

## Internet News

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### Internet Governance

Stephen Bell (no relation!), writing in Computerworld New Zealand, discusses a recent UN ICT forum on governance of the internet. In particular he quotes Vin Cerf, one of the 'fathers of the internet', who addressed the forum describing how the internet had developed openly and freely due to the openness of the technical rules and their voluntary adoption by designers. Unavoidably, as the internet developed it began to incorporate functions that had been subject to considerable regulation offline. Cerf's view is that governance should, "be thought of as the steps taken collectively to facilitate the spread, development and collective use of the internet". As an example, he says that e-commerce could be promoted by the adoption of procedures for the use of signatures, mechanisms to settle disputes in international electronic transactions and the treatment of international transaction taxes, together with protection of intellectual property.

Certainly, if there is no voluntary governance of the internet, there will be compulsory external government control.

### Internet Really Flies

After 3 years of testing, [!] SAS, the Swedish airline, seems to be going ahead with in-flight internet connection <http://www.internetnews.com/bus-news/article.php/568691>. Up until two weeks ago I would have thought that very unnecessary. Then my home computer crashed fatally and I have been without access until very recently. I can't believe how much I missed not being able to logon whenever I wanted. As an active member of an online motorcycle club, <http://www.bikersoracle.com/vfr>, I felt really cut-off. Maybe I won't be so hasty to judge others in future!

### Directgov

The Office of the e-Envoy announced a new electronic access point to government at the beginning of March this year. Directgov, <http://ukonline.direct.gov.uk/Homepage/fs/en>, is expected to develop into the first point of contact with government for the public, bringing all of the various government departments into one website. Initial impressions of the site are very good. The homepage is clean and ordered, and the 'citrus' colour scheme is very refreshing! It only took me seconds to navigate to information on driving licences for motorcyclists. Previously it took much longer trying to get through via the DVLA site.

If the site can retain its simple, uncluttered, interface it should be a valuable resource for many people. However, it will need to be promoted much more vigorously to potential users so that they automatically think of it when they need governmental information.

### Lifesaver

The internet is to be used to co-ordinate research and knowledge in order to assist governments and relief agencies cope with drought in Asia. The International Water Management Institute (IWMI), a non-profit making organisation, has launched a website, <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/droughtassessment/index.asp> created as a "meeting place" for scientists, managers and policy makers dealing with drought.

It is hoped that the website will bring together the people, data and knowledge that will help to alleviate the devastating effects of drought throughout Asia. There is an acknowledged pool of knowledge and experience in the area but it requires a co-ordinated effort to make the best use of these resources. The internet is seen as the ideal way of bringing this about.

## Intranets and Content Management

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I know that you should not judge a book by its cover, but the minute I look at the home page of an intranet I start to get a very strong impression of what may lie beneath. One intranet I came across recently had white type on a black background, and at quite a small font size at that. It was unreadable at almost any distance. All the other pages on the intranet used the same reversed-out appearance and all were equally unreadable. On asking why this had been adopted the answer given was that this was the format that had been used for the annual report a year or so back, and the Chairman liked it so much that he decided that it should be the basis for the intranet 'so that there was a strong brand identity'. Need I report that intranet usage was in terminal decline?

For a web site creating a strong brand identity is an important objective of the home page, because you are trying to get some instant 'stickiness' that will persuade a first-time visitor that this is a site worth visiting and remembering. Intranets are different, and yet the same. There should be a strong link with corporate objectives, but more in terms of organisational culture. When I see an intranet home page where the organisation is by department, and presupposes that users know which department is responsible for certain information it tells me a lot