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TECHNOLOGY

CNN **HeadlineNews** **buzz FACTOR** HEADLINE NEWS

The Internet imagined: 'We are immigrants to the future'

By Christine Boese
 CNN Headline News
 Wednesday, January 26, 2005 Posted: 5:12 PM EST (2212 GMT)

(CNN) -- Is the Internet vulnerable to a terrorist attack?

Sixty-six percent of the 1,286 technology experts surveyed in a recent study said they believe at least one devastating attack will be launched against the Internet infrastructure or the U.S. power grid within the next 10 years.

More than half of these same experts also predicted that the Internet will be deeply integrated into our lives through both objects and physical environments, often with higher-speed connections (and more surveillance).

In November, I wrote about participating as an expert in a Pew Internet & American Life and Elon University study, "The Future of the Internet."

In it, a diverse group of technology experts and ordinary Net surfers offered their visions of what could happen with online technologies and society in the next 10 years.

The experts study is now complete, and investigators have published the results.

Because participants were solicited online and not randomly selected, the statistics are not considered applicable to larger social groups, but the response rate (and the prominence of the Internet experts who participated) give the study credibility.

Half of the experts were online before the advent of the graphical World Wide Web in 1993.

The experts predicted the *most* radical changes caused by the Internet will hit news organizations and publishing, citing blogs as a catalyst.

By contrast, most of them said religious institutions will experience the least radical



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changes because of the Internet.

Education is another area of significant agreement among the experts. Fifty-seven percent predict virtual classes will become more widespread, with students grouped by interest and skill in the future, rather than by age.

But in their comments many expressed frustration at how resistant educational institutions were to technological innovation in the past 10 years.

Fifty-six percent said telecommuting and home-schooling will expand, blurring boundaries between work and leisure, affecting family dynamics.

Fifty percent of the experts say they believe anonymous and free Internet file-sharing on peer-to-peer networks will be as common 10 years from now as it is today.

The experts didn't agree on everything. Half the respondents disagreed that people would use the Internet to support political biases and stop reading anything that disagreed with their views.

Also, half disagreed with a prediction that online voting would be secure and widespread by 2014.

As much as I enjoyed completing the survey, I also loved digging deeply into the extensive typed responses posted to the Web site, comparing my own responses to those of some of my "Internet heroes" and writers whose work I read avidly.

Some said what I expected: Howard Rheingold predicted flash mobs or "Smart Mobs" (the title of his book) will mobilize political action with cell phones and digital assistants, sooner in some countries than others.

David Weinberger said "hyperlinks will subvert hierarchy," a common theme on his blog and in his book, "Small Pieces Loosely Joined."

"We the Media" author Dan Gillmor said traditional kinds of "intermediaries" will be undermined, and new intermediaries will emerge.

But those who follow Gillmor's career know he believes this so strongly about journalism that he left his job at the San Jose Mercury News to commit himself to a grassroots project to envision new journalistic intermediaries.

Perhaps some of the anonymous predictions were bolder:

Soon being offline will not be an option. ... There will be huge demand for: security, wireless access and entertainment. Advertisers will continue to flee print and broadcast media, fracturing that market and forcing them into niches. When everything is available to everyone at the same time there will be no dominant killer-advertising channel.

Ethernet originator and 3Com founder Bob Metcalfe could still imagine wildly futuristic visions, predicting that people would stop moving to cities, the Internet would replace schools, and video blogs would replace television channels.

This experts survey was conducted from September to November 2004. Four thousand predictions made from 1990 to 1995 are already compiled in a database accessible at the same Web site.

The expert survey responses are being added to that database. The ongoing research project forms an amazing time capsule to look back on as Internet cybercultures evolve into the future.

As one anonymous respondent put it, "We are immigrants to the future. It's all in our children's hands now."

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