Drinking from the Firehose: What do Windows '95, The Internet, and the WWW Have in Common?

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1623

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Drinking from the Firehose

What do Windows '95, The Internet and the WWW Have in Common?

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This month's column is going to be a ramble of a number of loosely related topics as I am having a hard time focusing on a single hot topic. In fact, I would like to encourage the readers of ATG to send me topics that they think would be interesting and appropriate for this column. (Internet-related phenomena are the general themes.) I would like to recruit more guest columnists. Anna Belle Leiserson did a wonderful column last month on AcqWeb and I would like to invite others to share their thoughts here too. I do not want to continue making shameless plugs for ACQNET and AcqWeb; that is not this column's purpose. So, folks, give me some feedback so I will have some fodder to work with!

So how about that Windows '95? I think it is amazing that SOFTWARE gets this kind of media blitz. It used to be cameras, or princess phones or new cars that got that kind of attention. But not SOFTWARE. To me, this is a real watershed in the acceptance of computing in everyday American life. The fact that Bill Gates could get the Rolling Stones to allow him to use 'Start Me Up' in his ad campaign is telling — sort of in the same vein as Bill Clinton using a Fleetwood Mac tune as his campaign theme. The baby boomer generation is coming into its own, we're the adults now, and the Oldsters and the Generation Xers are having to face being the bread sandwiching the spread of this crazy generation.

I heard something recently that hit a nerve. The question was: "How old were you when you created your first home page?" That's one of those questions like, "Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?" or "Where were you when Kennedy (John or Bobby) and/or Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot?" or "Where were you when they landed on the moon?" or "Where were you when John Lennon was shot?" or "Where were you when the Challenger Space Shuttle blew up?"

These are events in our lives where a moment freezes and you remember stupid little details that crystallize the situation. It doesn't matter if you are a child or an adult, but that you were there and somehow it was important. Of course, not everyone thinks the preceding events I just mentioned are so important, they are just examples. You can think of your own, depending on your own experiences.

So, will we remember the day that Windows '95 was released? Only time will tell, since it still remains to be seen if this product is all it is cracked up to be. One of my computer-expert friends says that Windows '95 is the "bees knees" if you have a "plug 'n play system" (the newest idiot-proof computer set-ups on the market). However, if you are trying to upgrade on an existing

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system, it's darn difficult, and she ought to
know, she's trying to install it now where
she works.

Meanwhile, most of us are limping along
on a hodge podge of machinery. For those
people who love Macintosh, their choice
may end up like the Beta-VHS competition.
Beta supposedly was a superior product; it
just didn't win. Even though DOS-based
systems are not intuitive, they reign. And
those of us in libraries (as well as other
professions, I'm sure), have it even worse as
we have to shift amongst many essential,
though proprietary, systems. For example:
at most libraries, typically staff must know
how to use: an integrated library system,
bibliographic utility, campus e-mail systems
(where I work we currently have at least 3 to
choose from), word processing, database
management, and spreadsheet packages
(several of each to choose from), and ven-
dor based products (too many to count).
Then of course there is the Internet and the
WWW to deal with. AARGH!

Furthermore, our lives are complicated
by VCR's and fax machines we don't know
how to program, televisions and answering
machines and a variety of telephones, and a
gazillion choices of kitchen appliances and
household devices, weed whackers, lawn
mowers, not to mention our cars and ATM
banking machines. It's a wonder our heads
don't explode with all this information at
our fingertips.

Yet if you look back in history, you'll
find mankind has been through this before.
We are evolving as we speak. As James
Burke recently observed on an episode of
"The Day the Universe Changed" on PBS,
the human mind can only absorb so much,
and we are going through a period where
people are getting slower and slower at regu-
lar reading. We are becoming more depen-
dent on graphics and less on symbols. When
the printing press was invented, people
thought they could know everything because
it could all be recorded in this new inven-
tion, the printed book. They were over-
whelmed by that change in technology just
as we are now with the Internet.

What will replace the Internet? I don't
know, but I feel like the world is turning
into a giant tele-everything! I was showing
off the WWW to a friend who isn't Internet-
connected the other day. He observed, "So
why is everyone duplicating the same
things?" Good question — maybe because
no one has leapfrogged to the next stage of
development. What we need is a world-
wide catalog of catalogs. In a way, it's kind
of like telephone books. There is no ONE
telephone book; communities have their
own. And people keep their own lists of
frequently called numbers with addresses;
kind of like bookmarking your favorite home
pages.

One thing is for sure, at the rate change is
happening, this column, whether it's me
who writes it or someone else, should have
plenty to comment upon for years to come! 

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November 1995 / Against the Grain 95