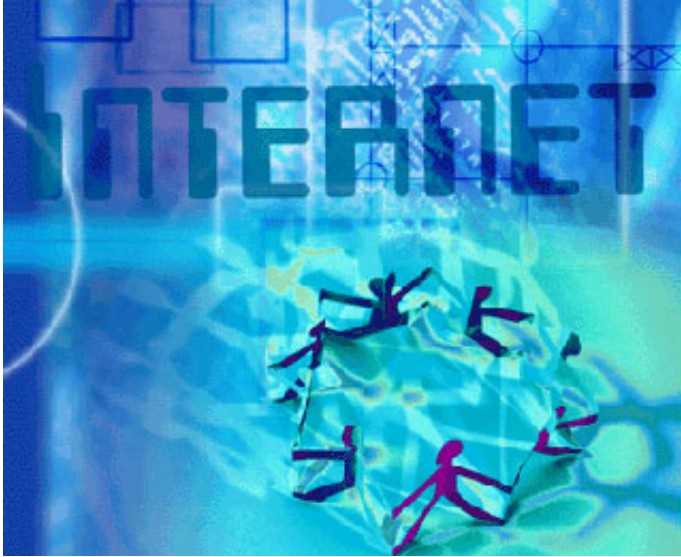


The Web: Fifteen years of browsing

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Fifteen years ago this Christmas week, Tim Berners-Lee, an obscure scientist working in a European laboratory, invented the Internet browser, now a fixture of the digital economy, experts tell United Press International's The Web.

Sir Berners-Lee today still lives a simple professor's lifestyle, bicycling around town, as his browser was supplanted by the Mosaic browser developed by a college student, Marc Andreessen at the University of Illinois, a few years later. Andreessen's invention led to the creation of Netscape, the Netscape Navigator and other technologies that enervated to the go-go 1990s run in investment in technology on Wall Street and

the creation of millions of jobs and hundreds of Internet companies here and abroad, including now household-names eBay.com and Amazon.com.

This week Berners-Lee launched a blog -- one of today's hot Internet trends -- and commented on his creation all those years ago. He expressed surprise that professional publishing became the dominant content on the Internet, when he had expected it to be Web chats. The Web, after the debut of the browser, "was soon full of lots of interesting stuff, but not a space for communal design, for discourse through communal authorship," Berners-Lee writes at dig.csail.mit.edu/breadcrumbs/node/38

To be sure, that is changing, as evidenced by blogs and wikis, where even the most anti-social personality can contribute to a communal discourse online, all without an editor.

One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the constant evolution of the browser itself. The first browser was actually a browser-editor, Berners-Lee notes, which allowed one to edit any page and save it back to the Web if one had access rights to the content.

There were browser wars during the 1990s that ended with Microsoft Corp. as the victor. Then there was litigation, claiming that the integration of the browser into the Windows operating system was quite illegal. Small companies -- and non-profits -- entered the fray once again. Netscape re-emerged in the guise of Mozilla, with a new browser. The small, often free alternatives are where the action remains today, in terms of technological innovation.

This past spring, Oslo, Norway-based Opera Software launched a new version of its browser, Opera 8 for Windows and Linux. Internet users can now surf the Web faster than before. The browser included new

features, like a unique security-information field that indicates the trustworthiness of banking and shopping Web sites.

The new version of Opera also introduces an advanced page-resizing function that adapts Web pages to fit the width of any PC screen or window. "With 10 years of listening to the needs of Internet users, we believe we have released a product that sets a new standard for Web browsing," said Jon S. von Tetzchner, chief executive officer, Opera Software. "Security has long been a top priority. To further protect people online we've added the new security information field."

This fall Opera made a move that could increase its mass-market acceptance, removing the garish ad banner and licensing fee from the browser. The ad-free, full-featured Opera browser is now available for download -- completely free of charge -- at www.opera.com. Still, given the marketing power of Microsoft, it is difficult for the smaller companies, no matter how excellent their technology may be, to make headway. So they resort to extreme means to get attention. Perhaps aping the Internet ad campaign contest format made famous by leftist activist group Moveon.org, Mozilla Corp. last week "launched the next phase of its Firefox 1.5 grassroots marketing campaign: the Firefox Flicks Ad Contest," a spokeswoman told The Web.

This contest calls upon professional and aspiring filmmakers to create broadcast-quality 30-second commercials for Firefox. The winning ads will also be considered for inclusion in global marketing campaigns for Firefox. The judges of the contest include Jim Denault, the cinematographer behind the sardonic cable TV series "Six Feet Under," and the actor Freddy Rodriguez, also late of "Six Feet Under," among other artists.

And in what was probably unimaginable 15 years ago, mobile-phone developers are competing mightily to improve the browsers for wireless

Web surfing.

Research by Nokia indicates that browsing is generating more than 60 percent of data traffic on smartphone networks, said Heikki Heinaro, vice president, Nokia technology platforms, based in Espoo, Finland.

Sixty-eight percent of American adults, or about 137 million people, use the Internet, whether by wire or wireless, up from 63 percent one year ago, according to this fall's report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

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