

Who's your Daddy?

No, this is not about Anna Nicole Smith's five month old daughter, Dannielynn Hope. It's about the parentage of the "Internet" and the cachet of being it's "father." As noted in the article above Robert E. Kahn, (born December 23, 1938), along with Vinton G. Cerf, (born June 23, 1943), invented the TCP/IP protocol, the technology used to transmit information on the modern Internet. What seems odd is that one would be termed "the father of the Internet" while the other would be deemed "Google's man in Washington DC." (See Wikipedia.)

But then, others have placed a differing emphasis on the paternal monicker. As reported in the August 2006 issue of this newsletter, it was Cerf who was draped with the mantle of Daddy-dom. Also mentioned in that August piece, "Structuring the Internet," was "Dave Farber, often called the grandfather of the internet, [who] has been the most prominent critic." Well, maybe not so much.

On July 17th, the so-called "father" and "grandfather" of the Internet squared off in a debate over the principle of network neutrality. Vint Cerf — who developed the network protocols on which the Internet functions and is now Chief Internet Evangelist for Google — and Dave Farber — former FCC Chief Technologist and professor of Computer Science and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University — held forth in front of an audience at the Center for American Progress in

Washington, D.C.

In fact, both Cerf and Farber recognized a need for some sort of legal guarantee that phone and cable companies would not use their duopoly over broadband connectivity to restrict access to information online. And although the phone and cable companies that have used Farber as a foil to fight network neutrality don't like the idea of any government involvement in the issue, Farber does not agree.

Dave Farber: "The focus of this should not be, in my opinion, protecting companies against companies. It should be protecting the users against companies in general."

It should be reiterated that the "So called "Neutrality" legislation" is merely an attempt to reinstitute the ground rules upon which the Internet has operated all along, up to about a year ago. Perhaps not all "Engineers fear rash legislation would inhibit the ability of systems engineers to improve latency and jitter issues needed to move data at speed."

Doing away with network neutrality will also diminish the robustness of the Internet itself. Gary Bachula spoke at the hearing as a representative of a consortium of universities and corporations that are developing what's called "Internet2," the next generation of broadband connectivity, which offers speeds at least 100 times faster than current broadband connections. Bachula told Senators that data discrimination does nothing but complicate network design and increase the cost of network construction.

Gary Bachula: "All of our research and practical experience supported the conclusion that it was far more cost-effective to simply provide more bandwidth. With enough bandwidth there is no congestion."

Therefore, so long as adequate broadband capacity exists there is no need to abandon the principle of network neutrality. However, instead of providing that capacity, phone and cable companies would rather skimp on the growth and maintenance of their network infrastructures in order to squeeze every penny possible out of all network users. In other words, the corporate drive to abandon network neutrality stems primarily from claims that broadband bandwidth is in scarce supply.

Vinton Cerf argued that such a rationale is disingenuous. He should know: commonly called a "father of the Internet," now a vice president at Google, Cerf co-developed the core protocols that make Internet-based communication possible. And he says until there is true nationwide availability of broadband — something major phone companies in particular pledged to do several years ago — any claim that a viable bandwidth marketplace exists in the U.S. rings hollow.

Vinton Cerf: "According to the statistics from the FCC in 2004, only 53% of Americans had a choice at broadband access, either from cable companies or from the telcos with their DSL service. 28% have only one choice — either cable or DSL. And 19% don't have any choice at all: there is no broadband."

Those who represented the big phone

and cable companies at the hearing seemed to be on the defensive from the public backlash that has developed over the last month over this issue. Kyle McCormick, president of the United States Telecom Association — a trade group that lobbies in D.C. for the likes of AT&T, BellSouth and Verizon, among many others made what appeared to be a solemn and significant pledge.

Kyle McCormick: “Our commitment to you is this: We will not block, impair, or degrade content, applications, or services.”

This was from February of last year. There has been a rather tectonic shift since then. From my examination of the topic, I’ve come away with a few observations. Others may disagree with this analysis — that’s what makes for a lively debate — but here goes.

No business exists in a regulatory vacuum, nor do they want to exist in such an anarchy. That’s why they are lobbying so ferociously — to change the rules of the game to their advantage, not that of the public. Most of these companies were spawned from regulatory monopolies in the first place. They have already received billions of dollars in tax incentives and public investment for infrastructure which they pocketed and, while lobbying for more, the U.S. has fallen precipitously in world ranking of connect speeds. It appears to be easier to work to achieve a captive market than it is to do their real job.

Their quest to charge both consumers and content providers for the same traffic above and beyond connection fees is nothing more than a grand scheme of double dipping.

AmigaMCCC News

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P.O. Box 813

Bedford, Texas 76095

<http://www.amigamccc.org>

March Calendar

March 12 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 pm — Grand Prairie Public Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

March 12 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 9:15 pm — Location TBD

March 31 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

In the end, this is a contest over huge sums of money in which the combatants are out for blood. The ultimate question is how much is going to be shed and who’s going to pay with it. How the public protects itself in this clash of titans is ultimately a political decision. It doesn’t take much to see that the sidelines of history are littered with those who have been crushed. You can raise your voice or pay in silence.

by Kevin Hopkins
from the February Issue of the Status Register
CUCUG, Champaign, Illinois