

OPINION PACKAGES

Guest VIEW

No carrier Leave the information superhighway toll free

From the San-Diego Union-Tribune

Dial up the Internet at 7 p.m. on a week-night and there's a good chance you won't get through. Or sometimes you might be surfing the net and your connection will be cut off. A glitch in the system somewhere.

It's hard to tell whether the problem is with your Internet provider, like America On-Line, CompuServe or the thousands of small companies throughout the nation, or if it's the local phone company or the long-distance lines. But what's clear is that this new medium that can connect us to vast amounts of information and each other has serious capacity problems. And until they're solved, the Internet will never be a vital communication service.

And that's too bad, because the Internet's potential is huge. Ostensibly, any kind and any amount of data can be sent across it, and that means video telephone, television, fax, computer service, research and shopping — all from your PC.

But with inadequate infrastructure, the Internet can't live up to its promise.

The keepers of the Internet infrastructure — network service providers and phone companies — apparently have not yet figured out it's in their interest to build the best integrated system they can. Currently, they're leery of each other, seeing each other as competitors instead of collaborators.

That's understandable. Long-distance companies worry that Internet providers will steal their business with video communication.

But the truth is that there's enough business and profit for everybody, if they're savvy enough. The Internet pie is big and getting bigger.

Telephone service companies have been complaining that Internet users are tying up the lines, especially now that most providers have gone to flat rates instead of charging by the hour for on-line connections. Suggestions are surfacing that perhaps Internet use should be restricted by going back to charging by the amount of time on line. Bad idea.

Whatever the solution to the capacity problem, restricting Internet access should not be part of it. Providers should not be coaxed into going back to charging by the hour. Instead, the phone companies and long-distance services should view Internet users as their new wave of customers and find ways to accommodate them. And the providers themselves must build up their end of the communication infrastructure to accommodate all the new users and those who are staying on line longer because of the flat rates.

If the Internet is ever to become the communication medium of the future, it will be by moving forward, not backward. That means providers and phone companies must build the infrastructure to handle the volume of users. Internet users should not be looked upon as nuisances clogging up the phone lines. Instead, they're the customers of the future.

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Mehsling's VIEW



Mike
KLUCK

Volunteer shares holiday spirit

Editor's note: Due to a production error, Mike Kluck's column appeared incorrectly in Wednesday's edition. This is the correct version.

Over the years I have had the privilege to be a part of many different sporting events and contests.

At these events, I've also witnessed many courageous feats. To be on hand when a little 10-year-old scores his first basket, or be in Tempe, Ariz., and watch Tommie Frazier run through the Gator defense are things I'll always remember.

But no matter how much strength I've observed at any of these athletic contests, nothing will ever match the strength and courage I observed over my winter break.

During the break, I volunteered at the Mission Distribution Center here in Lincoln. I originally started by helping sort clothes and items that they had received over the holidays.

But after a couple of days, I started interviewing clients for food orders.

The interviews weren't that extensive — the candidates just had to tell me the basics about themselves: names, age, number of children living at home, etc.

But to sit there and watch people, complete strangers, muster up the strength and tell me why they weren't able to do the most basic thing in life — provide for their family — is the strongest feat I have or will ever witness.

These aren't people who are lazy, hooked on drugs or alcohol, or have some mental disability preventing them from working or providing for themselves.

They aren't the rejects of society, people you turn your backs on, or people you avoid by walking down the other side of the street.

They are people who have faced setbacks in their lives and need help getting back on the right track.

They are people who have wanted



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to make a change in their lives for the better and need a little aid to get back on their feet.

One man, call him Bill, injured his back while helping a friend. It happened before Christmas, and if he's lucky, he will be able to go back to work in February.

Since the accident didn't happen at work, he doesn't qualify for disability or time off. He is lucky because his job will still be waiting for him when he is healthy again. Unfortunately, that doesn't feed his three children right now.

“Sarah” had a difficult time sitting for her appointment — her 2-year-old son “Ryan” wouldn't let her.

There was no evidence the father had taken off when the child was 6

months old, leaving the mother with all the bills and no support. Her son was vibrant and full of energy.

Then there was “Emily.” Emily didn't want to talk, but her 5-year-old daughter “Jenny” enjoyed showing me how she could write her name and had fun playing with the things on my desk. Like Ryan, Emily didn't show any of the outward effects of living for many years with an abusive man.

Young and just out of high school when she got pregnant and married, but now on her own, Emily wants to raise enough money to move to Fremont — where family there can help her take care of her two daughters. Her plans are to work during the day and attend school at night.

But with a broken-down car, and not much work over the holidays, times are tough right now.

I sat and listened to their stories; praised them for trying to do the right thing in raising their children. And since the Mission is a Christian organization, I provided them with a pamphlet of Bible verses.

Then I agreed to get them a food basket.

Another organization puts the food baskets together based on the size of family, but most baskets contain the basics of pasta, toilet paper, canned goods, etc.

What impressed me even more was that although these families were struggling through a difficult time, they were still willing to make donations to help other families.

I helped carry the baskets to their cars (once I even delivered the box to a family's home personally because they didn't own a vehicle), and after about 10 or 20 thank-yous they would drive away.

And I would go back and listen to another story, thankful that I could help.

Kluck is a journalism graduate student and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

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