Internet has only just begun, say founders

April 22 2009, by Daniel Silva

British software genius Tim Berners-Lee, one of the founders of the World Wide Web system gives a speech during the 18th International World Wide Web Conference (WWW2009) in Madrid. While the Internet has dramatically changed lives around the world, its full impact will only be realised when far more people and information go on-line, its founders said.

While the Internet has dramatically changed lives around the world, its full impact will only be realised when far more people and information go on-line, its founders said Wednesday.

"The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet. The future is still so much bigger than the past," said Tim Berners-Lee, one of the inventors of the World Wide Web, at a seminar on its future.

Just 23 percent of the globe's population currently uses the Internet, according to the United Nation's International Telecommunications

Union, with use much higher in developed nations.

By contrast, just five percent of Africans surf the web, it said in a report issued last month.

But that level is expected to rise, especially in developing nations, as mobile Internet access takes off, making it no longer necessary to use a computer to surf the Web, said Internet co-founder Vinton Cerf.

"We will have more Internet, larger numbers of users, more mobile access, more speed, more things online and more appliances we can control over the Internet," the Google vice president and chief Internet evangelist said.

Robert Cailliau, who designed the Web with Berners-Lee in 1989, said having more data on the Internet, and more people with the ability to access it, will spur the development of new technology and solutions to global problems.

"When we have all data online it will be great for humanity. It is a prerequisite to solving many problems that humankind faces," the Belgian software scientist said.

The Internet has already led to the development of businesses that could not have existed without it, boosted literacy and learning and brought people closer together through cheaper modes of communication, the Internet pioneers said.

"We never, ever in the history of mankind have had access to so much information so quickly and so easily," said Cerf.

With the help of other scientists at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), Berners-Lee and Cailliau set up the Web in

1989 to allow thousands of scientists around the world to share information and data.

The WWW technology -- which simplifies the process of searching for information on the Internet -- was first made more widely available from 1991.

The number of Web sites has since ballooned from just 500 as recently as 1994 to over 80 million currently, with growing numbers of sites consisting of user-generated content like blogs.

Even its founders are surprised by its popularity.

"What we did not imagine was a Web of people, but a Web of documents," said Dale Dougherty, the founder of GNN, the Global Network Navigator, the first web portal and the first site on the Internet to be supported by advertising.

For his part, Cailliau said he was impressed that search engines can still sort through the myriad of material that is now on-line.

"To me the biggest surprise is that Google still functions despite the explosion in the number of sites," said Cailliau.

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