October 2006

A Decade on the Net

Greetings Amigans. As I write this, I consider the various implications of two anniversaries that take place this month. One is the 5th anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, which has overshadowed a country, a presidency, and caused bouts of widely differing opinion on how the international world works, or should work. We've all been affected, either directly or indirectly, though I count myself relatively lucky in that I haven't been directly affected. I pass along my best wishes to all those who have been. Sometimes it's difficult to believe the event is five years past, as it's still very much in many people's minds.

The other anniversary is more superficial, but more personal. September 15th marks the 10th anniversary of Sabrina Online, my monthly web-comic (www.sabrina-online.com). It's weird to look back and consider that I've kept anything rolling for that long. After ten years and 400 comic strips, I don't believe it's had an appreciable impact on the world at all, but it has made me think about what has changed in the world, and especially on the Internet, over those ten years.

Within those ten years, the Internet has graduated from something relatively few people made use of to a juggernaut which permeates everyday life. It's one of those things that, like other technologies, has become something people just assume you have or use nowadays, like past technologies like the car, TV, cable TV, cell phones, VCR, DVD Players, and of course, computers. People will give you URLs or e-mail addresses today and assume you know exactly what to do with them. If your reply is "I'm not on the Internet" (and you are under sixty) that person will look at you as if you just grew a second head, and possibly beat you to death with a a shovel. It's already obvious that broadband cable and DSL Internet access is already starting to approach that point, as people will happily point you toward gigabyte-size files you could never hope to download within your lifetime over a phone modem. The Internet showed so much potential for business and commercial applications ten years ago, which has largely been realized, along with spam accounting for 70 percent of all e-mail traffic and hackers trying to steal your personal and financial information.

The big thing on any new technology, and the Internet is no exception, is that we're developing a generation of youngsters who don't remember a time when it didn't exist. In some ways, we're already there. My problem is that, at least in the relative timeframe of the computer world, I'm officially on old fart, and I have old-fashioned expectations of the people I share the Internet with. I tend to expect people to treat other people like … people, instead of using the relative anonymity and un-reachability of the Internet to say or do things that would get them beaten if they said in a real public

area. I also tend to expect people not to feel justified about stealing intellectual property, like music or software. It's nothing new that things get stolen or copied, but now there's an attitude of "how dare those guys try to make money" or "everyone does it, so no one has the right to criticize me" about it. I'm not expecting the stealing to stop, but they should at least admit that wrong is wrong.

Of course, people believe a lot of things in odd ways, so I can't say too much. Some people think the moon landing was faked, the government intentionally flooded New Orleans, and Windows is a better operating system than anything else. Some people are just crazy, especially after spending a decade on the net.

…by Eric Schwartz
The AmiTech-Dayton Gazette, September 2006

Broadband Reality Check

On September 12th, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin testified in front of a Senate committee considering his re-nomination. He told the group that his top priority was the proliferation of broadband connectivity, and touted accomplishments made in that direction over the last year or two. But a new report from Free Press provides a reality check to the rosy rhetoric. Free Press research director Derek Turner says while it's true that broadband connectivity is growing, the quality of service is

actually getting worse.

> Derek Turner: "Most of that is driven by what we call so-called "DSL Lite" offerings, where they're half the speed of a normal DSL connection for about the same price. So while other countries are getting faster and faster, we're offering our consumers lower speeds."

In addition, the FCC uses a bogus methodology to determine just how much of the country is covered by broadband.

> Derek Turner: "If you're in a zip code and there's one customer there that subscribes to, let's say, a satellite connection, then that zip code is now counted as covered, and this allows the FCC to say that 99% of the country has access to broadband. And in fact, one out of every 10 consumers has access to no broadband, and that the average consumer, or the median consumer, has only access to two providers."

Martin also touted the growth of alternative broadband connections to DSL or cable modems, like broadband-over-power line technology, mobile phone, and other long-range wireless connections. However, the opposite is actually true.

> Derek Turner: "They peaked in about June of 2001, at having about one and a half percent of the market, were third-platform alternative connections. And they dropped drastically, to where now they only make up one-half of one percent of the entire market."

Turner believes the federal government should view the proliferation of broadband with a perspective similar to the undertaking of rural electrification more than 70 years ago. In addition, at least one current policy battle

AmigaMCCC News

October Calendar

October 16 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
      7:00 pm — Grand Prairie Public Library
      760 Bardin Road, Grand Prairie

October 16 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
      Approx. 9:15 pm — Location TBD

October 28 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

      Note change in location this month
      Check website for a map

will play a significant role in determining whether the U.S. will regain its standing as a well-wired nation or continue to slip behind other industrialized countries.

> Derek Turner: "We need to maintain net neutrality because it's been the key driver of Internet growth since its birth. And that we believe if you get rid of network neutrality, what you're going to work operators really don't have much incentive to roll out faster connections like you see in Japan and western Europe."

To read the new report on the state of broadband in America, visit www.freepress.net, and click on the box marked "Broadband Reality Check II."