The Advent of the Internet

History of Information 103
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What is "the internet"?
Technological roots
Economic consequences: disintermediation
The future(?) of news
Social consequences: the rise of "virtual communities"
Is the internet a community?
Defining "the internets"

The "internet": a technology, a channel, a medium, a "place," a set of applications…?
Contrast "radio," "television" vs "video"

George Bush was right...
A Convergence of Causes

Technological developments
Policy choices
Economic forces
Infrastructure
  e.g. Web presumes large number of pc’s in place
Social responses
Technological Bases of the Web

Communications protocols/Packet switching
Physical Networks
Addressing system
Hypertext transfer protocols
Browsers/ Graphical browsers
Indexing & search
Broadband
1969: ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency of DOD) (later DARPA) creates Arpanet, linking time-sharing computers at four research sites by telephone lines. Net makes use of packet-switching, rather than circuit switching, as with phone communication at the time.


1974 Bob Kahn and Vin Cerf ("Father of the Internet") demonstrate Transfer Control Protocol, which enables machines to route & assemble data packets.

1974: Ethernet developed at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), allowing communication among machines on local networks.

Arpanet 1971
1980's: NSF funds national backbone to connect computer research centers. Other gov't-funded networks (BITNET, CSNET) emerge

1980's: Commercial networks begin to emerge

1983: Domain Name System (DNS) introduced to keep up with growing number of hosts, introduces domain names .com, .gov, .mil, .edu, etc.

Late 1980's: First Internet Service Providers emerge

1989: Australia, UK, Germany, Italy, etc. join Internet
1990: ARPANET shuts down
1991: NSF removes all restrictions on commercial use of Internet
1992: Internet Society (ISOC) formed, assumes responsibility for fixing standards through the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), by now a voluntary organization
1995: NSF discontinues support of infrastructure
1998: Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) established to oversee assignment of domain names and IP addresses, formerly under control of US government. But Bush administration indicates intent to retain control in 2005.
The Origins of Email

1971: First network email program created by Ray Tomlinson at Bolt, Beranek & Newman (BBN), with "USER@hostname.domain" addressing system.

But public access to email doesn't begin until 1988, when MCI mail is linked to the Internet.
The Emergence of the WWW

1945: Vannevar Bush writes "As We May Think" in The Atlantic; envisions Memex machine to follow links between documents on microfiche

1965: Ted Nelson coins the term "hypertext" to describe "compound documents" formed by links among documents

1990: Tim Berners-Lee of CERN coins the term "World Wide Web"; develops HTTP protocol for transmitting hypertext documents between clients and servers and first Web browser making use of hypertext links.

c. 1990-: Pay-based online services like AOL, Compuserve, and Prodigy market connectivity + proprietary content (games, chat rooms, e-commerce, instant messaging etc.) to users unfamiliar with computers, first for hourly and then for monthly fee. By 1998, AOL has 15m. members.
The Growth of the WWW

1993: Mark Andreessen's Mosaic browser released by NCSA, which runs on Windows and permits easy integration of graphics in Web pages. CERN announces that W3 technology will be available free to everyone.

1994: Over 200 HTTP servers; traffic on CERN server has grown 1000-fold since first launched. From the mid-90s on, Internet use roughly doubles every year.


1995: Microsoft releases Internet Explorer bundled with Windows 95 to compete with Netscape.

1995 AOL makes Internet available to all subscribers.
1991: Gopher, developed at U. Minnesota, creates searchable index of FTP sites
1995: AltaVista launched by DEC; company regards it as showpiece for its hardware
1997 Larry Page and Sergey Brin launch Google, which makes use of Page Rank algorithm to rank pages according to popularity.
1998: Goto.com (later Overture, later Yahoo! Search) introduces pay-per-click advertising
1994-2005: Internet use increases rapidly, driven by email, E-commerce, news & information, pornography & gambling. By 2005 there are an estimated 100m Web sites.

~2000- Growth of broadband enables exchange of audio & video content; blogs and social networking sites proliferate, etc.

2005: 68 percent of American adults and 90 percent of American teenagers have used the Internet.
The Promise of the Web
The Promise of the Web

Predictions that Internet/Web will:

- Dematerialize online content ("end of the book")
- "Disintermediate" commerce & discourse (eliminate the middleman, like retailers & wholesalers)
- Destabilize the "old media"
- Decentralize authority & permit ground-up social & political organization.
- Create a new, global consciousness
- Ensure the dominance of English as a world language
The Internet as Disintermediator
Disintermediating Commerce

E-commerce is dominant or major channel
- Downloadable products (software, mp3's, pornography)
- Travel/event tickets/etc.
- Retail stocks & investment products
- Public records

Successful disintermediation
- Books (new & used)
- Some electronics & photo
- Some apparel (c. 10-15%)
Disintermediating Commerce

Limited or niche disintermediation

- Real estate
- Groceries & beverage
- Automobiles

... but price information etc. is disintermediated in all markets
Displacing "Old Media"
Challenges for the Old Media

Craigslist etc. divert classified advertising
News aggregators, blogs & online sources capture audience
National sources displace local sources online.
The Disaggregation of Content

Specialized sites displace newspapers as sources of information about sports, business, entertainment, weather, listings, opinion, other traditional newspaper features (advice, puzzles, reviews).
The end of the newspaper?

Why keep paper newspapers around?

"The newspaper model - putting text on paper - is becoming a dinosaur; much like the horse and buggy disappeared when the automobile came on the scene."
2008: "Free" newspaper readership exceeds paid readership

"We don't have a crisis of audience. We have a crisis of revenue."

"People are used to reading everything on the net for free, and that's going to have to change," Rupert Murdoch, 4/6/09
Economic models for digital newspapers or news gathering:

- advertising
- "pay wall" (WSJ) or "freemium" (NYT until recently)
- pay-per-view via microcredit
- monthly "all you can read" for group of publishers à la cable packages
- "tax" on ISP fees
- Subsidized foundations & universities