By Jack McCrude

Edutainment, or Building It and They Will Come—Although You May Wish They Had Not

For approximately the past four years, thousands of dedicated individuals from hundreds of colleges and universities around the world have been working hard to design, build, and operate Internet2 (I2). In this column, the term I2 implies the full range of advanced higher education networking activities—campus, regional, national, and international—not just specific infrastructure projects. Some heavy souls are now even working on Internet3. However, these investments do not receive universal support. Among other arguments, detractors claim there are few, if any, applications that need, or can effectively use, 12-feet. Indeed, the perception of a lack of applications led Blaise Zerega to label high-bandwidth networks “highways to nowhere.” In a recent Forbes magazine article, Zerega wrote, “Without killer apps, there is no reason to hop on the information highway, and it has nothing to do with the goals of both the university and the world do not have access to the information highway, and it has nothing to do with the goals of both the university and the world. We have built an advanced technical infrastructure and those we are planning. Once again we have forgotten that often the technology itself is the easy part.

The problem is that many potential travelers want to go to different destinations. And many others who want to go where the bridge leads are unable to connect to it. User policies need to be consistent with the new technologies we have delivered and those we are planning. Once again we have forgotten that often the technology itself is the easy part.

As a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I am familiar with the building of the famous “Bridge to Nowhere” the Fort Duquesne Bridge. Just a little ahead of its time in the 1960s, it is a splendid structure that had just one major planning problem. Although the bridge was completed on time, there was no space available on the north side of the Allegheny River to build the required connectors to the bridge to the interstate system. So this important part of the city’s infrastructure remained unused for several years, with the exception of the occasional late-night reveler who would drive off the end of the span.

We have built Internet2, and the users are beginning to come. Unlike the Fort Duquesne Bridge, it is certainly not a bridge to nowhere. The problem is that many potential travelers want to go to different destinations. And many others who want to go where the bridge leads are unable to connect to it. User policies need to be consistent with the new technologies we have delivered and those we are planning. Once again we have forgotten that often the technology itself is the easy part.

Notes

Jack McCrude is Associate Vice Chancellor for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer at the University of California, Berkeley. The contents of this article formed the basis for a presentation at the NWACC conference in Seattle on June 6, 2000.

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