**History of the World Wide Web**

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Before the World Wide Web the Internet really only provided screens full of text (and usually only in one font and font size). So although it was pretty good for exchanging information, and indeed for accessing information such as the Catalogue of the US Library of Congress, it was visually very boring.  
  
In an attempt to make this more aesthetic, companies like Compuserve and AOL began developing what used to be called GUIs (or graphical user interfaces). GUIs added a bit of colour and a bit of layout, but were still pretty boring. Indeed IBM personal computers were only beginning to adopt Windows interfaces - before that with MSDOS interfaces they were pretty primitive. So the Internet might have been useful, but it wasn't good looking.  
  
Probably the World Wide Web saved the net. Not only did it change its appearance, it made it possible for pictures and sound to be displayed and exchanged.  
  
The web had some important predecessors, perhaps the most significant of these being Ted Nelson's Xanadu project, which worked on the concept of Hypertext - where you could click on a word and it would take you somewhere else. Ted Nelson envisaged with Xanadu a huge library of all the worlds' information. In order to click on hyperlinks, as they were called, Douglas Engelbart invented the mouse, which was to later become a very important part of personal computers. So the idea of clicking on a word or a picture to take you somewhere else was a basic foundation of the web.  
  
Another important building block was the URL or Uniform Resource Locator. This allowed you a further option to find your way around by naming a site. Every site on the worldwide web has a unique URL (such as www.nethistory.info).  
  
The other feature was Hypertext Markup Language (html), the language that allowed pages to display different fonts and sizes, pictures, colours etc. Before HTML, there was no such standard, and the "GUIs we talked about before only belonged to different computers or different computer software. They could not be networked.  
  
It was Tim Berners Lee who brought this all together and created the World Wide Web. The first trials of the World Wide Web were at the CERN laboratories (one of Europe's largest research laboratories) in Switzerland in December 1990. By 1991 browser and web server software was available, and by 1992 a few preliminary sites existed in places like University of Illinois, where Mark Andreesen became involved. By the end of 1992, there were about 26 sites.  
  
The first browser which became popularly available to take advantage of this was Mosaic, in 1993. Mosaic was as slow as a wet week, and really didn't handle downloading pictures well at all - so the early world wide web experience with Mosaic, and with domestic modems that operated at one sixths of current modem speeds at best, were pretty lousy and really didn't give much indication of the potential of this medium.   
  
On April 30, 1993 CERN's directors made a statement that was a true milestone in Internet history. On this day, they declared that WWW technology would be freely usable by anyone, with no fees being payable to CERN. This decision - much in line with the decisions of the earlier Internet pioneers to make their products freely available - was a visionary and important one.   
  
The browser really did begin to change everything. By the end of 1994 there were a million browser copies in use - rapid growth indeed!!   
  
In the same year Marc Andreesen founded Netscape Corporation, and the World Wide Web Consortium, which administers development of Word Wide Web standards, was formed by Tim Berners Lee.  
  
Then we really started to see growth. Every year from 1994 to 2000, the Internet saw massive growth, the like of which had not been seen with any preceding technology. The Internet era had begun.  
  
The first search engines began to appear in the mid 1990s, and it didn't take long for Google to come on the scene, and establish a dominant market position.  
  
In the early days, the web was mainly used for displaying information. On line shopping, and on line purchase of goods, came a little bit later. The first large commercial site was Amazon, a company which in its initial days concentrated solely on book markets. The Amazon concept was developed in 1994, a year in which some people claim the world wide web grew by an astonishing 2300 percent! Amazon saw that on line shopping was the way of the future, and chose the book market as a field where much could be achieved.  
  
By 1998 there were 750,000 commercial sites on the world wide web, and we were beginning to see how the Internet would bring about significant changes to existing industries. In travel for instance, we were able to compare different airlines and hotels and get the cheapest fares and accommodation - something pretty difficult for individuals to do before the world wide web. Hotels began offering last minute rates through specially constructed websites, thus furthering the power of the web as a sales medium.   
  
And things went even further - in some fields of travel, individuals would outline where they wanted to travel to and from, and travel companies would then bid for the business. All these developments rapidly changed the way traditional markets worked. In some industries, the world would never be the same again.