2014

At Brunning: People and Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do

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Recommended Citation
Brunning, Dennis (2017) "At Brunning: People and Technology: At the Only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do," Against the Grain: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 54.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6739

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Against the Grain / April 2014

Tubes

My iPhone, on Wi-Fi, used to try to log me into any WIFI Router along my way. One router near campus bore the moniker THEN-TERNETISASERIESOTUBES.

Ted Stevens, Alaska’s late senior senator, explained the Internet thus in a 2006 senate hearing on net neutrality. His major point was that as traffic increased, the networks would have to expand through improvements or contract through fees and taxes.

His words went viral in the online world whose libertarian and utopian goals and ideals were well settled. Besides, the Senator had built that bridge to nowhere, he excelled at pork; naturally nothing he said could be taken seriously.

Stevens however, were he alive and kicking, might have the last laugh. By likening the Internet to a plumbing or electrical wiring, he was trying to shift to a more fitting metaphor to characterize the real nature of the Internet. Those who wanted the Internet to be free preferred to liken the Internet to a road, an information highway, built to move person and freight as freely as possible. Roads were a public utility or a public good.

Recent court rulings and business deals mark a notable turn in metaphor and real behavior. Recently the Supreme Court ruled that Internet providers like Verizon could make deals with content providers like Netflix to charge customers more for higher speed and data services. They ruled that customers could pay more for a wider highway, bigger pipes, more bulky tubes.

Hot on the heels of this decision, Netflix and Comcast agreed to do just that, a move both had resisted throughout the defining period of net neutrality. For some time now, Netflix had proposed to Comcast and other cable providers to put their own servers into the server farms of the providers for faster and higher capacity downloads. The catch was that Netflix couldn’t make deals with content providers like Netflix to charge customers more for higher speed and data services. They ruled that customers could pay more for a wider highway, bigger pipes, more bulky tubes.

What’s up, Zuck?

Bugs Bunny would understand WhatsApp’s rocket rise in valuation...a bushel of carrots...

This is what Bugs Bunny would hear if he met Brian and Jan, two guys who created WhatsApp in their own version of a Silicon Valley garage in 2009. BTW, they are now the world’s most recent billionaires:

WhatsApp Messenger is a cross-platform mobile messaging app which allows you to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS. WhatsApp Messenger is available for iPhone, BlackBerry, Windows Phone, Android, and Nokia.

Bugs would also learn, between chops on his bright orange carrot, that although Brian and Jan slaved at Yahoo! for a decade running the advertising platform, they agreed in principle with another stated principle from the canonc Geekster movie, Fight Club:

Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy stuff we don’t need — Tyler Durden, Fight Club

On February 19, 2014, Facebook Inc. announced it is buying WhatsApp Inc. for US$19 billion. Facebook will pay $4 billion in cash, $12 billion in Facebook shares, and $3 billion in restricted stock units to be granted to WhatsApp founders and employees that will vest over four years.

Right now, the new owners, Facebook, and the new WhatsApp billionaires are able to eat Carrot and the carrot cake, too. Facebook stock rose just as it did when they proved they were serious about mobile. This is one more piece of that mobility strategy.

The Facebook phone failed because Facebook isn’t a cell phone company. Most every one of its registered users had cell phones and the loyalty that comes with it. With WhatsApp, Facebook may be repeating themselves.

Others have commented that WhatsApp current success is that it exploits a loophole in provider pricing. Today cell phone providers sell access to a network and price for the access. WhatsApp and similar products exploit the fact that now providers do not differentiate use. Once everyone is using the loophole, it is bound to be closed up.

A founder and CEO of WhatsApp Inc., Jan Koum, worked hard on his napkin concept and paid his dues, struggling since 2009 for his big pay day. In the days since, he appears in press as the quintessential Web entrepreneur and evangelist, proclaiming how awesome it is to be part of Facebook yet autonomous. The vision thing is that all is data and technologies built on some other unit of delivery and measure is over. Into the breach steps WhatsApp.

Koum is correct. It’s all about data now, the ones and zeroes. Whether this observation is transformational is another claim altogether. We’ve seen in our own part of the online world that data is easiest to access when it is free. In library-land we’ve used open as our surrogate term but let’s face it, we mean free.

Verizon, Vodafone, T-Mobile, and AT&T remain largely unaffected by the free movements disrupting publishing. Like Google, they sit at one end of the network. They are in charge of delivery of the data.

The library angle or take away: get there first, sign them up, find a Facebook.