THE EXPERT’S OPINION

An interview with
Max Robbins, Executive Director
International Internet Association

Interview by Beth Green
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Max Robbins is Executive Director of the International Internet Association (IIA). The IIA is a Washington, DC based private, non-profit organization that was formed in September 1993. The organization is funded entirely by private donations and corporate sponsorship. Mr. Robbins has been Executive Director of the IIA since its inception.

JGIM: What do you perceive as the most significant Internet development in the last 5 years?

Robbins: Hands down, commercialization and the use of the Internet by businesses that are interested in making a profit.

JGIM: In 1991 Internet access was extended to commercial users for the first time. What kinds of new services or technology has Internet introduced in order to attract and retain commercial users?

Robbins: Essentially, the Internet is used more as an enhancement or addition to an existing network of telephone lines and dedicated private lines for corporations wanting to communicate quickly and efficiently with others, perhaps other branch offices, and in essence avoid the costs of buying from general public switch telephone networks. The largest concern or concerns, in order, on the Internet are security, security, security, and security. The advent of some security tool, privacy enhanced mail for instance, will be a great benefit to most of the users who utilize Internet for E-mail.

JGIM: What precautions has Internet taken to protect user privacy?

Robbins: Internet does not take precautions for security measures. Instead, there are particular organizations that function within the Internet realm which have made significant moves to allow certain areas of it to be more secure. Most notable among those are the large commercial Internet providers, the PSIs and UltraNets for example, which are essentially the primary providers of access. These providers have implemented series of security procedures on their local hosts (local hosts being the machine that you access to guard as your gateway into Internet).

JGIM: What are the funding sources for Internet operations?

Robbins: Internet, capital I, is a collection of networks. Internet, lower case i, started as the military backbone and was originally paid for by the Department of Defense for the purpose of maintaining a communications infrastructure that would be resilient to attack or more resilient than the public communications channel in the event of military war. A substantial amount of funding was placed by Congress when it decided to include the federal supercomputing facilities in that network. When research became a priority in the 1960s and 1970s, money was given to the National Science Foundation, which became the defacto administrator of the network, and they ran the primary arteries of the Internet up until the late 1990s. Once the universities were tied into the network, each would pay to link its particular local area network, generally in the case of the Northeast — the Bitnet network, with the network linking many of the academic IBM mainframes.

The current model has essentially three, possibly four, methods of funding. The primary funding for the main arteries is from the National Science Foundation under the U.S. Department of Defense. There is funding by the public and private telephone networks, the MCIs, AT&Ts, and SprintS. There is a significant number of privately held networks by large corporations, i.e. Xerox and IBM. And there is now a terrific amount of funding that is coming from private individuals who are making investments, either channeling it through one of the large telecommunications companies or directly to a substrata of data service providers.

JGIM: What is your assessment of Internet’s usefulness to the business community in general?
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