

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Listen up, Big Brother *Echelon may be more real than we know*

Hello, Echelon, we know you're listening.

And did you enjoy the International Jam Echelon Day we celebrated in October?

You see, we read some of the same periodicals you do.

Echelon — a previously half-mythical spy organization with the power to eavesdrop on every single phone call, fax or e-mail on the planet, just lost some of its mythical quality and became a little more solid.

The BBC came forward earlier this month with confirmation from the Australian Inspector General of Intelligence and Security, Bill Blick, admitting that that country's Defense Signals Directorate does form part of the Echelon network.

The United States and Britain are the chief beneficiaries of Echelon, those giant golf balls (called radomes) — examples of which dot the North Yorkshire Moors — that listen to satellites in orbit far above the earth.

The National Security Agency is implicated in using voice recognition software to scan telephone conversations for key words — words which can be construed to relate to America's security interests.

Phrases like "thermo-nuclear device" or even "stock split" might be chosen as red flags, and there has been a movement among computer "hacktivists" (long aware of Big Brother's listening ear) to play with the limitations of the technology and "jam" the system with messages containing words likely to be flagged.

This October 21st, an international effort to spam Echelon met with an as-yet unknown reaction, but we can tell you what to think of all this:

We don't need Echelon listening to us talk about our babies or investments. We can live without the snooping, thanks.

Besides being a breach of our right to privacy, Echelon represents micromanagement on the most grandiose scale: not even Uncle Sam needs to poke a finger in every pie.

Not to mention the bad manners involved; someone ought to have told the grown-up Miss Grundies of the NSA that reading other people's mail isn't polite.

But what, exactly can we do about it, except shame them — do we expect the constipated old boys of Echelon will heed our words of advice?

Not likely.

But we know they're listening.

“Someone ought to have told the grown-up Miss Grundies of the NSA that reading other people's mail isn't polite.”

Obermeyer's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Told You So

Jennifer Walker's column (11/5/99) listed the statistic that there have been half a million sexual assaults against women as a reference to the "status" of women in America.

Gerard Harbison (Letters, 11/8/99) countered with his own "Internet-based" obscene number of only 200,000 as he lashed out at the women's studies program for promoting a disregard for the "facts."

I checked the Justice Department figures as well and found that in 1992, there were 500,000 sexual assaults, and that in 1998, according to the survey in question, one woman in every 1,000 (age 12 and over) fell victim to sexual assault.

And here's the Lincoln Rape Crisis Center's information: for every one reported sexual assault, nine go unreported.

How many more women than the 100,000 Mr. Harbison "informs" us were really raped last year?

Perhaps if Mr. Harbison could spend more of his time in his department of expertise, chemistry, his contribution to "mankind" could become more significant than his contributions to the Daily Nebraskan.

Michael Knisely
continuing education

Window to the World

I am a Network/Customer Service Engineer in the wonderful world of computing.

The Microsoft verdict is very amusing. After reading the "Our View" section of the DN (Monday), I can't help but laugh at how wrong you are.

Microsoft has been the dominant operating system for the past 10 years. In fact, it is safe to say that about 75% of the machines running (both at home and work) are running some version of Windows.

This is a VERY significant number for the following reasons:

A: Windows is a GOOD operating system. Now several people will disagree with me, saying that Linux or MacOS is more powerful. However, most of these people are "computer nerds" like myself and can actually comprehend a more complex operating system.

But regardless of what anyone says, Windows is easily picked up by anyone.

B: Why would anyone want to switch? I mean, seriously!!! I work

with banks that employ little old ladies who are forced into learning Windows NT or Windows 95.

Do you really think that the elderly population (and if you think it's a small amount of users, you are drastically WRONG) wants to switch to something else?

Easy answer: NO. Whether we like it or not, Microsoft is a part of all of our lives, and to try to cast this away would be like asking Neal Obermeyer to make "politically correct" editorial cartoons.

C: Gigalapse. "Gigalapse" is a phrase coined by the inventor of Ethernet when he predicted an Internet downfall in 1996. It refers to a BILLION lost user hours because of machines or operating systems not working. Can anyone even BEGIN to imagine the time and effort that it takes to put together an operating system that will be supported by the rest of the computer world... and acknowledged by the public?

We're again talking about something that has taken Microsoft YEARS to perfect. Also take into consideration that companies that write software have been spending the past 10 years writing software exclusively for WINDOWS.

What makes you think that these companies are going to want to spend MILLIONS of dollars both training and implementing their software on another operating system?

If Microsoft were unable to continue its quest, we would have a lapse of time in which our software would become GROSSLY outdated compared to our hardware. This is unacceptable.

able in the computer world. Now, I hate Bill Gates just as much as the next guy or gal. However, I do accept that this devil has brought life to the computer industry that no one else was able to bring.

The United States needs to pull its head out of its ass and realize we're punishing the man who has made life easier for us all.

Marcus Graham
former UNL student professional techno-weenie



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