark sites ([Gazeta.ru](#), 8 December).

Ukraine Struggling for Control of .ua Domain

The Ukrainian Network Information Center (USITs) is trying to obtain the right to administer the .ua domain, Ukraine's national domain, from its current administrator, Dmitriy Kokhmanyuk who has been the administrator since 1992.

- The USITs states that Kokhmanyuk does not live in Ukraine and that this "does not allow him to effectively make decisions on the domain." Kokhmanyuk denies this and claims that he has been living in the country since June 2008.
- Kokhmanyuk stated that the main reason USITs wants to become the administrator of registration is to obtain the commercial profits ([Cnews.ru](#), 30 November).
- USITs asserts that it has the support of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Yuriy Korzh, the representative of the coordination council of the USITs, believes USITs could become the administrator "in the near future" ([Cnews.ru](#), 30 November).
- Veni Markovski, the representative of ICANN in Russia and the CIS, stated that ICANN does not have the authority to support either side ([Cnews.ru](#), 1 December).

Ukraine Applies for Cyrillic Top-level Domain .укр

The director of the Ukrainian Network Information Center (USITs), Yuriy Goncharuk, announced that the .óëð domain should be online in February or March of 2010. According to Goncharuk, the registration procedures for the new domain have not yet been determined but registration will be cost-bearing in order to cover the expense. USITs will be the administrator of the .укр domain ([Cnews.ru](#), 27 November).

Registration in the .name Domain Begins in Russia

The Ru-Center announced on 1 December that it will begin registration of names in the .name domain as an accredited registrar. This is the result of an agreement between RU-Center and VeriSign which gave RU-Center the right to manage the .name domain. ".name" is intended exclusively for individuals and it is recommended that people register using their first and last names. RU-Center will open multi-language domain names (IDN) in the .name domain ([Cnews.ru](#), 1 December).

E-Government

Gosuslugi.ru Experiences "Technical Difficulties" on Opening

The Russian government unveiled its new e-government site, Gosuslugi.ru, on 1 December. The portal will tell visitors about the documents, costs, and time frames for specific services, and provide a search engine and links to other government web sites ([Moscow Times](#), 24 December). On 15 December, the site was opened to the public in a "testing" mode and, numerous media outlets publicized the opening. One hour later, according to Lenta.ru, the site stopped working and displayed an "error 404 object not found" message. Later, [Lenta.ru](#) stated, the site displayed a message stating: "It works!" Error messages continued to appear until approximately midnight (17 December).

In an interview with [Vedomosti](#), Yelena Lashikina, a representative of the ministry of communications, stated that the site had been attacked by hackers. The site's developers told Vedomosti that it had experienced technical problems during the

transition from testing mode to live mode (16 December).

Social Networks

New Blog Rating Services Vie to Replace Yandex

Yandex announced in November that it would no longer publish its popular Top 30 blog list as of December 2009. However, Yandex made its blog rating API publicly available ([CEP20091105950205](#)).

- On 24 November, [Slon.ru](#) announced that it had launched its own blog Top 30 of political and economic posts using Yandex's API. The Top 30 resides at <http://slon.ru/rating/blogs/>.
- Artemiy Lebedev, famous blogger and artist whose studio manages the Yandex website launched his rating at <http://www.artlebedev.ru/tools/blogs/>.
- Anton Nosik, head of blogging at SUP, the owner of LiveJournal, has started a rating at <http://whoyougle.com/blogs/>, according to [slon.ru](#).
- [BlogRating.org](#), a new site used almost exclusively by Russians (*Alexa.com*, 30 December), offers an open formula so that users can verify the objectivity of the rankings. Further the website shows trending information for blogs' rankings over time ([Cnews.ru](#), 1 December).

Medvedev Recommends That Politicians Blog

During a media forum in Moscow, Medvedev highly recommended politicians become bloggers. According to [Gazeta.ru](#), the President called blogs "a good form of direct communication between politicians and the people" and stated that having a blog is useful for managers of all levels. He also stated that blogging was a chance to feel like a journalist (9 December).

Odnoklassniki Refused Priority Registration

The popular social networking site [Odnoklassniki.ru](#), a Russian *Classmates.com* clone, was refused early domain registration because its trademark contains both Cyrillic and Latin characters and the registration procedures for the new domain require that it contain only Cyrillic letters. The general director of Odnoklassniki, Mikhail Kiselev, appealed to the director of the Russian association of electronic communications, Mark Tverdnyin, but the question has yet to be resolved. In theory, [Lenta.ru](#) pointed out, this could give cybersquatters or another company the chance to take the domain name (9 December).

Ownership

Digital Sky Technologies Negotiating To Buy ICQ

According to [Vedomosti](#) and [Lenta.ru](#), the investment company Digital Sky Technologies (DST) which is owned by Yuriy Milner, Grigoriy Finger and Alisher Usmanov, may be interested in purchasing ICQ, a popular messaging service in

Russia, from AOL for between \$200-\$250 million (14 December). DST controls Mail.ru, which in turn has its own very popular messenger service "Mail.ru Agent," a direct competitor of ICQ in Russia. Mail.ru's Agent has 12 million users and ICQ has 8.4 million users per month. Together the two services would capture approximately half of the Runet, *Lenta.ru* speculated. Further, ICQ could be integrated into other services owned by DST, including V Kontakte and Odnoklassniki (15 December).

DST, Others Buy Stake in Social Network Game Developer

Alisher Usmanov, one of the partners of DST and other investors including Andreessen Horowitz and Tiger Global invested \$180 million in Zynga, a developer of popular games for social networks. According to *Cnews.ru*, DST will not have representation on the company's board or any special oversight authorities. The main users of Zynga's games, which include FarmVille, Café World, and Mafia Wars, are concentrated on Facebook, in which DST recently purchased 2% preferred stock. Zynga's games are also available on MySpace, Bebo, Hi5, Friendster, Tagged, Yahoo! and the iPhone (12 December).

Mail.ru Buys Russian Leader in Online Games

Mail.ru, which is controlled (53.2%) by DST purchased Astrum Online Entertainment (AOE), the largest developer and operator of massively multi-player online games in Russia, in order to "create the largest online communications and entertainment company in Russia" (*Kommersant*, 25 November; *Cnews.ru*, 1 December). According to the conditions of the deal, Mail.ru will hold 100% of AOE. Shares in AOE will be paid for in part with shares in Mail.ru and part in cash. DST, which owns a controlling interest in Mail.ru and AOE, will continue to have control of both companies (*Lenta.ru*, 7 July 2008; *Kommersant*, 25 May; *Cnews.ru*, 1 December).

Telecoms & Mobile Telephony

Move to Digital Television Broadcasting Proves Slow

According to Vice-Minister of Telephonics and Mass Communications Aleksandr Zharov, the development of a digital television broadcasting system is currently underway, but the predominance of analog systems in some regions -- and a reluctance to move away from them -- makes it difficult to say when the switch to digital broadcasting will be complete. Although the Kremlin could take steps to promote the sales of digital television sets, switching to digital broadcasting could extend beyond the year 2015 (*Kommersant.ru*, 7 December). Despite this, popular news website *Lenta.ru* reported that the so-called "First Multiplex," a collection of channels sponsored by the Kremlin, would begin broadcasting in 2014 (30 December). The development of a digital television broadcasting system is currently being financed by a mixture of unitary enterprises, which have so far provided 13 billion Rubles, and Oblast governors, like the leaders of the Leningrad, Yakutiya, and Tatarstan (*Kommersant.ru*, 7 December). Although some cable television companies have expressed interest in financing the construction of a digital broadcasting system, none have made any concrete offers to do so (*Kommersant.ru*, 7 December).

Russia To Begin Limited Testing of 4G Wireless Technology in 2010

According to popular news website *Gazeta.ru*, Russia will begin testing the viability of 4G wireless technology as a replacement for Russia's existing communications infrastructure, which currently consists of a variety of systems, including 3G (25 December). Russian Minister of Telephonics and Mass Communications Igor Shegolev announced that trials of 4G LTE technology would begin in several Russian regions in 2010, with the intention of determining how the systems would be used, and how to implement them (*Gazeta.ru*, 28 December). The upgrade in communications technology, according to popular news website *Gazeta.ru*, comes in response to president Dmitriy Medvedev's expressed

desire that Russia must move to a fourth generation communications infrastructure so as to "not fall behind the times" (25 December).

Kremlin May Require Text Message-Based Identification for Online Services

Users of the Russian government's online service portal could be required to verify their identity by sending a text message through their personal cellular phones in order to access some services. Currently, access to the portal, which allows Russian citizens to view and fill out official forms, is only password-controlled. According to Ilya Massukh, an advisor to the Minister of Telephonics and Mass Communications, the new security measure would be necessary for some services available on the portal ([Gazeta.ru](#), 4 December).

GLONASS Able To Provide Navigation to All of Russia

The satellite system of navigations, GLONASS, is able to provide a signal to nearly the entire territory of Russia, the Deputy Minister for Economic Development Oleg Savelev announced 14 December. On 14 December, three more satellites were added to the system, bringing the total to 22 satellites, which, according to Savelev, are accurate to within 7 meters ([Gazeta.ru](#), 14 December).

Runet Roundup

Er.ru 'Among Five Best Political Party Internet-Projects in the World'

According to a [Nezavisimaya Gazeta](#) article, *Alexa.com* recently rated the website of Russia's party of power United Russia "in the top five best political party internet projects in the world. According to the head of the party's central elections committee, Andrey Vorobyev, the site had 15,940,232 visitors over the past year and is consistently ranked number one on the Rambler.ru politics section (4 December). However, a search of *Alexa.com* did not [produce](#) such a rating. Click [here](#) for *Alexa.com*'s information on Er.ru.

Yandex Begins New Machine Translation Service

Popular Russian search engine Yandex now features a machine translation service that allows users to translate search results from one of five foreign languages -- English, Spanish, Italian, German, and French -- to Russian, simply by clicking an icon. According to project manager Lidiya Popelo, the machine translation feature will be useful in the around 15% of Yandex searches that are conducted using Latin letters, as such searches frequently return foreign-language results ([Cnews.ru](#), 8 December).

Rosinformtekhologii to Present Information Security Solutions at Moscow Forum

The 15th International Forum "Security and Safety Technologies" is scheduled to be held in Moscow on 2-5 February 2010. The event is organized by Russian government and law enforcement agencies, including FSB, Ministry of Interior, Security Council, and Ministry for Information and Mass Communications. The Federal Agency on Information Technology (Rosinformtekhologii) said it would set up a special exhibit to showcase IT security solutions from leading Russian developers. <http://www.tbforum.ru/> <http://minkomsvjaz.ru/departments/rosinformtekhologii/news/xPages/entry.9458.html>

[1] http://roem.ru/2009/11/26/kts_podaril_domeni_kiberskvotteram/

[2] http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/hi_tech/274146.html

[³] <http://www.ve-domosti.ru/newspaper/article/2009/11/27/220032>

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