

THE INTERNET

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The Internet is a worldwide, publicly accessible series of interconnected computer networks that transmit data by packet switching using the standard Internet Protocol (IP). It is a "network of networks" that consists of millions of smaller domestic, academic, business, and government networks, which together carry various information and services, such as electronic mail, online chat, file transfer, and the interlinked web pages and other resources of the World Wide Web (WWW).

An early popular web browser was ViolaWWW, based upon HyperCard. It was eventually replaced in popularity by the Mosaic web browser. In 1993, the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois released version 1.0 of Mosaic, and by late 1994 there was growing public interest in the previously academic, technical Internet. By 1996 usage of the word Internet had become commonplace, and consequently, so had its misuse as a reference to the World Wide Web.

Examples of early university Internet communities are Cleveland FreeNet, Blacksburg Electronic Village and NSTN in Nova Scotia. Aside from the complex physical connections that make up its infrastructure, the Internet is facilitated by bi- or multi-lateral commercial contracts (e.g., peering agreements), and by technical specifications or protocols that describe how to exchange data over the network. Indeed, the Internet is essentially defined by its interconnections and routing policies.

As of December 30, 2007, 1,319 billion people use the Internet according to Internet World Stats. Writing in the Harvard International Review, philosopher N.J. Slabbert, a writer on policy issues for the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Land Institute, has asserted that the Internet is fast becoming a basic feature of global civilization, so that what has traditionally been called "civil society" is now becoming identical with information technology society as defined by Internet use.

There have been many analyses of the Internet and its structure. For example, it has been determined that the Internet IP routing structure and hypertext links of the World Wide Web are examples of scale-free networks.

Similar to the way the commercial Internet providers connect via Internet exchange points, research networks tend to interconnect into large subnetworks.

The Internet has made possible entirely new forms of social interaction, activities and organizing, thanks to its basic features such as widespread usability and access.

Social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace have created a new form of socialization and interaction. Users of these sites are able to add a wide variety of items to their personal pages, to indicate common interests, and to connect with others. It is also possible to find a large circle of existing acquaintances, especially if a site allows users to utilize their real names, and to allow communication among large existing groups of people.

Some governments, such as those of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Myanmar, the People's Republic of China, and Saudi Arabia, restrict what people in their countries can access on the Internet, especially political and religious content. This is accomplished through software that filters domains and content so that they may not be easily accessed or obtained without elaborate circumvention.

In Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, major Internet service providers have voluntarily (possibly to avoid such an arrangement being turned into law) agreed to restrict access to sites listed by police. While this list of forbidden URLs is only supposed to contain addresses of known child pornography sites, the content of the list is secret.[citation needed] Many countries, including the United States, have enacted laws making the possession or distribution of certain material, such as child pornography, illegal, but do not use filtering software.

According to a June 2007 article in Discover magazine, the combined weight of all the electrons moved within the Internet in a day is 0.2 millionths of an ounce. Others have estimated this at nearer 2 ounces (50 grams).

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