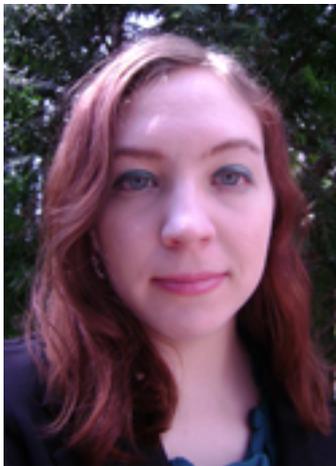


The web after 20 years: It's not so different

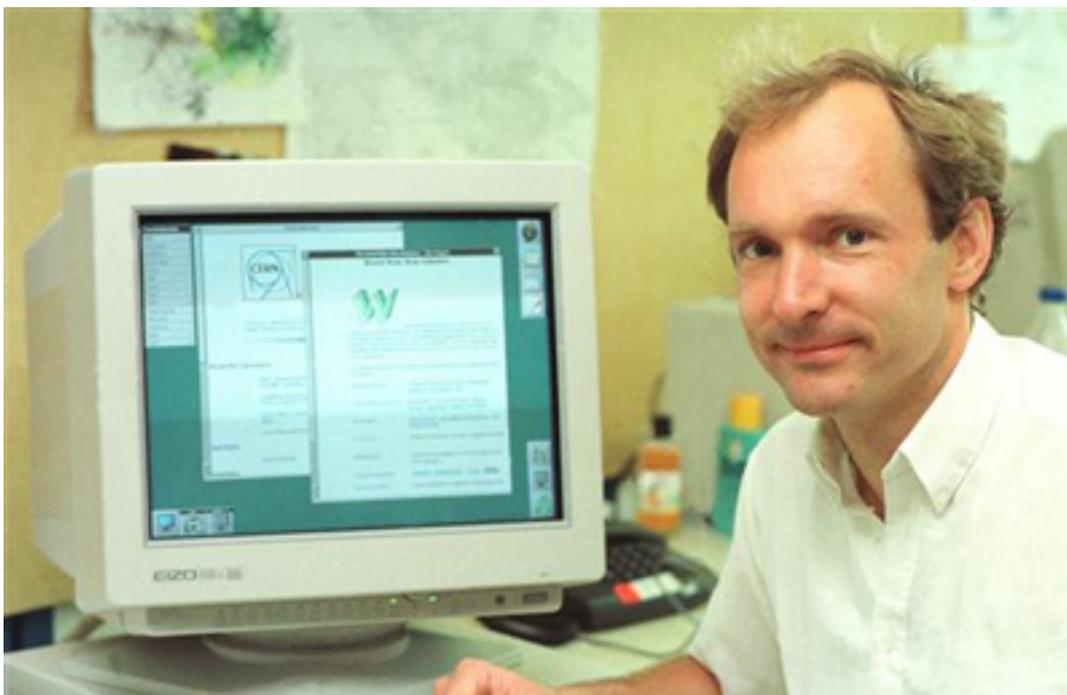
Stephanie Carmichael, Contributor



On April 30, the World Wide Web [turned 20](#) [1]. Oh, how the years pass us by.

When we think about how people use the Internet today, some of us cringe. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pervade every virtual inch, enticing thousands to waste countless hours of their lives watching videos of [cats falling asleep in glasses of orange juice](#) [2]. We can do so much with this technology, and so many of us squander it.

I guess that's why the company that developed it is trying to restore the very first URL. Those sites may not be what British scientist Tim Berners-Lee envisioned when his software went public in 1993, when he worked at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. But in a way, the web is exactly what it was designed to be — 630 million websites later.



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“In 1989, one of the main objectives of the WWW was to be a space for sharing information,” Berners-Lee wrote [on his blog](#) [3] in 2005. “It seemed evident that it should be a space in which anyone could be creative, to which anyone could contribute.”

He added that the existence of blogs and wikis “and the fact that they are so popular makes me feel I wasn't crazy to think people needed a creative space.” Berners-Lee was actually a [big proponent](#) [4] of blogs when others considered it a peril of the web.

Of course, Berners-Lee invented the space for information (the web), not the Internet itself, which is a network of computers and cables. That emerged decades before thanks to the efforts of computer scientists Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn, the “Fathers of the Internet”; in 1976, we got our first commercial e-mail service, Comet.

But the web has shaped the modern world in innumerable ways. It all began with one website that Berners-Lee made on his NeXT computer, a machine that Steve Job's old company built when he originally left Apple (before returning later). It acted as the first web server.

The [earliest web address](#) [5] simply redirected visitors to CERN's front page until about a week ago, when the agency used an archived copy to get it back up online. In 1993, [the page](#) [6] outlined the basics of the web and explained how to access documents and establish a server. Now, CERN wants to preserve and reinstate any assets it can recover.

The project stands as a little piece of history, but the evolution of the web is all around us. We don't need the equivalent of a virtual museum to understand it. It's how we connect with people; it's a dimension that's become half-reality, half-virtual in our daily lives. It's a part of everything.

That was the whole idea.

“There was a second part of the dream, too, dependent on the web being so generally used that it became a realistic mirror (or in fact the primary embodiment) of the ways in which we work and play and socialize,” wrote Berners-Lee [in 1998](#) [7]. “That was that once the state of our interactions was on line, we could then use computers to help us analyze it, make sense of what we are doing, where we individually fit in, and how we can better work together.”

I think we've accomplished that pretty well. That's the power of the web — even if people use it to look at funny pictures of cats.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/30/2014 - 12:50pm):

<http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2013/05/web-after-20-years-it%E2%80%99s-not-so-different>

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Links:

[1] <http://www.foxnews.com/tech/2013/04/30/happy-birthday-web-public-internet-turns-20-today/>

[2] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cna5GRnbVzU&feature=youtu.be>

[3] <http://dig.csail.mit.edu/breadcrumbs/node/38>

[4] <http://dig.csail.mit.edu/breadcrumbs/node/170>

[5] <http://info.cern.ch/>

[6] <http://info.cern.ch/hypertext/WWW/TheProject.html>

[7] <http://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/ShortHistory.html>