

Intruder Alert – So Far, So Fast, the Internet of Today

By Burt Tschache

As a computer professional, I hear people complain about Internet speed on a regular basis. However, if you want to go back just a few years, the Internet speed we have attained today is truly blazing by comparison. It was just under 50 years ago that the first paper on the theory of packet switching was published. If you recall just a few columns ago, I explained that the packet is the basic electronic construct of information transfer on a network. For those that missed that one, a packet has a header, a trailer and your information sandwiched between the two.

There is no one person that can claim they invented the Internet. The reporters that twisted Al Gore's comments about his support of the Internet as the Information Superhighway knew better than that, but they simply wanted to cause difficulties for him. The former Vice President just knew a good tool when he saw it.

It was in the mid 60's when the

Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency or ARPA (eventually DARPA) began limited testing of a digital communications network at a dizzying speed of 1200 bps. Meanwhile, colleges and universities were looking for ways to transfer papers for peer review at a more rapid rate than the U.S. Mail.

By the end of 1969, the first 4 nodes of what will become the Internet are up and running at UCLA, Stanford Research Institute, University of California at Santa Barbara and the University of Utah. Zipping along at a blinding 50 kbps, the Information Superhighway is on its way, albeit more of a one-lane road at the time.

By 1971, 11 more nodes are added and 2 years later, there are 2,000 users of what is referred to as ARPANET; not bad for 10 years of hard work and study. The next 10 years see establishment of standards and protocols that will assist in the further growth of this new communications tool. The year 1973 sees the first international connection to the Uni-

versity College of London and we have not looked back since.

The 70's also see the beginning of Smilies or Emoticons initially used to add a bit of humor to the text-based system. They are initially derided as inane and silly, but look how rampant they are today. The 70's also saw the first SPAM sent by the Digital Equipment Company touting their new, soon to be released, computer.

With the 80's comes the first major crash due to a virus and a bevy of competing networks vying for supremacy as the provider of choice. Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol merged to become the location awareness system we know as TCP/IP. The Domain Name System or DNS also came into existence as the way to trans-

late the Domain Name into an IP address just so we can type in a Domain Name in whatever language we choose and it will find its way to the correct outpost in Cyberspace.

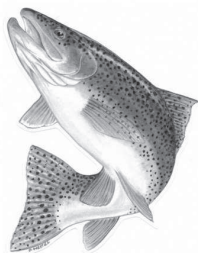
The 90's see the business community taking note of the Internet and the need for speed becomes pre-eminent as files get larger and complex graphics are incorporated. By the end of the decade, remote meetings are commonplace and one of the largest non-events, Y2K, comes and goes. I would like to think it was a non-event because of all the work put into making it so.

(To Be Continued . . .)

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