

The Past, Present, and Future Impact of Our Networks

Tom Wheeler

This is a dramatic way to publicize one's viewpoint. Hope others follow Wheeler's example
This is a short but lucid history of networking. It is a bit biased towards telephony, which is the FCC's charter. The problems associated with the Internet are different, and everything is now coming down to the Internet.

Why do I say that? Wireless technology is able to put the Internet just about everywhere. Ten years ago it was point-to-point microwave backhaul that made stringing wire unnecessary. Telecommunications, the Internet included, was able to penetrate the interior of Brazil, Nicaragua and elsewhere. In the last few years Wimax has made it possible to go the last mile without wire. An American has to be remote indeed to be out of reach of the Internet. Competition is not much of a factor. In almost every market, granting monopolies no longer makes much sense. Wheeler writes of freedoms which are present simply by the nature of the technology.

The major omission, not even discussed, is the most important: privacy. The Snowden affair has revealed that the Federal Government, of which Wheeler is part, has put its probes and tentacles into the middle of just about every communication on earth. This is already having widespread impact. I (in Ukraine) was approached a month ago to join a Switzerland-based Internet startup, the business plan of which amounted to not being in the US. Clients could be assured of data privacy. Yandex (Russia) is talking of doing the same. IBM reported a rotten quarter because a major client, China, is backing away. They don't want to be spied on.

Wheeler thus does a great job of discussing history, how we got to this point, and competition. He does not say a word about the most important issue of the day. Kindle allows an author to update a document whenever. This one could afford to be longer (it is maybe 25 pages as it stands, worth the price so long as it is free) and a chapter on privacy would be a very welcome addition.

Let me add in closing that Wheeler is a smart guy with a good writing style. A pleasure to read.