

INFORMATION PIONEERS: EPISODE FIVE

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ARCHIVE FOOTAGE begins over:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

One and a half billion. That's the number of people who are now coming together in one place to learn, work and share their lives. It's a place we're all still building minute by minute.

In the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE

The inventor of this giant virtual playground was an English software engineer, Tim Berners-Lee, who - lucky for us - in the 1980s was suffering from a serious case of information over-load at work.

Based at CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research in Geneva, Berners-Lee was trying to coordinate a mass of different data formats, research papers and incompatible computer systems from contributors all over the globe.

Berners-Lee daydreamed of a different way of organising information - more useful, more intuitive, more...human. Could he use his computer at CERN to create a space where:

ANIMATION illustrates:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

-- Any piece of information could be linked to

-- Any other piece of information out in the world?

He realised that to do this he'd *also* have to link two ideas that had been knocking about quite separately for some time.

The first was Hypertext:

-- Which was a way of linking documents together, using one word to immediately take you to another useful document.

(MORE)

These hypertext documents were already commonly used on individual databases and CD-Roms.

The second idea, the Internet:

-- Was an internationally agreed method of allowing one computer system to send files, messages or data as packets of coded information to another connected computer.

Berners-Lee needed to mash these ideas together to create a network of global hypertext - allowing linked data or documents to be accessible to anyone connected to the Internet.

He called it the World Wide Web.

In the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE

Never mind the world - if anyone was going to get linked up at all Berners-Lee knew the system would need rules to make sure everyone was speaking the same language. So he wrote them...

ARCHIVE footage illustrates:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

-- Every single piece of information would have an address, like a postcode, where the computer could find and retrieve it (URL)

-- The computers would talk to each other through a set of recognisable protocols (HTTP)

-- And a common language would mean that any document could be converted into an understandable format for any other computer (HTML)

In the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE

And that was it!

No central mainframe. No giant bureaucracy, no corporate H.Q. No one would control the web. It wasn't a physical thing to be owned. It was a space for everyone. And nothing, therefore, would be off limits.

(MORE)

Those three rules Berners-Lee had devised were in fact only there to ensure everyone's contribution, from the grass-roots up, could exist - and be linked to - on an equal basis.

And passionately believing those contributions mustn't be at the mercy of financial barriers or hierarchies, Berners-Lee gave his idea over to everyone to use - for free.

ANIMATION and ARCHIVE FOOTAGE illustrates:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

And, after a cautious start, from the mid 90s, we all slowly went on Berners-Lee's web and started making connections. And more connections. And more connections.

As he hoped, gradually this enormous collaboration, like a giant international 'show-and-tell', built a new picture of our world. And each webpage, like a neuron in the human brain, could free associate with other pages

-- revealing surprising relationships we couldn't predict

-- creating ideas that were insightful, empowering and... strangely entertaining.

A small-time band becomes a global sensation. A President is swept into office. A government is brought into crisis.

The weather in Mexico City. The future in the Arctic. The will of the crowd. The blog of the one-off. Every photo under the sun. Every remote treasure within our grasp. Surprising lives. Virtual lives. News on demand. Talents on show. Shopping, confessing, dating, creating. And from space we can look down on it all. And find ourselves.

Back in the STUDIO:

ADVOCATE

The world got smaller. But also, surely, more awe-inspiring than we ever knew before.

(MORE)

Tim Berners-Lee is still out there right now [at www.w3.org], still passionate about his vision of ever more linked data, of a semantic web that will not only connect information but interpret it for us, and of a uniquely neutral space that must remain open to every single person.

Perhaps Berners-Lee made the most important connection in modern computing - by connecting people together for the future. Power is shifting, before our eyes, into the hands and laptops of people.

And the power of his daydream from the 1980s? Tim Berners-Lee has put the world at our fingertips. And we're hardly off the starting blocks.

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE over:

ADVOCATE (V.O.)

We're alive during a *genuine* revolution.

Who knows what's next for the web? Well, we do. Because its future is ours to keep creating.

So what are you waiting for?

END