The Hierarchy of Nerds: Blending Star Wars and Psychology

This might be one of the few D.C. trade association blogs that could open with a re-posting of a thesis that Chewbacca was actually a highly-placed spy, and Han Solo was simply an unwitting cover for the hairy agent. A friend of mine forwarded the post to me last year in an email saying, "My mind is officially blown. Destroyed. I can't look at Star Wars the same way again." If you're a Star Wars fan, then the original post is worth a read. If you're not, then I'll skip to the point and propose that there are instances in which a novel approach to a common problem can open new and innovative perspectives.

Illustration courtesy kiwi_orange_socks

About a month ago, Ben Thompson on stratechery.com proposed that Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" can be translated to define the mobile wireless market, with specific application (no pun intended) to the iPhone. OK. That's a mouthful, and I'll be honest – until I saw the post, I had no idea who Maslow or what the Hierarchy of Needs were; as Clint Eastwood admitted to Rene Russo in *In the Line of Fire,* "I had to look it up."

But, here it is in a nutshell: Maslow, an American psychologist, proposed that basic human needs must be met before more intricate goals such as morality, problem solving and creativity can be mastered. The theory is often presented in pyramid form, with physiological needs such as breathing, eating and sleeping occupying the base layer while employment, friendship, self-esteem and confidence take roost at upper levels. Stated simply (and perhaps robbing Maslow's observations of their elegance), property doesn't matter if you're not eating. Or, as Thompson notes, "until lower order needs are met, we don't really pay attention to or pursue higher order needs." Thompson proposes Maslow's construct can be modified to describe the mobile wireless market: physical needs, at the bottom of the pyramid, are met by hardware; usability depends upon software at the next level, which in turn forms the "personable"

nature of the device or service through tailored apps. Ultimately, all endeavor to derive cloud-hosted services that, from the user's perspective, are irreplaceable.

Thompson then crowns Apple for being first to "deliver superior hardware, superior software, and a year later, a superior app store," but as quickly notes that Android has responded effectively. Thompson's post has gotten some eyes around the industry; [Barron's Tech Trader Daily](#) reports that UBS gave a nod to Thompson when it issued a Buy rating for Apple. I propose that Thompson's "Mobile Hierarchy of Needs" could be translated to a "Rural Hierarchy of Needs." At the supporting base, a network is required –and, the network must be broad enough and robust enough to support the services upon which users rely. These would be both fiber and mobile wireless, because neither is an effective substitute for the other; rather, they net complements.

These services, in turn, support applications – not "apps," as we think about Android's Facebook Home or Apple's [Evernote,](#) but the application of technology to life, such as telemedicine or distance learning or commerce or public safety. The fortification of these societal underpinnings then advance the communities in which those activities occur and are perpetuated, leading to the next level of community strength. This is an idea that NTCA is promoting in its Smart Rural Community initiative – technology is a prerequisite, but its potential is obtained when teams of collaborative leaders stand behind and promote it. Perhaps not as mind blowing as Chewbacca as Han's boss, but arguably more important.

(Author's clarification, May 14: the hypothesis characterizes Chewwie as a spy on behalf *of the Rebellion, using Han as a cover to travel the Galaxy unnoticed - JS)*