

Pot Holes and Detours on the Electronic Highway

Let's stop kidding! The so-called Electronic Highway is in practical terms just a two mile stretch of interstate leading to nothing better than a cart path. In terms of the diversity of tools, formats, and operating systems, this electronic roadway which is encapsulated by the term Internet, is going to require a mammoth overhaul to have utility for garden variety computer users. Further, to believe that the ordinary user is unimportant until that user takes the time to learn esoteric operating systems, is a worn out and self-serving ethic.

Until very recently, the Department of Defense and NSF have been picking up the Internet tab using public funds. However, the rules and ethos of the Internet have changed and there is a new power structure in charge...with still another waiting anxiously in the wings. The newest computer users are flocking onto the Internet in ever increasing numbers in search of their electronic Nirvana. Too often they find traffic jams slowing down fast 14,000 modems to a crawl or the unexpected *no carrier* message dumping them back into unpleasant reality. As a result, their stay can be frustrating, hence disappointing, and therefore brief. The unfriendly language of *UNIX* is not only cryptic and unintuitive but can effectively keep the new computer user on the outside frantically trying to get in. The response from business identifying a full blown gold mine in this unregulated information bonanza is generating new business ideas and strategies, an instant demand for shells and friendlier front ends, along with the newest status symbol, the Internet address!

The Internet has been characterized in positive terms as a natural anarchy where insiders protect the ethic of freedom of speech to a point where offensive speech, not tolerated in most social groupings, is ignored. When experienced Internetters discuss Federal regulation of the Internet there is rarely a middle position where compromise is possible but rather a vehement chorus to keep the federal rascals out. In fairness, any rational person has to agree that the Fed has done very poorly in these areas. The Internet is a microcosm of the greater society - with all the ills! In the United States, deregulation led to the greatest bank robbery in history while regulation rarely works because the people who are to be regulated too often own those monitoring their activities. In spite of the rhetoric and self interest, the institution we call the Internet is being examined, dissected, and reassembled in ways that were unthinkable a few years ago. **NEXT**

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