The Internet
By Laura Goldhar

The Internet was begun to help U.S. authorities communicate in the aftermath of a nuclear attack; it has now become a way to let people all over the world share ideas and work. From a very modest beginning in the early 1960s, the Internet has rapidly evolved into a worldwide network with over 1,000 computers being added each month as of 1996. In the past, communications networks were point-to-point, meaning that each computer on the network was dependent on the one before it. This meant that if one point on the network was destroyed, the whole network would be, too. What if the communications network were set up more like a fishnet: no center and not point-to-point? This structure allows information to find a path through the network regardless of whether a section of the network is gone.

Many universities began offering Internet access for scientific collaboration. This quickly spawned a general interest in and awareness of the Internet. A result of this is that there are now many services that allow you to access the Internet to exchange electronic mail, transfer files between computers, and find information. Many schools and businesses offer direct connections to the Internet and dial-in access to allow you to use the Internet from home via a modem. There are also many commercial services. Some of the most popular are America Online and the Microsoft Network.

If you have never used the Internet, you might be wondering what you can actually find on the Internet and if it is worth the trouble to get access. You can find information on almost every topic, from airline fares to quadratic equations. There is even information from the White House about current policies and what is going on in the world. Research from universities is often posted on the Internet, allowing people to keep up with the latest scientific discoveries. If you are looking for information about a company, product, or movie, the Internet should definitely tell you something. The Internet also has the benefit of being a live, interactive system; its information can be updated 24 hours a day.

One of the most phenomenal aspects of the Internet is electronic mail (e-mail). Thanks to e-mail it is possible to communicate with people around the globe, instantly expressing your thoughts to them. Commercial companies, along with many businesses, organizations, and education centers are able to issue e-mail addresses. These usually look like anyuser@somecomputer.place.type. This consists of a username, *anyuser* (a unique name for each person on a system), and the symbol @ which separates the user from the hostname. The hostname is usually in three parts. The first part is a unique host (computer on the Internet), in this case *somecomputer*. The second part of the address is the organization, *place*, and the third part is the type of organization. For colleges and universities this is *edu*. Commercial hosts use *com*; government, *gov*; military, *mil*; organization, *org*; and primary and secondary educational hosts in the United States use *k12.state-name.us*. The three parts of the hostname are separated by periods. The scheme of naming computers is known as the Domain Name System (DNS).

If you want to communicate with a large group of people with common interests, Newsgroups are a great way to learn and express thoughts about almost every subject. You can join a Newsgroup about computer programming, developments on the Internet, or music—there is something on the Internet, or music—there is something on the Internet, on almost every subject. *Usenet* is the electronic news and discussion forum that makes this possible. Newsgroups are easy to join, and often prove very interesting and helpful.

Another primary use of the Internet is the File Transfer Protocol (FTP). FTP allows information to be transferred from host to host on the Internet. You can do this to transfer information between different accounts. FTP can also be used to transfer to your computer (download) files from the many public FTP servers on the Internet. This allows a user to get computer programs, Internet browsers, and more. Programs, pictures, and text can be downloaded from FTP sites.

The World Wide Web is what many people think of when they hear the Internet mentioned. In the early 1990s, the World Wide Web was conceived as a way to allow words, pictures, and sounds to be combined into a new way to communicate over the Internet. This means that it is easy for a person to look at information with the help of browsers, such as Netscape and the Microsoft Internet Explorer, which navigate World Wide Web (nicknamed Web) pages. The World Wide Web is what has made the Internet so popular. As it has become easier for people to find information, the number of Internet users has grown swiftly.

Though only recently entering the mainstream, the Internet has existed for several decades. As we move into the 21st century, worldwide communication becomes more imperative for the spreading of ideas. The Internet allows people globally to share ideas, learn, and express themselves. It can and will influence and improve almost every aspect of our lives. We are living in a glorious age of information thanks to the Internet.

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