

1

The Net and Netizens *The Impact the Net Has on People's Lives*

Welcome to the 21st Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen), and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually, you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in the same virtual space.

The situation I describe is only a prediction of the future, but a large part of the necessary infrastructure currently exists. The Net—or the Internet, BITNET, FIDOnet, other physical networks, Usenet, VMSnet, and other logical networks—has rapidly grown to cover all of the developed countries in the world.¹ Every day, more computers are attached to the existing networks, and every new computer adds to the user base—at least twenty-seven million people are interconnected today.

We are seeing a revitalization of society. The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new, more democratic world is becoming possible. As one user observed, the Net has “immeasurably increased the quality of . . . life.” The Net seems to open a new lease on life for people. Social connections that were never before possible, or relatively hard to achieve, are now facilitated by the Net. Geography and time are no longer boundaries. Social limitations and conventions no longer prevent potential friendships or partnerships. In this manner Netizens are meeting other Netizens from far away and close by that they might never have met without the Net.

A new world of connections between people—either privately, from individual to individual, or publicly, from individuals to the collective mass of many on the Net—is possible. The old model of distribution of information from the central Network Broadcasting Company is being questioned and

challenged. The top-down model of information being distributed by a few for mass consumption is no longer the only news. Netnews brings the power of the reporter to the Netizen. People now have the ability to broadcast their observations or questions around the world and have other people respond. The computer networks form a new grassroots connection that allows excluded sections of society to have a voice. This new medium is unprecedented. Previous grassroots media have existed for much smaller groups of people. The model of the Net proves the old way does not have to be the only way of networking. The Net extends the idea of networking, of making connections with strangers that prove to be advantageous to one or both parties.

The complete connection of the body of citizens of the world that the Net makes possible does not yet exist, and it will be a struggle to make access to the Net open and available to all. However, in the future we might see the expansion of what it means to be a social animal. Practically every single individual on the Net today is available to every other person on the Net. International connection exists on the same level with local connection. Also, the computer networks allow a more advanced connection between the people who are communicating. With computer communication systems, information and thoughts are connected to people's names and electronic-mail addresses. On the Net, one can connect to others who have similar interests or whose thought processes he or she enjoys.

Netizens make it a point to be helpful and friendly—if they feel it will be worthwhile. Many Netizens feel they have an obligation to be helpful, answer queries, and follow up on discussions; to put their opinions into the pot of opinions. Over a period of time the voluntary contributions to the Net have built it into a useful connection to other people around the world. When I posted the question, “Is the Net a Source of Social/Economic Wealth?” many people responded. Several corrected my calling the Net a source of accurate information. They pointed out that it was also a source of opinions. However, readers can train themselves to figure out the accurate information from the breadth of opinions. Presented here is an example of the broad range of views and opinions that I was able to gather from my research on the Net. The Net can be a helpful medium to help one understand the world. Only by seeing many points of view can one figure out his or her position on a topic.

Net society differs from off-line society by welcoming intellectual activity. People are encouraged to be thoughtful and to present their ideas to the Net. People are allowed to be intellectually interesting and interested. This intellectual activity forms a major part of the online information that is carried by the various computer networks. Netizens can interact with other people to help add to or alter that information. Brainstorming among different

types of people produces robust thinking. Information is no longer a fixed commodity or resource on the Net. It is constantly being added to and improved collectively. The Net is a grand intellectual and social commune in the spirit of the collective nature present at the origins of human society. Netizens working together continually expand the store of information worldwide. One person called the Net an untapped resource because it provides an alternative to the normal channels and ways of doing things. The Net allows for the meeting of minds to form and develop ideas. It brings people's thinking processes out of isolation and into the open. Every user of the Net gains the role of being special and useful. The fact that every user has his or her own opinions and interests adds to the general body of specialized knowledge on the Net. Each Netizen thus becomes a special resource valuable to the Net. Each user contributes to the whole intellectual and social value and possibilities of the Net.

LICKLIDER'S VISION

The world of the Netizen was envisioned more than twenty-five years ago by J. C. R. Licklider. Licklider brought to his leadership of the Department of Defense's ARPA Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO) a vision of "the intergalactic computer network." He shared this vision with others when he spoke as a representative from ARPA. Licklider was a prophet of the Net. In the 1968 paper, "The Computer as a Communication Device," written with Robert Taylor, they established several principles from their observations on how the computer would play a helpful role in human communication.² They clarified their definition of communication as a creative process, differentiating between communication and the sending and receiving of information. For example, when two tape recorders send to or receive information from each other, that is not communication. They wrote:

We believe that communicators have to do something nontrivial with the information they send and receive. And . . . to interact with the richness of living information—not merely in the passive way that we have become accustomed to using books and libraries, but as active participants in an ongoing process, bringing something to it through our interaction with it, and not simply receiving from it by our connection to it. . . . We want to emphasize something beyond its one-way transfer: the increasing significance of the jointly constructive, the mutually reinforcing aspect of communication—the part that transcends “now we both know a fact that only one of us knew before.” When minds interact, new ideas emerge. We want to talk about the creative aspect of communication.³

Licklider and Taylor defined four principles for computers to make a contribution toward human communication:

1. Communication is defined as an interactive creative process.
2. Response times need to be short to make the “conversation” free and easy.
3. Larger networks form out of smaller regional networks.
4. Communities form out of affinity and common interests.

Licklider and Taylor’s understandings from their 1968 paper have stood the test of time and do represent the Net today. In a later paper Licklider co-wrote with Albert Veza, “Applications of Information Networks,”⁴ they explore the possible business applications of information networks. Licklider and Veza’s survey of business applications in 1978 falls short of the possibilities Licklider and Taylor outlined in their 1968 paper and represent but a tiny fraction of the resources the Net currently embodies.

In the 1968 paper, Licklider and Taylor focused on the Net being comprised of a network of networks. While other researchers at the time focused on the sharing of computing resources, Licklider and Taylor kept an open mind:

*The collection of people, hardware, and software—the multi-access computer together with its local community of users—will become a node in a geographically distributed computer network. Let us assume for a moment that such a network has been formed. . . . Through the network of message processors, therefore, all the large computers can communicate with one another. And through them, all the members of the supercommunity can communicate—with other people, with programs, with data, or with a selected combinations of those resources.*⁵

Their concept of the sharing of both computing and human resources matches the modern Net. The network of various human connections quickly forms, changes its goals, disbands, and reforms into new collaborations. The fluidity of such group dynamics leads to a quickening of the creation of new ideas. Groups can form to discuss an idea, focus in or broaden out, and re-form to fit the new ideas that have been worked out.

Netnews, IRC (Internet Relay Chat), mailing lists, and mud/mush/moo/m** (various of the discussion tools available on the Net) are extremely dynamic. Most can be formed immediately for either short- or long-term use. As interests form or events occur, discussion groups can be created. (for example, the mailing list 9NOV89-L was formed after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and continued in order to discuss German unification.)

The virtual space created on noncommercial computer networks is accessible universally. The content on commercial networks, such as Compuserve

or America Online, is only accessible to those who pay to belong to that particular network. The space on noncommercial networks is accessible from the connections that exist, whereas social networks in the physical world generally are connected by limited gateways. So the capability of networking on computer nets overcomes limitations inherent in noncomputer social networks. This is important because it reduces the problems of population growth. Population growth need not mean limited resources any more—rather that very growth of population now means an improvement of resources. Thus, growth of population can be seen as a positive asset. This is a new way of looking at people in our society. Every new person can mean a new set of perspectives and specialties to add to the wealth of knowledge of the world. This new view of people could help improve the view of the future. The old model looks down on population growth and people as a strain on the environment rather than seeing the intellectual contribution these individuals can make. However, access to the Net will need to be universal for the Net to fully utilize the contribution each person can make. As long as access is limited, the Net and those on the Net lose the full advantages it can offer. But also, the people on the Net need to be active in order to bring about the best possible use of the Net.

Licklider foresaw that the Net would allow for people of common interests, who are otherwise strangers, to communicate. Much of the magic of the Net is the ability to make a contribution of your ideas and then be connected to utter strangers. He saw that people would connect to others via this Net in ways that had been much harder in the past. Licklider observed as the ARPANET grew to span two continents that this physical connection allowed for wider social collaborations to form. This was the beginning of computer data networks facilitating connections of people around the world.

My research on and about the Net was very exciting for me. When posting inquiries, I usually received the first reply within a couple of hours. The feeling of receiving that very first reply from a total stranger is always exhilarating! That set of first replies from people reminds me of the magic of electronic mail (e-mail). It is nice that there can be reminders of how exciting this new form of communication really is—so that the value of this new use of computers is never forgotten.

CRITICAL MASS

The Net has grown so much since its birth in the 1960s that a critical mass of people and interests has been reached. This collection of individuals adds to the interests and specialties of the whole community. Most people can now

gain something from the Net, while at the same time helping it out. There are enough people online now that most anyone new coming online will find something of interest. People are meshing intellects and knowledge to form new ideas. Larry Press made this clear by writing:

I now work on the Net at least 2 hours per day. I've had an account since around 1975 but it has only become super important in the last couple of years because a critical mass of membership was reached. I no longer work in LA, but in cyberspace.

Although the original users of the Net were from technical and scientific communities, many of them found it valuable to explore the Net for more than just technical reasons. Today, many different kinds of people are connected to the Net. The original users of the Net (then several test-beds of network research) were from only a few parts of the world. Now people of all ages, from most parts of the globe, and of many professions, make up the Net. The original prototype networks (the ARPANET in the United States, the network of the National Physical Laboratory in the United Kingdom, CYCLADES in France, and other networks around the world) developed the necessary physical infrastructure for a fertile social network to develop. Einar Stefferud wrote of this social connection:

*The ARPANET has produced several monumental results. First, it provided the physical and electrical communications backbone for development of the latent social infrastructure we now call "THE INTERNET COMMUNITY."*⁶

Many different kinds of people comprise the Net. The university community sponsors access for a broad range of people (students, professors, staff, retired professors, etc.). Many businesses are also connected. A "K-12 Net" that invites younger people to be a part of the online community exists. Special bulletin-board software exists to connect personal computer users to the Net. Various Unix bulletin-board systems exist to connect other users. It is virtually impossible to tell what kinds of people connect to public bulletin board systems (BBSs), as only a computer (or terminal) and modem are the prerequisites to connect. Many, if not all, FIDOnet BBSs (a very common BBS type) have at least e-mail, and many also participate in the larger Net through a gateway to Netnews. Prototype community network systems are forming around the world (for example, Cleveland Free-Net, Wellington Citynet, Santa Monica Public Electronic Network (PEN), Amsterdam Digital City, Hawaii FYI, National Capital Free-Net and others in Canada). Access via these community systems can be as easy as visiting the community library, and membership is open to all who live in the community.

In addition to the living body of resources this diversity of Netizens represents, there is also a continually growing body of digitized data that forms another resource. Whether it is Netizens digitizing great literature of the past (for example, the Gutenberg Project or Project Bartleby), people gathering otherwise obscure or non-mainstream material (for example, on various religions, unusual hobbies, gay lifestyle), or Netizens contributing new and original material, the Net follows in the great tradition of other public institutions, such as the public library or the principles behind public education. The Net shares with these institutions that it serves the general populace. The data available is just part of the treasure. Often, living Netizens provide pointers to this digitized store of publicly available information. Many of the network access tools have been created on the principle of being available to everyone. The best example is the method of connecting to file repositories via FTP (File Transfer Protocol) by logging in as an "anonymous" user. Most, if not all, World Wide Web sites, Wide Area Information Systems (WAIS), and gopher sites are open to all users of the Net. It is true that the Net community is smaller than it will be eventually, but the Net has reached a point of general usefulness no matter who you are.

This evidence is exactly why it is a problem for the Net to come under the control of commercial entities. Once commercial interests gain control, the Net will be much less powerful for the ordinary person than it is currently. The interests of commercial entities are different from those of the common person. Those pursuing commercial objectives are only interested in making a profit. A user of CompuServe or a similar commercial network pays for access by the hour. If this were extended to the present-day Net, the Netiquette of being helpful would have a price tag attached to it. If people had had to pay by the minute during the Net's development, very few would have been able to afford the network time needed to be helpful to others.

The Net has only developed because of the hard work and voluntary dedication of many people. It has grown because the Net is in the control and power of the people at the grassroots level, and because these people developed it. People's posts and contributions to the Net have been the developing forces.

GRASSROOTS

The Net brings people together. People connecting with other people can be powerful. There is power in numbers. The Net allows individuals to realize their power. The Net, uncontrolled by commercial entities, becomes the gath-

ering, discussion, and planning center for many people. The combined efforts of people interested in communication has led to the development and expansion of the global communications system. What's on the Net? Usenet, Free-Net, e-mail, library catalogs, FTP sites, free software, electronic newsletters and journals, Multi-User Domain/Dungeon (mud)/mush/moo, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), the multimedia World Wide Web (WWW) and many kinds of data banks. Different servers, such as WWW, WAIS, and gophers attempt to order and to make it easier to utilize the vast variety of information. There are both public and private services and sources of information. The public and free services often have come about through the voluntary efforts of one or a few people. These technologies allow a person to help make the world a better place by making his or her unique contribution available to the rest of the world. People who have been overlooked or have felt unable to contribute to the world, now can. The networks allow much more open and public interaction over a much larger body of people than possible before. The common people have a unique voice that is now being aired in a new way.

This new communications system introduces every single person as someone special and in possession of a useful resource. Several people described how important is the ability to connect to others at a grassroots level:

Simple—by access to a vast amount of information and an enormous number of brains—BRIAN MAY

For a geographically sparse group as it is, MU allows people to get to know one another, the relevant newsgroup gives a sense that there's a community out there and things are happening, and an associated FTP site allows art and writing to be distributed.—SIMON RABOCZI*

In summary, nets have helped enormously in the dissemination of information from people knowledgeable in certain areas which would be difficult to obtain otherwise.—BRENT EDWARDS

I get to communicate rapidly and cheaply with zillions of people around the world.—ROSEMARY WARREN

The following examples show how this is possible.

People are normally unprotected from the profit desires of large companies. Steven Alexander from California uses the Net to try to prevent overcharging at gas stations, a good example of the power of connecting people to uphold what is fair and in the best interest of the common person in society.

FROM: STEVEN ALEXANDER

I have started compiling and distributing (on the newsgroup ca.driving) a list of gas prices at particular stations in California to which many people will contribute and keep up to date, and which, I hope, will allow consumers to counteract what many of us suspect is the collusive (or in any case, price-gouging) behavior of the oil companies.

A user from Germany also reported using the Net to muckrake:

A company said they were a [nonprofit organization]. . . . Someone looked them up in the [nonprofit] . . . Register . . . [and] they did not exist there. . . . Another one said, that he had contact with the person who sent the letter . . . only [under] another company-name, and that he simply ignored this person since he looked like a swindler. So they are swindlers, and people from the Net proved it to us, we then of course did not engage with them at all.

The Net has proven its importance in other contemporary critical situations. As the only available line of communication with the rest of the world, the Net helped defeat the attempted coup in the former Soviet Union in 1990. The members of the coup either did not know about or understand the role the Russian RELCOM network could play. The connections proved resilient enough for information about the coup to be communicated inside and out of the country in time to inform the world and encourage resistance.⁷

The Net has also proven its value by providing an important medium for students. Students participating in the Chinese pro-democracy movement have kept in touch with others around the world via their fragile connection to the Net. The Net provided an easy way of evading government censors to get news around the world about events in China and to receive encouraging feedback. Such feedback is vital when fighting on seems impossible or wrong. Similarly, students in France used the French Minitel system to organize a successful fight against plans by the French government to restrict admission to government-subsidized universities.

The information flow on the Net is controlled by those who use the Net. Users actively provide the information they and others want. There is much more active participation than what is provided for by other forms of mass media. Television, radio, and magazines are all driven by those who own them and who determine who will write. The Net gives people a medium they can control. This control of information is a great power not available before to the common person. For example, Declan McCreech describes how this makes possible access to the most up-to-date information.

FROM: DECLAN MCCREESH

You get the most up to date info. that people around the world can get their hands on, which is great. For instance, the media report who wins a Grand Prix, what happened and not a great deal more. On the net, however, you can get top speeds, latest car and technology developments, latest rumors, major debates as to whether Formula 1 or Indy cars are better etc.

The Net helps to make the information available more accurate because of the many-to-many or broadcast and read and write capability. That new capability, which is not normally prevalent in our society, allows an actual participant or observer to report something. This gives the power of the reporter to the individual, allowing the source to report. This new medium allows everyone online to make a contribution. The old media instead controls who reports and what they say. The possibility of eyewitness accounts via the Net can make the information more accurate. This also opens up the possibility of a grassroots network, where information is passed from person to person around the world. Thus, German citizens learned about the Chernobyl explosion from the Net before the government decided to release the information to the public through traditional media. The connection is people to people rather than government to government. Citizen journalists can now distribute to more than those they know personally. The distribution of the writings of ordinary people is the second step after the advent of the inexpensive personal computer in the early 1980s. The personal computer and printer allowed anyone to produce mass quantities of documents. Personal publishing is now joined by wide personal distribution.

Not only is grassroots reporting possible, but the assumption that filtering is necessary has been challenged. People can learn to sort through the various opinions themselves. Steve Welch disagreed that the Net is a source of more accurate information, but agreed that people develop discriminatory reading skills.

FROM: STEVE WELCH

When you get more information from diverse sources, you don't always . . . get more accurate information. However, you do develop skills in discerning accurate information. . . . Or rather, you do if you want to come out of the info-glut jungle alive.

Governments that rule based on control of information will succumb eventually to the tides of democracy. As Dr. Sun Yat-Sen of the Chinese Democracy Movement (c. 1919) once said, "The worldwide democratic trend is mighty. Those who submit to it will prosper and those who resist it will per-

ish.” The Net reintroduces the basic idea of democracy as the grassroots people power of Netizens. Governments can no longer easily keep information from people.

Many groups that do not have an established form of communications available to them have found the Net to be a powerful tool. For example, for people far away from their homeland, the Net provides a new link.

FROM: GODFREY NOLAN

The Net has immeasurably increased the quality of my life. I am Irish, but I have been living in England for the past five years. It is a lot more difficult to get information about Ireland than you would expect. However a man called Liam Ferrie who works in Digital in Galway, compiles a newspaper on the weeks events in Ireland and so I can now easily keep abreast of most developments in Irish current affairs, which helps me feel like I'm not losing touch when I go home about twice a year. It is also transmitted to about 2000 Irish people all over the first and third worlds.

FROM: MADHUR K. LIMDI

I read your above posting and wanted to share my experience with you. I have been a frequent reader of news in usenet groups!! Such as soc.culture.indian.misc.news.southasia and both of these keep me reasonably informed about the happenings in my home country india.

Also in the United States, the Net has provided stable communications for people of various religious and sexual persuasions. Many other communities have also found the Net to be an excellent medium to help increase communication.

FROM: GREGORY G. WOODBURY

We will be going to a march on Washington and are coordinating our plans and travel with a large number of other folks around the country via e-mail and conversations on Usenet.

FROM: JANN VANOVER

I'm a member of a Buddhist organization and just found a man in Berkeley who keeps a Mailing List that sends daily guidance and discussions for this group. So I get a little religious boost when I log on each day.

FROM: CAROLE E. MAH

For me and for many of my friends, the Net is our main form of communication. Almost every aspect of interpersonal communication on the network has a gay/lesbian/bi aspect to it that forms a tight and intimate acquaintanceship which sometimes even boils over into arguments and enmities.

This network of connections, friends, enemies, lovers, etc. facilitates political goals that would not otherwise be possible (organizing letter-writing campaigns about the Gays in the Military Ban via the ACT-UP list, being able to send e-mail directly to the White House, finding out about activism, bashing, etc. in other states and around the world, etc.).

FROM: ROBERT DEAN

As a member of the science fiction community, I've met quite a few people on the net, and then in person.

COMMUNICATION WITH NEW PEOPLE

In many Netizens' lives the Net has alleviated feelings of loneliness, which seem common in today's society. The Net's ability to help people network both socially and intellectually makes it valuable and irreplaceable in their lives. This is forming a group of people who want to keep the Net accessible and open to all.

The Net brings together people from diverse walks of life and makes it easier for these people to communicate. It brings them together in the same virtual space and removes the impact or influence of first impressions.

FROM: MALCOLM HUMES

I'm in awe of the power and energy linking thousands into a virtual intellectual coffee-house, where strangers can connect without the formalities of face to face rituals (hello, how are you today . . .) to allow a direct-connect style of communication that seems to transcend the "how's the weather" kind of conversation to just let us connect without the bullshit.

Strangers are no longer strange on the Net. People are free to communicate without limits, fears, or apprehension. It used to be that there was a rather generous atmosphere that thrived on the Net and that welcomed new users. People were happy to help others, often as a return for the help they had received. Things have changed, and the welcome to newcomers is not as universally friendly, but there are still many online who are helpful to new users, and goodwill still overpowers any unfriendly comments.

FROM: JEAN-FRANÇOIS MESSIER

My use of the Net is to get in touch with more people around the world. I don't know for what, when, how, but that's important for me. Not that I'm in a small town, far from everybody, but that I want to be able to establish links

with others. In fact, because of those nets I use, I would !NOT! want to go to a small town, just because the phone calls would be too expensive. I have to say that I'm not an expressive person. I'm not a great talker, nor somebody who could make shows. . . . I'm more an "introvert".

Yet Jean-François wrote me. This is just one example of the social power of the Net. Another Netizen comments on how the Net helped her befriend strangers.

FROM: LAURA GOODIN

Last summer I was traveling to Denver and I used a listserv mailing list to find out whether a particular running group I run with had a branch there. They did, and I had a wonderful time meeting people with a common interest (and drinking beer with them); I was no longer a stranger.

BROADENED AND WORLDLY PERSPECTIVES

Easy connection to people and ideas from around the world has a powerful effect. Awareness that we are members of the human species, which spans the entire globe, changes a person's point of view. It is a broadening perspective. It is easy for people to assume a limited point of view if they are only exposed to certain ideas. The Net brings the isolated individual into contact with other people, experiences, and views from the rest of the world. Exposure to many opinions gives a person the chance to consider multiple views before settling on a specific opinion. Having access to the "marketplace of ideas" allows a person to make a reasoned judgment.

FROM: JEAN-FRANÇOIS MESSIER

My attitudes to other peoples, races and religions changed, since I had more chances to talk with other peoples around the world. When first exchanging mail with people from Yellowknife, Yukon, I had a real strange feeling: Getting messages and chatting with people that far from me. I noticed around me that a lot of people have opinions and positions about politics that are for themselves, without knowing others

Because I have a much broader view of the world now, I changed and am more conciliatory and peaceful with other people. Writing to someone you never saw, changes the way you write, also, the instancy of the transmission makes the conversation much more "live" than waiting for the damn slow paper mail. Telecommunications opened the world to me and changed my visions of people and countries. . . .

16 Netizens

FROM: ANTHONY BERNO

I could not begin to tell you how different my life would be without the Net. My life would be short about a dozen people, some of them central, I would be wallowing in ignorance on several significant subjects, and my mind would be lacking many broadening and enlightening influences.

FROM: HENRY CHOY

More things to look at. Increased perspective on life. The computer network brings people closer together, and permits them to speak at will to a large audience. I recommend that the telecommunications and computer industry make large scale computer networking accessible to the general public. It's like making places accessible to the handicapped. People brought closer together will release some existing social tensions. People need to be heard, and they need to hear.

FROM: PAUL READY

You don't have to go to another country to meet people from there. It is not the same as personally knowing them, but I always pay special attention to information from people outside the States. They are likely to have a different perspective on things.

FROM: LEANDRA DEAN

I love to study people, and the Net has been the best possible resource to this end. The Net is truly a window to the world, and without it we could only hope to physically meet virtually thousands of people every day to gain the same insights. I shudder to think about how different and closed in my life would be without the Net.

MATERIAL CHANGES TO PEOPLE'S LIVES AND LIFESTYLES

The time spent online can affect the rest of a person's life. The connections, interfaces, or collaborations between times on and off line form an interesting area of study. Netizens attest to the power of the Net by explaining the effect the Net has had on their lives. Because of the information available and the new connections possible, people have changed the way they live their lives. There are examples of both changes in the material possessions and changes in lifestyle. The changes in lifestyle are probably the more profound changes, but the new connections made possible are also important. Often the material gains are not financial. Rather, worthwhile goods can be redistributed—from those to whom the goods may have lost personal value to those who would value them.

NETIZEN COMMENTS ON MATERIAL CHANGES

FROM: WILLIAM CARROLL

Primarily because of the information and support from rec.bikes, three years ago I gave up driving to work and started riding my bike. It's one of the best decisions I've ever made.

RESPONSE RECEIVED VIA E-MAIL

When I started using ForumNet (a chat program similar to irc, but smaller— [Now called icb]) back in January 1990, I was fairly shy and insecure. . . . I had a few close friends but was slow at making new ones. Within a few weeks, on ForumNet, I found myself able to be open, articulate, and well-liked in this virtual environment. Soon, this discovery began to affect my behavior in "real" face-to-face interaction. I met some of my computer friends in person and they made me feel so good about myself, like I really could be myself and converse and be liked and wanted.

Of course, computer-mediated social interaction is not properly a crutch to substitute for face-to-face encounters, but the ability to converse via keyboard and modem with real people at the other end of the line has translated into the real-life ability for me to reach out to people without the mediating use of a computer. My life has improved. I wouldn't trade my experience with the Net for anything.

FROM: JACK FRISCH

I must begin my comments on the Internet with one simple yet significant statement: the availability and use of the Internet is changing my life profoundly.

FROM: CAROLE E. MAH

I also used to facilitate a vegetarian list, which radically altered many people's lives, offering them access to mail-order foods, recipes, and friendship via net-contact with people who live in areas where non-meat alternatives are readily available.

FROM: JANN VANOVER

Well, the first thing I thought of is purchases I've made through the Net which have "changed my life". I drove my Subaru Station wagon until last fall when I acquired a VW Camper van that I saw on a local Net ad. I wasn't looking for a van, wasn't even shopping for another vehicle, but the second time this ad scrolled by me, I looked into it and eventually bought it. I will certainly say that driving a 23-year-old VW camper van has changed my life! I thought I

would be ridiculed, but have found that people have a lot of respect and admiration for this car!

Through the Net, I heard that Roger Waters was going to perform "The Wall" again, an event I had promised myself not to miss, so I made a trip to Berlin (East and West) in 1990 to see this concert. This was CERTAINLY a life changing event, seeing Berlin less than one week after the roads were open with no checkpoints required. I don't think I would have known about it soon enough if not for the Net.

FROM: ROBERT DEAN

As for me, my main hobby is and was playing wargames and role-playing games. Net access has allowed me to discuss these games with players across the world, picking up new ideas, and gathering opinions on new games before spending money on them. In addition, I've been able to buy and sell games via Net connections, allowing me to adjust my collection of games to meet my current interests, and get games that I no longer wanted to people who do want them, whether they live down the road from me in Maryland, or in Canada, Austria, Finland, Germany or Israel. I have also taken an Esperanto course via e-mail, and correspond irregularly in Esperanto with interested parties world wide.

FROM: CARYN K. ROBERTS

Usenet & Internet . . . are available to me at work and by dialup connection to work from home. I have been materially enriched by the use of the Net. I have managed to sell items I no longer needed. I have been able to purchase items from others for good prices. I have saved money and am doing my part to recycle technology instead of adding burdens to the municipal waste disposal service

Using the Net I have also been enriched by discussions and information found in numerous newsgroups from sci.med to sci.skeptic to many of the comp.* groups. I have offered advice to solve problems and have been able to solve problems I had by using information in these forums.

THE NET AS A SOURCE OF ENORMOUS RESOURCES

Before the Net was widely seen as an enormous social network, some were experimenting with the sharing of computing resources. The following are some examples of ways Netizens utilize the information resources available on the Net:

FROM: TIM NORTH

I'm faculty here at . . . University and I use the Net as a major source of technical information for my lectures, up-to-date product information, and informed opinion. As such I find that I am constantly better informed than the people around me. (That sounds vain, but it's not meant to be. It's simply meant to emphasize how strongly I feel that the Net is a superb information resource.)

FROM: R. J. WHITE

I used the Net to find parts for my 1971 Opel GT. I was living in North America at the time, and going through the normal channels, like GM, are no good. The Net was like an untapped resource.

FROM: JOHN HARPER

[My] uses of the network [1] I once asked a question about an obscure point in history of maths on the sci.math newsgroup and got a useful answer from Exeter, UK. Beforehand I had no idea where anyone knowing the answer might be. I had drawn a blank in Oxford. [2] I asked a question about a slightly less obscure point on comp.lang.fortran which generated a long (and helpful) discussion on the Net for a week or two.

FROM: PAUL READY

Yes, it is a worldwide rapid distribution center of information, on topics both popular and obscure. It may not make the information more valuable, but it certainly increases the information, and the propagation of information. To those connected, it is a valuable resource. Flame wars aside, a lot of generally inaccessible information is readily available.

FROM: LEE ROTHSTEIN

Usenet and mailing lists create a group of people who are motivated and capable of talking about a specific topic. The software allows deeply contextual conversations to occur with a minimum of rehash. As experience develops with the medium, each user realizes that the other that he talks to or will talk to generally help him/her, and can do him/her no harm because of the remoteness imposed by the cable.

FROM: LU ANN JOHNSON

Hi! Usenet came to my rescue—I'm a librarian and was working with a group of students on a marketing project. They were marketing a make-believe product—a compact disc of "music hits of the 70's". They needed a source to tell them how much it cost to produce a CD—without mastering, etc. I exhausted all my print resources so I posted the question in a business newsgroup.

Within hours I learned from several companies that it cost about \$1.50 to produce a CD :) The students were very grateful to get the information.

FROM: LAURA GOODIN

I teach self-defense, and in rec.martial-art someone posted information about a study on the effectiveness of Mace for self-defense that I had been looking for for years.

FROM: CLIFF ROBERTS

I have been using Internet through a program in New Jersey to bring the fields of Science and Math to grammar school children grades K-8. We have implemented a system where the class rooms are equipped with PC's and are able to dial in to a UNIX system. There they can send e-mail and post questions to a KidsQuest ID. The ID then routes the questions to volunteers with accounts on UNIX. The scientists then answer or give advice of where to find the information they want. Another well accepted feature is to list out the soc.penpals list and e-mail people in different countries that are being studied in the schools.

FROM: JOE FARRENKOPF

I think Usenet is a very interesting thing. For me, it's mostly just a way to pass . . . time when bored. However, I have gotten some very useful things from it. There is one group in particular called comp.lang.fortran, and on several occasions when I've had a problem writing a program, I was able to post to this group to get some help to find out what I was doing wrong. In these cases, it was an invaluable resource

COLLABORATIVE WORK

As new connections are made between people, more ideas travel over greater distances. This allows either like-minded people or complementary people to come in touch with each other. The varied resources of the networks allow these same people to keep in touch even if they would not have been able to be in touch before. Electronic mail allows enough detail to be contained in a message that most, if not all, communications can take place entirely electronically. This medium allows for new forms of collaborative work to form and thrive. New forms of research will probably arise from such possibilities. Here are some examples:

FROM: WAYNE HATHAWAY

One "unusual" use I made of the Net happened in 1977. . . . Along with five other "Net Folks" I wrote the following paper: "The ARPANET TELNET Proto-

col: Its Purpose, Principles, Implementation, and Impact on Host Operating System Design," with Davidson, Postel, Mimno, Thomas, and Walden: Fifth Data Communications Symposium, Snowbird, UT; September 27-29, 1977. What's so unusual about a collaborative paper, you ask? Simply that the six of us never even made a TELEPHONE call about the paper, much less had a meeting or anything. Literally EVERYTHING—from the first ideas in a "broadcast" mail to the distribution of the final "troff-ready" version—was done with e-mail. These days this might not be such a deal, but it was interesting back then.

FROM: PAUL GILLINGWATER

. . . in Vienna was an on-line computer mediated art forum . . . with video conferencing between two cities, plus an on-line discussion in a virtual MUD-type conference later that evening.

RESPONSE RECEIVED VIA E-MAIL

In response to your question about having fun on the net, and being creative, one incident comes to mind. I had met a woman on ForumNet (a system like IRC). She and I talked and talked about all sorts of things. One night, we felt especially artistic. We co-wrote a poem over the computer. I'd type a few words, she'd pick up where I left off (in the middle of sentences or wherever) and on and on. I don't think we had any idea what it was going to be in the end, thematically or structurally. In the end, we had a very good poem, one that I would try to publish if I knew her whereabouts anymore. . . .

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Information flow can take various shapes. The strangest and perhaps most interesting one is how emotion can be attached to information flow, although they often seem like two very different things. I received a large number of responses that reported real-life marriages arising from Net meetings. The Net facilitates the meeting of people of like interests. The newness of the Net means we cannot fully understand its impact. However, it is worth noting that people have also broken up online. So while it is a new social medium, a range of dynamics will exist.

FROM: CARYN K. ROBERTS

I have found friends on the Net. A lover. And two of the friends I met, also met online and got married. I attended the wedding (in California).

22 Netizens

FROM: SCOTT KITCHEN

I think I can add something for your paper. I met my fiancée 4 years ago over the net. I was at Ohio State, and she was in Princeton, and we started talking about an article of hers I'd read in rec.games.frp. We got to talking, eventually met, found we liked each other, and the rest is history. We were married 31 December 1994.

FROM: GREGORY G. WOODBURY

I met the woman who became my wife when I started talking to the folks at "phs" (the third site of the original Usenet) during the development of Netnews. I would not have been wandering around that area if I hadn't been interested in the development of the net.

FROM: LAURA GOODIN

And now, the BEST story: about eight months ago I was browsing soc.culture.australia and I noticed a message from an Australian composer studying in the US about an alternative tune to "Waltzing Matilda." I was curious, so I responded in e-mail, requesting the tune and just sort of shooting the breeze. We began an e-mail correspondence that soon incorporated voice calls as well. One thing led inexorably to another and we fell in love (before we met face to face, actually). We did eventually meet face to face. Last month he proposed over the Internet (in soc.culture.australia) and I accepted. Congratulatory messages came in from all over the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Houston (that's his name) and I keep our phone bills from resembling the national debt by sending 10 or 12 e-mails a day (we're well over 1400 for eight months now), and chatting using IRC. A long-distance relationship is hellish, but the pain is eased somewhat by the Internet.

FROM: CHUQ VON ROSPACH

oh, and in the "how the Net made my non-net life better" category, I met my wife via the net. Does that count?

WORK

The fluid connections and the rapidly changing nature of the networks make the Net a welcome medium for those who are job hunting and for those who have jobs to offer. The networks have a large number of people who are looking for jobs. Placing job announcements is easy, and they can be kept available for as long as the job is offered. Résumés can be sent quickly and easily by e-mail. Companies can respond quickly and easily to such submissions, also by e-mail.

Besides finding work, the Net helps people who are currently employed perform their job in the best manner. Many people utilize the Net to assist them with their jobs. Several examples of each follow:

FROM: LAURA GOODIN

My division successfully recruited a highly-qualified consultant (a Finn living in Tasmania) to do some work for us; the initial announcement was over Usenet; subsequent negotiations were through e-mail.

FROM: JJ

I've hired people off the net, and from meeting them in muds, when I find somebody who can THINK. People who can think are hard to find anywhere.

FROM: DIANA GREGORY

I have learned to use UNIX, and as a result may be able to keep/advance in my job due to the 'net.

FROM: NEIL GALARNEAU

It helps me do my job (MS Windows programming) and it helps me learn new things (like C++).

FROM: KIERAN CLULOW

The Internet access provided me by the university has greatly facilitated my ability to both use and program computers and this has had the direct result of improving my grades as well as gaining me a good job in the computer field. Long live the Internet (and make it possible for private citizens to get access!)

FROM: MARK GOOLEY

I got my job by answering a posting to a news-group.

FROM: ANTHONY BERNO

I develop for NEXTSTEP, and the Net is very useful in getting useful programming hints, info on product releases, rumors, etcetera.

FROM: GREGORY G. WOODBURY

Due to contacts made via Usenet and e-mail, I got a job as a consultant at BTL in 1981 after I lost my job at Duke. Part of the qualifications that got me in the door was experience with Usenet.

IMPROVED COMMUNICATIONS WITH FRIENDS

Another way of improving daily life is by making communications with friends easier. The ease of sending e-mail is bringing back letter writing. However, the immediacy of e-mail means less care need be taken in the process of writing. E-mail, IRC, and Netnews make it much easier to keep in touch with friends outside one's local area.

NETIZEN COMMENTS ON IMPROVED COMMUNICATIONS

FROM: BILL WALKER

I also have an old and dear friend (from high school) who lives in the San Francisco area. After I moved to San Diego, we didn't do very well at keeping in touch. She and I talked on the phone a couple of times a year. After we discovered we were both on the net, we started corresponding via e-mail, and we now exchange mail several times a week. So, the Net has allowed me to keep in much closer touch with a good friend. It's nothing that couldn't be done by phone, or snail mail, but somehow we never got around to doing those things. E-mail is quick, easy and fun enough that we don't put it off.

FROM: ANTHONY BERNO

Incidentally, it is also one of my primary modes of communication with my sister (who lives in N.Z.) It's more meditative than a phone call, faster than a letter, and cheaper than either of them.

FROM: CAROLE E. MAH

It also facilitates great friendships. Most of my friends, even in my own town, I met on the network. This can often alleviate feelings of loneliness and "I am the only one, I must be a pervert" feelings among queer people just coming out of the closet. They have a whole world of like-minded people to turn to on Usenet, on Bitnet lists, on IRC, in personal e-mail, on BBSs and AOL type conferences, etc..

FROM: JANN VANOVER

Apart from purchases, I have been contacted by: 1) a very good friend from college who I'd lost track of. She got married to a man she met in a singles

newsgroup (they've been married 2 years+) 2) someone who went to my high school, knew a lot of the same people I did, but we didn't know each other. We are now "mail buddies" 3) an old girlfriend of my brothers. They went out for eight years, but I learned more about her from ONE e-mail letter than I had ever learned when meeting her in person.

FROM: GODFREY NOLAN

Above all it helps me keep in touch with friends who I would inevitably lose otherwise. The Net helps those that move around for economic reasons to lessen the worst aspects of leaving your friends in the series of places that you once called home. It's the best thing since sliced bread.

PROBLEMS

With all of the positive uses and advantages of the Net, it is not perfect. The blind view of people on the Net seems to shield most, but not everyone. For example, there is a relatively large male-to-female population ratio on the Net. Women online can feel the effects of this difference. Women who have easily identifiable user names or IDs are prone to be the center of much attention. While that might be good, much of that attention can be of a hostile or negative nature. This attention may be detrimental to women who try to be active on the Net. Net harassment can spread against users for other reasons as well. People with unpopular ideas need to be strong to withstand the abuse they may receive from others.

The worst non-people problem seems to be information overflow. Information adds up very quickly, and it can be hard to organize and sort through it all. Technology is now being developed to handle this problem.

FROM: SCOTT HATTON

There is a problem with this brave new world in that a lot of people don't appreciate there's another human being at the other keyboard. Flaming is a real problem—especially in comp.misc. This is all a new facet of the technology as well. People rarely trade insults in real life like they do on Internet. There's a tendency to stereotype your opponent into categories. I think this is because you're not around to witness the results. I find this more on Internet newsgroups than on CompuServe. I think this is down to maturity—a lot of folk on the Internet are students who aren't paying for their time on the system. Those on CompuServe are normally slightly older, not so hot-headed and are paying for their time. Damn. Now I'm at stereotyping now. It just goes to show. . . .

FROM: JOE FARRENKOPF

There is something else I've discovered that is really rather fascinating. People can be incredibly rude when communicating through this medium. For example, some time ago, I posted a question to lots of different newsgroups, and many people felt my question was inappropriate to their particular group. They wrote to me and told me so, using amazingly nasty words. I guess it's easier to be rude if you don't have to face a person, but can say whatever you want over a computer.

FROM: BRAD KEPLEY

I get a little irritated with people always claiming someone else is "wasting bandwidth" because they disagree with them. About half the time it turns out that the person being told to shut up was right after all. Then again, when you look at things like alt.binaries.pictureserotica and other "non-bandwidth-wasting" activities, it seems almost comical to me when someone says this. There is nothing more wasteful than 95% of what Usenet is used for. It's a joke to say that a particular person is 'wasting' it. To say that they are off-topic makes more sense. I guess this is just a gripe rather than what you are looking for. Wasting bandwidth again. :)

CONCLUSION

For the people of the world, the Net provides a powerful means for peaceful assembly. Peaceful assembly allows people to take control of their lives, rather than that control being in the hands of others. This power deserves to be appreciated and protected. Any medium or tool that helps people hold or gain power is something special that has to be protected.

The Net has made a valuable impact on human society. My research has demonstrated that people's lives have been substantially improved via their connection to the Net. This sets the basis for providing access to all in society. Using similar reasoning, J. C. R. Licklider and Robert Taylor believed that access to the then-growing information network should be made ubiquitous. They felt that the Net's value would depend on high connectivity. In their 1968 article, "The Computer as a Communication Device," they argued that the network's impact upon society will depend on how available the network is to society as a whole.⁸

Society will improve if Net access is made available everyone. Only if access is universal will the Net itself advance. Ubiquitous connection is necessary for the Net to encompass all possible resources. One Net visionary, Steve Welch, responded to my research by calling for universal access:

If we can get to the point where anyone who gets out of high school alive has used computers to communicate on the Net or a reasonable facsimile or successor to it, then we as a society will benefit in ways not currently understandable. When access to information is as ubiquitous as access to the phone system, all Hell will break loose. Bet on it.

Steve is right. “All Hell will break loose” in the most positive of ways imaginable. The philosophers Thomas Paine and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and all other fighters for democracy would have been proud.

Similar to past communications advances such as the printing press, mail, and the telephone, the Global Computer Communications Network has already fundamentally changed our lives. Licklider predicted that the Net would fundamentally change the way people live and work. It is important to try to understand the Net’s impact, so as to help extend and reinforce this achievement.

NOTES

1. See *Internet Society News* 2 (Spring 1993) inside back cover for a map showing Net penetration around the world. Larry Landweber maintains and posts updated connectivity maps and tables. See, for example, ftp://ftp.cs.wisc.edu/connectivity-table/Connectivity_Table.text
2. J. C. R. Licklider and Robert W. Taylor, “The Computer as a Communication Device,” reprinted in *In Memoriam: J. C. R. Licklider 1915–1990* (Palo Alto, Calif: Digital Systems Research Center, 1990); originally published in *Science and Technology*, April 1968. Available online at <http://memex.org/licklider.html>
3. *Ibid.*, 21.
4. *Proceedings of IEEE* 66 (November, 1978): 43–50.
5. Licklider and Taylor, 32.
6. Stefferud, Einar *et al.*, “Quotes from Some of the Players,” *ConneXions—The Interoperability Report* 3 (10): 21.
7. See article by Larry Press posted on the comp.risks newsgroup, September 6, 1991.
8. Licklider and Taylor, 40.

Much thanks is owed to the many who contributed Usenet posts and e-mail responses to requests for examples of how the Net has changed people’s lives. Only a few of the many replies received could be quoted but all contributed to this work.

The following people who were quoted indicated that their e-mail addresses be included:

Jim Carroll	jcarroll@jacc.com
Kieran Clulow	u1036254@vmsuser.acsu.unsw.edu.au

28 *Netizens*

Robert Dean	robdean@access.digex.net
Jack Frisch	frischj@gbms01.uwgb.edu
Scott Hatton	100114.1650@compuserve.com
Lu Ann Johnson	ai411@yfn.ysu.edu
Jean-François Messier	messier@igs.net
Larry Press	lpress@isi.edu
Clifford A. Roberts	cliffr@donuts0.bellcore.com
Chuq Von Rospach	chuqui@plaidworks.com
Gregory G. Woodbury	news@wolves.durham.nc.us

An early version of this chapter by Michael Hauben was made available online in Summer 1993. A revised version was printed in the *Amateur Computerist* 6 (Fall/Winter 1994–1995).

Appendix to Chapter 1

The Posts for the Research

1. Is the Net a Source of Social/Economic Wealth? & Other Thoughts
2. The Magic of E-Mail—Beginnings
3. Does the Net Bring Real-Life Advantages?
4. Looking for Exciting Uses of the Net
5. Connecting Others to the Net
6. Looking for Stories of Net Harassment
7. Does the Net Help You Be Creative or Have Fun?

IS THE NET A SOURCE OF SOCIAL/ECONOMIC WEALTH? & OTHER THOUGHTS

POST

Newsgroups: news.misc, alt.culture.usenet, alt.amateur-comp, sci.econ,
comp.misc, soc.misc, comp.org.eff.talk

Subject: Is the Net a Source of Social/Economic Wealth? & Other Thoughts

There are some notes I have made in trying to form a proposal for a paper I am writing for an Independent Project in College. I would appreciate any ideas or suggestions in e-mail. Please send e-mail to me at:

hauben@cs.columbia.edu

The points I would most like some feedback on are 1-6.

However, it might be useful if anyone is interested in the question of whether or not the Net (and its users) is a source of creation of economic, social, or intellectual wealth. This might make an interesting discussion via public follow-ups.

MY PROPOSAL

I want to understand this idea of Internetworking and cooperative attitude. The social connections and collaborations that the Internet and other parts of the global computer network make possible are new and very important. This more widespread communication brings the general populace of the world in better intersection/global social intercourse.

Question about Battle for use and right to utilize. And people have taken the battle up in order to keep access open and for all. Forces for restriction and

censorship. Only through battle that net has stayed open. Net *inherently* allows people choice to speak.

Is it secret that Usenet did restrict corporations/private from abusing Net as it is research-oriented and developed only via because it was an experiment? (NOT A FLAME)

*****1. What does communication over the networks mean? Is it “value-added” somehow in that any response might bring something added into the amount of information or value. Does communication via the Net represent the quicker building by people on other people’s work thus representing advancements (in ideas, products, production, etc..)

*****2. Does the Net represent intellectual wealth? Does the net represent the growth and increase in Gross National Product /Wealth or Wealth of Nations? (What if any theoretical background is there to this?) William Petty maybe Bacon, or Royal Society.

*****3. What does the Net make possible? Is the “Communication” on the net different than normal/before modes of communication? Does the widespread of connections and zero-time (Ability to turnaround information and/or publication or exchange of information in almost no time) of producing things prove revolutionary?

*****4. Provides a Forum that facilitates Intellectual Ferment

*****5. Net makes knowing real conditions of society possible—because you have a “direct” connection to “many” people—the masses.

*****6. Accurate Information (similar to point 5)

7. How does the network make these “connections” possible easier than before? (These connections being finding people in the world to enjoy exchanging information, debating, connecting intellectually or whimsically—helping to find people who you can or want to interact/communicate with.)

8. Who has access and can gain the advantage of this service/connection/resource/revolution? Is this only an advantaged group of people, or is it growing quickly? Or should it grow quicker? What direction is access going towards for? What is Clinton/etc.. doing? (Business?) Is there a fight against the continued openness and/or growing openness of letting the great body of people communicate accurate information that is normally controlled in normal modes of mass media.

Thanks

—Michael Hauben

THE MAGIC OF E-MAIL—BEGINNINGS

POST:

Subject: The Magic of E-Mail—Beginnings

Newsgroups: comp.mail.misc, alt.amateur-comp, alt.folklore.computers,
soc.college, alt.culture.usenet, news.misc

Do you remember the first e-mail message you sent? Do you remember the first e-mail you replied to? Do you remember the first response you received in e-mail? Do you remember the first e-mail response you received seemingly before you sent out the original message? <chuckle>—Do you remember the magic?—

Excitement is a key word, as is immense usefulness. Whether you are a scientist, a student or a casual user, person-to-person communication via the computer is **VERY** exciting. Remember your first time and write it down. Keep your memory and save it for posterity. You . . . We . . . are all part of what is a relatively early period of the computer communications revolution. Save your experience in order to help recognize and remember this period of change—this beginning.

And if you do write down (or type in) your first (or first couple) of real **exciting** e-mail beginnings please e-mail them to me. I will try to post a summary to usenet. And talk about e-mail from e-mail or e-mail in response to Usenet, or e-mail in connection with something before the current e-mail or what you think might come in the future.

Thanks,
—Michael

DOES THE NET BRING REAL-LIFE ADVANTAGES?

POST:

Article 891 of alt.amateur-comp:

Newsgroups: soc.singles, rec.autos, soc.college, alt.amateur-comp,
soc.culture.usa, comp.misc

From: hauben@cs.columbia.edu (Michael Hauben)

Subject: Does the Net Bring Real-Life Advantages?

Message-ID: <C5II5B.KJr@cs.columbia.edu>

Summary: Has the Net improved or broadened your off-line world?

Date: Thu, 15 Apr 1993 06:31:58 GMT

How has the Net changed your life? Has anyone who has used the Net actually been able to add to their off-line life successfully? I am doing research for a paper for college, and I am interested in the material changes that the Net helps develop through the increased communication.

Has access to the Net and your participation on it allowed you to do something that you wouldn't have done before—offline? Anything would be interesting—meeting people/new friends, marrying someone from on-line, joining groups, certain opportunities that were there because of the connection via the Net, etc.. I am interested in hearing about actions caused by use of any part of the Net (Usenet, talk, e-mail, etc.). The **KEY** point is that the cause or facilitator of the event needs to be because of the Net somehow. If you have any interesting, or useful stories, or ideas please either e-mail them to me, or post a follow-up to this message!

Thanks,
—Michael

LOOKING FOR EXCITING USES OF THE NET.

POST:

Subject: Looking for Exciting Uses of the Net

I am doing research for a paper for a college independent study about the net and communications. I would appreciate hearing about using any part of the net: Usenet News/Netnews, irc, e-mail, mailing-lists, Freenets, FTP, wais, gopher, etc..

I would like to know about people's uses of the network(s) that have been especially interesting, valuable and/or exciting. I want to hear about people's delights and also about disappointments using the Net. Please do NOT send me information about use by businesses or corporations for commercial purposes. I am NOT interested in commercial or proprietary uses. I AM interested in uses that serve the public, that are open, that serve science, research, education, and social aims and objectives. I am also interested in uses that serve to help people personally on their work (programming, et al.) or hobbies.

Either e-mail me at hauben@cs.columbia.edu or post a public follow-up. Both if possible.

Thanks,
—Michael Hauben

CONNECTING OTHERS TO THE NET

Subject: Connecting Others to the Net

Newsgroups: news.misc, alt.culture.usenet, alt.amateur-comp, comp.misc,
soc.misc

Hi,

I would like to hear from people the various ways in how they have introduced others to Usenet and the Internet. What ways have been successful and relatively inexpensive in getting family, friends, and other associates connected?

I am interested because I am interested in people's attempts (consciously or unconsciously) to further the expansion of the Net.

To the further expansion of the Net! :)

—Michael Hauben

LOOKING FOR STORIES OF NET HARASSMENT

POST:

Subject: Looking for Stories of Net Harassment

Newsgroups: alt.censorship, news.misc, comp.mail.misc, alt.amateur-comp

Have you ever experienced harassment on the net? Have you tried to utilize the communicative aspects of Usenet, E-mail or other computer networking capabilities but wound up discouraged? Please let me know if you have been the victim of censorship, harassment or some kind of blocking at some point in your usage of computer-facilitated communication. If so, do you think this "discouragement" was wrong or vicious, or malicious.

Thank you,

—Michael

And lastly maybe it would be helpful to find out why you thought you were treated such.

DOES THE NET HELP YOU BE CREATIVE OR HAVE FUN?

POST:

Subject: Does the Net Help You Be Creative or Have Fun?

Newsgroups: soc.culture.usa, talk.bizarre, alt.mud, alt.irc, news.misc,
alt.culture.usenet, alt.amateur-comp, rec.music.misc,
rec.arts.misc

I am conducting research for an independent study about computer and communication for college. So far I have asked and received many “serious” answers and replies dealing with work, keeping in touch with friends around the world, etc. However I am also interested in what effect the Net (Netnews, the Internet, other Nets, FTP, irc, gopher, etc.) has on either creative endeavors you might have, or just plain silly or fun things. Has access to the Net helped you in any creative hobbies you might have, or just given you a chance to have fun?

For example. have your music tastes expanded, or do you know about more plays happening, have you learned about other who are musicians, or artists or writers? And if so, have you gotten a chance to jam, paint, write, or somehow help each other? Have there been any on-going creative collaborative music/art/literary experiments? How has the computer assisted communication helped you be creative or expanded your boundaries?

The other side is, have you found more ways to just have fun, or of new ways of having fun.

As I am not exactly sure where to post this message, I would appreciate any suggestions as to other groups to post the message to.

Thanks!

—Michael Hauben