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The Internet Revolution – Part 2

Over the next month, I plan to discuss the technologies and the historical context that led to the mass adoption of cloud computing. Last week, our exploration began in 1995. This week, in Part 2 of this series, we'll learn about how the technology changed, making the Internet revolution, and life as we now know it, possible.

The Internet was a clunky beast back in 1995. By today's standards, the dial-up connections were horribly unreliable and were slower than molasses. Anyone who had access to the Internet at the time no doubt recalls staring at a blank screen for minutes at a time while listening to the familiar, raucous sound of the dial-up modem attempting to connect to the network.

Connection speeds and data transfers via the Internet were painfully slow because today's technological groundwork for the information highway had not yet been laid. But since that time, Internet-based technologies have drastically changed our world. From 1995 until now, a number of important events occurred that made the Internet as we now know it possible. And, with these changes came the increased Internet and processing speeds that make cloud-based computing a feasible alternative.

However, it wasn't always this way. It was in 1995 that things began to change, in part because the commercial possibilities of the Web became apparent. As with many other phenomena, commercialization was one of the driving forces behind change — in this case, the reorganization of the Internet.

As Nicolas Carr notes in "The Big Switch: Rewiring the World from Edison to Google," 1995 was a turning point in this regard:

"At the end of 1993, less than 5 percent of sites were in the .com domain. ... [A]s the profit-making potential of the new medium became clear, businesses rushed in and commercial sites quickly came to dominate the network. By the end of 1995, half of all sites bore .com addresses, and by mid-1996 commercial sites represented nearly 70 percent of the total."

The next five years brought forth remarkable changes, due in large part to the forces behind the dot-com boom. In his groundbreaking work, "The World is Flat: A Brief History of the

Twenty-first Century," Thomas Friedman posits that the tipping point occurred sometime around 2000, when 10 "flattening" forces converged.

According to Friedman, the interaction of these 10 forces — the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of the PC, Netscape, work flow, outsourcing, offshoring, uploading, insourcing, supply chaining, in-forming (Internet search), and the Steroids (digital, mobile, personal and virtual) — resulted in a new world order, moving us from Globalization 2.0 to 3.0.

In his book, Friedman explains this how this transition occurred horizontally, rather than vertically :

"Globalization 2.0 was really the era of mainframe computing, which was very vertical — command-and-control oriented, with companies and their individual departments tending to be organized in vertical silos.

Globalization 3.0, which is built around the convergence of the ten flatteners, and particularly the combination of the PC, the microprocessor, the Internet and fiber optics, flipped the playing field from largely top-down to more side to side. And this naturally fostered and demanded new business practices, which were less about command and control and more about connecting and collaborating horizontally."

In other words, it's a whole new ball game now that we've now entered Globalization 3.0. The rapid convergence of the 10 flatteners has changed the way that we do business and there's no turning back. The activities that we engage in every day using the Internet would not be possible but for the widespread availability of broadband access.

Next week, we'll continue to explore the many forces and technological changes behind this seismic shift.

Nicole Black is of counsel to Fiandach & Fiandach in Rochester. She co-authors the ABA book Social Media for Lawyers: the Next Frontier, and co-authors Criminal Law in New York, a West-Thomson treatise, She is the founder of lawtechTalk.com and speaks regularly at conferences regarding the intersection of law and technology. She publishes four legal blogs and can be reached at nblack@nicoleblackesq.com.



By **NICOLE BLACK**

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