An Interview with

Brad Templeton

Founder, Publisher and CEO, ClariNet Communications Corporation

by [George E. Hatoun](#)

[ClariNet Communications Corporation](#) is an Internet success story. But unlike many high-tech companies that have sprung up recently, ClariNet has been around for almost 16 years. It is an example of what happens when a brilliant idea is executed at the perfect time. What ClariNet does is sell subscriptions worldwide to its news services, which include stories distributed from wire and syndication services. The idea was conceived by a man who is no stranger to information technology.

Brad Templeton is the founder, publisher and Chief Executive Officer of ClariNet. His life story reads very much like the recent history of the Internet. Templeton started his first Arpanet mailing list in 1979 and began reading Usenet in the spring of 1981. He created one of the first international links on that service. He has written a number of software tools, including the Newsclip Programming Language, the Dynafeed Dynamic net news feeding system, a tool to measure Usenet readership, and a system to encode binaries to printable ASCII text.

In 1989, Templeton founded ClariNet. Today, ClariNet, with over a million subscribers, purports to be the first and largest electronic news service on the Internet. The San Jose-based company's largest venture is its ClariNet e.News subscription service, which provides live news from wire sources, computer industry news, syndicated columns and features, financial information and stock quotes. The news is posted in a Usenet compatible format and sent to subscribers worldwide.

Postings to ClariNet's Usenet groups are done by a staff of people ``roughly analogous to news editors,'' Templeton said. His editors post the articles, which are ``highly edited for quality,'' in a format for serial reading according to a number of classifications, some general (like clari.news.features) and some more specific (like clari.sports.basketball.college.men.stats).

In determining what new groups get created, Templeton said that ClariNet ``look[s] at what the readers are interested in reading.'' Current hot topics among his ``almost nerdish audience'' include computer-related news, sports information, and international news. Syndicated cartoons such as Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* are also popular.

Templeton is quite opinionated, especially about topics related to the future of the Internet. On the subject of censorship, he thinks that it is important that Internet publishers are treated like their print counterparts. ``The electronic press need to be the kind of press mentioned in the First Amendment,'' he said. If the electronic press is found to be in the ``second class'' of media, like broadcast media, he warns that Internet censorship will constitute a ``real danger'' to the future of the medium.

While Templeton said that privacy is an issue on the Internet, he doesn't think that the current concern about information security on the net is justified. He said that ``there isn't one documented case of anyone'' stealing a credit card number over that network. In particular, he doesn't think that the possibility of having a credit card number stolen over the Internet should concern individual consumers since credit card holders who find fraudulent charges on their bills can simply report them to the their card issuer and have the charges canceled. Templeton said that ClariNet has ``taken credit card orders for sometime.''

Templeton also had some advice for young people looking to profit from the Internet and the information revolution. He said that selling subscriptions for access to information on a web page is probably one thing not to do, citing low subscription numbers for such services. He said that selling one's expertise on the Web will probably be lucrative in the future.

Citing his own success and the successes of services like the Yahoo indexing project and Netscape Communications Corporation, he encouraged students to try out their ideas. He commented on the fact that ``the on-line world didn't exist 20 years ago'' and that there will always be new opportunities.

However, Templeton doesn't think that there are any sure-fire money making strategies. ``I think there's a lot to be learned through hard experience,'' he said. He said that would-be Internet entrepreneurs should realize that ``people are jealous'' and that successful ideas tend to get copied. Templeton, who warns of the ``big bad world of corporate society,'' thinks that the Internet is good news for smaller ventures. ``I think it's better for the small guy than the big guy,'' he said.

Templeton took an around-the-world tour of sorts in July of 1995, which included stops in South Africa, Hong Kong and China. An account of his trip appears on his [homepage](#).