INTERNET 2000

the path to the Total Network

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with research assistance from

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For my wife, without whose patient support and encouragement this book would not have been written.

And to my son Erik, who reawakened my interest in the Internet.

Both are riches that stagger me with their value.

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Publisher's Preface

N etworking has a long and honourable history. Human beings have normally been gregarious and attached importance to interacting together; the gathering in the clearing in the forest, and the communication of danger via networks of beacons and bonfires on high ground, gave way to the formal moot or meetings — and eventually to the signal flags, the semaphore codes, the Morse key, the telex and telegraph, the fax machine, the telephone . . . The latter has probably been the biggest force for networking since time began; the ability to communicate directly from one's home or one's desktop with literally hundreds of millions of fellow humans constitutes a revolution of unparalleled dimensions and importance.

But as well as offering immense advantages, even the revolutionary telephone suffers from major drawbacks when it comes to networking. People often wish to communicate precise data, or large volumes of data; and the spoken word is not too apposite for such communication. Furthermore, people often wish to communicate with "anyone who is interested" or with "all my colleagues"; and the telephone is really only suitable for one-to-one communication rather than one-to-many.

The emergence of global data networks over the past twenty or so years promises to bring about one of the last great revolutions in human networking; the ability to communicate using any mixture of text, graphics, motion video or sound with any number of colleagues or like-minded individuals no matter where on this planet they happen to be; to be able to communicate one-to-one, or one-to-many; to be able to communicate interactively and in real-time. That is what the future holds. That is also what we can study in the present, in 1994 and 1995, as the Internet shows us the way the world of networking is going to be, the Internet shows us some of the problems we may meet, the Internet shows us some of the new opportunities that are going to become available.

This, to me, is the vital importance of Stephen Arnold's pace-setting new Briefing. The information future lies with networks and with networking; and the Internet which is here and now is a real, working model of a global network for the exchange and interchange of data and information. We can observe it working; we can note all the little frictions and disadvantages; we can note what can now be done better — or more cheaply, or more easily — than was done before. In other words, we have the very good fortune to be able to study the future in action just before it arrives.

HarryCollier

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