

What's Next for the Net?



Sarah Blinco glances back, then looks forward to what's next online.

ONCE UPON a time (ok, so it was only 1997 but in Internet terms that's a whole digital generation), I was a University student discovering an exciting novelty called a 'Laptop computer', and from my dorm room at UQ I could plug into the world and 'surf' away.

Back then there were a number of free web-hosting sites like Geocities.com that enabled dabblers like myself to design primitive websites based around our interests, just like those fan sites I'd discovered in the early '90s when my brother had us 'dialled up' and only 80 websites existed. During my Uni days many informative websites started appearing based around science, linguistics and history. Then there were the likes of mine that were themed around, let me see, The X-Files and romantic comedy films. I know, I'm a total nerd, and not much has changed really (given my mounting excitement on the return of The X-Files to film this year), but my point is that as the Internet progressed rapidly and our opportunities to interact and develop our own little spot in cyberspace expanded, it became increasingly exciting and evident that we had indeed arrived in the 'future'.

Chat sites, search engines, banner ads, gaming, Napster and downloadable goodies all began to emerge at the speed of light throughout the era now referred to as 'dot com'. Following Graduation, I continued to utilise the Internet as we cruised through the age of 'Excite.com', 'Yahoo.com', Hotmail, Amazon, Seek, RSVP, Wikipedia, Wotif and of course, Google which has now earned its own place in most dictionaries as a verb that means 'to search for information on the Internet'.

The Internet has not only become faster and more accessible but has emerged as an invaluable communication, marketing and networking tool. I eventually discovered the likes of eBay (an online marketplace where you can buy and sell pretty much anything) and YouTube (an on-demand video site that you dreamed of as a kid where you simply search for a video of any kind and by magic it appears). Over the past year I've successfully bought and sold quite a bit online and have some dodgy (no, none of those!) videos on YouTube. It's an extraordinary experience to live and learn on the Internet - something I never would have imagined in the '80s while desperately trying to untangle my Bananarama cassette out of my Walkman.

Just as I thought I'd 'caught up' last year following an experimental phase on MySpace and Ninemsn's Spaces.live.com blog sites, I finally succumbed to the numerous requests for an emerging networking site called Facebook. The advancements never end! As millions of users sign in to Facebook each minute of the day, I'm caught between 'poking' friends, updating my blog, sharing video and photos in real time, scheduling appointments into Google Calendar, answering emails, talking to family abroad via

Skype, and streaming live radio in my office from my (now) wireless Laptop... Aside from trying to actually decipher all this computer jargon, I'm also wondering what's next.

While the big guns of the 'dot com' corporations battle it out to buy and sell the next big thing in Cyber-land, where can we go to from here being that an average Internet user like me (or now even my mum and dad!) emails, chats, networks, 'skypes', 'googles', shares information and listens to music on

the latest being hotel rooms at the likes of www.ubid4rooms.com.

Tim Flattery, General Manager of Digital Artists (www.digitalartists.tv) has worked in the thick of the Internet evolution since the early '90s and most recently spent two years as head of new media and branded entertainment for Becker Entertainment working in New York, Washington and Los Angeles. He also launched the well known social forecasting and new media development firm Pophouse.

He anticipates an exciting new Internet age. "We call it the 'second digital decade' where the internet will 'disappear', will stop being something separate and will be the centre of everything. The first digital decade was an entrée to how powerful the internet really is and the connectedness of everything through technology. It has only just started to stretch its legs in terms of usage. Wherever there's electricity it will touch you... You'll plug into the Plasma screen with no problems, and everyone can become a media proprietor".

Tim concludes the future will be fast, furious and entertaining! "The Internet is very good at entering inefficient business spaces like book selling, auctions, the idea of searching for information - any industry that doesn't offer customers great services is vulnerable to the Internet. For example, television is a terrible customer service if you're thinking with your Internet head-space. Who wants to wait when you can have instant access? The internet is salivating to take control of that industry on a global level. Video and television over the 'net in the next three years is the next big thing, particularly with the Federal Government dipping into future fund to put in much faster internet. It will change our consumption habits forever".



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demand at the flick of a switch (or is that the click of a mouse)? Will we soon be able to access any television series or film as it's released? To an extent this is already happening on some mobile networks, with entertainment, news and sports scores filtered through as they become available, or on new sites like www.joost.com. Then of course there's the booming online marketplace where we can auction, bargain and bid for all manner of goods and services,