Andreessen and Clark had realized that browsers would rapidly become a commodity. NCSA had licensed the Mosaic code to other startups, and Microsoft was developing its own browser. Netscape couldn't hope to make its living from the browser market. What it could do was get its browser out before the others. If it was rapidly and widely accepted, then the company would have a platform from which to launch other products for which it would charge money. It would also bring millions of people to Netscape's home page—the default first screen when Navigator was opened. There, Netscape could display ads from companies that would pay to reach a large viewership. The site also would instantly notify browsers of Netscape's other services, which the company would charge for. Netscape also would charge companies for a commercial grade of the browser, which was more powerful, and for setting up and supporting a company's Web server.

In taking this position, Netscape was wisely acknowledging that on the Web, it was more profitable to be a service company than a software company. Andreessen and Clark may not have been completely clear on this at the beginning, though, because people who downloaded the browser were told that they could use it free for only three months. After that they were expected to pay, or they would be in violation of the licensing agreement. I didn't know what reaction Netscape was getting to this. I assumed that some people paid, but many did not, and simply downloaded the next version of the software, which also turned out to be free. Netscape allowed this to happen for fear of losing fans to other browsers, and as time went on its appeal for payment was minimized.

This approach set the tone for the Web companies that would follow: Release beta versions for review, which put a nascent software program in the hands of hundreds of professional and amateur users, who would (for free) send suggestions for improvements; give away basic software to get customers on board; distribute the software fast and cheap over the Internet; then try to make money from the millions of visitors through ads or services.

On December 16, 1994, a third day in an incredible week, CERN announced major news. After negotiating for several years, the CERN Council had unanimously approved the construction of the Large Hadron Collider, a new accelerator. It would be the next leap toward investigating the even smaller scales of matter. I would soon learn, however, that to accomplish such a mammoth undertaking CERN would impose stringent budget conditions across the organization. No program that wasn't central to high-energy physics could be supported. That meant that CERN, regretfully, could not continue to support Web development, or the consortium.

In a way, it was probably in everybody's best interests for it to opt out. CERN, at its heart, had always concentrated on high-energy physics, and had never developed great experience with industry or a general policy about working with it. But I felt that CERN deserved the credit for letting me develop the Web, and for maintaining such a tremendously creative environment. Continued involvement in the consortium would have cemented its place in the Web's ongoing history. I would rather have seen the organization get a pat on the back than go quietly into the night. For his part, Robert would remain very involved with the Web community, by continuing to organize the annual WWW Conference series.

CERN's resignation left the consortium without a European base, but the solution was at hand. I had already visited the Institut National de Recherche en Informatique et en Automatique (INRIA), France's National Institute for Research in Computer Science and Control, at its site near Versailles. It had world-recognized expertise in communications: their Grenoble site had developed the hypertext browser/editor spun off as Grif that I had been so enamored with. Furthermore, I found that Jean-François