

RANDOM

William Blinn
COMMUNICATIONS

179 Caren Avenue
Worthington, Ohio 43085
614-785-9359
Fax 877-870-4892
www.Blinn.com

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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

The Internet, It Is A'Changing ...

Sometimes people miss things. More than a decade ago, on a Sunday night, I was in New York City, wandering around Midtown Manhattan and there was a distinct odor of burning wood. No sign of a fire. Just the smell. "What's burning?" I asked a cop. He told me that the problem was a fire in a subway switching station at 125th Street. That's the station in Harlem where Metro North trains make the first of two stops in Manhattan. The second is at Grand Central Terminal. A lot of people get off the Metro North trains at 125th Street and transfer to the subways. I expected a gigantic mess on Monday morning. Instead, it was a perceived mess. The news segments on WCBS and WINS suggested transit gridlock on the subways and trains, but the traffic reports noted 15-minute or shorter delays at 125th. The news and traffic people apparently didn't listen to each other because the reports continued like that all morning.

I thought of that during the Beijing Olympics. The news from Beijing wasn't that Mark Phelps won 8 gold medals or that the US maybe edged out China on the total number of medals or even the hundreds of personal tragedies and triumphs. The big news was that nothing happened.

The Chinese government was afraid. NBC was afraid. They thought that global interest would overwhelm their video servers. More than 100 million people around the globe accessed various online sites during the Olympics, even though there was a lot of complaining in the US that foreign sources were often blocked. Overall, everything worked as intended.

The estimated 1.3 billion worldwide Internet users were more than four times the number of potential users that tried to access Mark Cuban's broadcast.com "airing" of Victoria's Secret show a decade ago.

The media streamed more than 2200 hours of live competition in 25 sports and more than 112 video streams were often available at one time. In all, 336 streams could have been sent out simultaneously. The content was available to 77 countries, of which the United States was not one. Elsewhere on the planet, viewers didn't have to settle for NBC's version of the Olympics.

Actually, the Olympics gave the Communications Workers of America a great platform to promote the fact that when it comes to real-time download capacity to the

home (the last mile), the US sucks. We are 15th in terms of broadband to the home. Nations where the government governs are far ahead of the United States. We like to demonize government agencies and hand everything over to "free enterprise", so most of the industrialized nations have sprinted past the US and now deliver high-speed, low-cost Internet service to the home.

Examples? Sure: South Korea has been the gold standard for service for years. Four European Union (EU) countries have been deploying fiber faster than the US. Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands added more than 30 percent last year. Koreans increasingly are watching TV shows and other entertainment online rather than tuning in to their traditional media sources.

In Western Europe and the Pacific Basin, people are more inclined to watch their television and other entertainment over the Internet. Around 50 percent of the broadband users prefer the online convenience and experience. Users in the US are slowly finding that having choices in time and content is satisfying, but we're far behind the rest of the civilized world.

But as bad as the US Internet infrastructure is, it hasn't stopped folks from going online and watching video. Did you know that 8 hours worth of video is loaded onto YouTube every minute? Wow! But watch out for HD. TV shows around the globe are going high-def and HD uses at least 7 times the bandwidth of standard definition.

Once people discover they can enjoy their content when they want and where they want, the demand for entertainment options and quality will steadily increase.

The Free Lunch Isn't Free

Internet infrastructure isn't free. Maybe it's time for government to do what it's supposed to do: Regulate. The Internet gives firms the most direct, most personalized, most individualized means of talking directly to you about their products, services. They should pay for the privilege of trying to grab your attention, interest, and checkbook. But the way things are headed, we will pay for businesses to spam us.

Incidentally, my lead comments – the ones about the New York City subway fire – resulted in my doing a little extra research. When I tried to find the account in the archives of the New York Times, I couldn't. I found several

stories about fires in and around Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal, as well as a lot of stories about track fires, so subway fires are more common than I thought.

But I couldn't find an account of the one WINS and WCBS made sound like such a big deal. All I remember is that the fire occurred on a Sunday, that the weather was warm, and that it was between about 1985 and 1998. I traveled to New York City fairly often in those days. Many of the accounts I found were in the right period, but they occurred on Wednesdays or in February. **B**

Windows 7: 2010

I'm finding it increasingly hard to wait. Vista is pretty and I really like some of the features, but Vista turns even a fast computer into a bowl of half-frozen bacon grease. After more than a year of working with Vista, I would seriously consider ripping it off the machine and going back to XP if the process wouldn't take so long. So I'm already ready for Windows 7 even though Microsoft is still working on milestone releases. No sign yet of even an early release candidate.

But Microsoft is showing the current milestone version around. According to postmortems that have emerged from Microsoft, development of Vista was somewhat haphazard with communications problems between teams. This time around, Microsoft says it's gotten that part right.

Microsoft has spent a lot of money trying to retrofit improvements into Vista. For Windows 7, these improvements are the starting point. That alone should help immensely.

Despite its quirks, Vista has some user-interface features that I like. These will be retained and improved in Windows 7.

One feature of Vista that almost nobody likes is user access control, those annoying pop-ups that ask if you want to continue doing something. Most people think the only options are on or off. That's not true, but the settings aren't as granular as they should be. Windows 7, Microsoft says, will improve that part of the interface.

It's far too early to count on any specific features for Windows 7, but it's not too early to dream about a really workable operating system. For Microsoft, this could be the last chance to get it right. Vista's problems (real and perceived) have already chased some users away to Apple or Linux machines. **B**

Gimmie Your Money!

The creeps who want your money keep an eye on the news. They know which banks are in trouble and which banks have acquired failing banks. So they blast out spams telling you have you have only 48 hours to confirm your identity. After that, what are they going to do—confiscate your money? Needless to say, I received one of these bogus

messages and, needless to say, I didn't bite. But I did look around. What I found was a lot of bad news.

The message said:
WACHOVIA CORPORATION NOTICE.

Citigroup announced a buyout of Wachovia brokered by the FDIC moments ago. (1)

All Wachovia bank locations will be in the Citigroup merger to prevent failure of Wachovia.

The Citigroup/Wachovia would focus on upgrading banks' (2) security certificates.

All Wachovia customers must fill the forms and complete installation of new Citigroup Standard digital signatures during 48 hours. (3)

Please follow the installation steps below:
Read more here>> (link to nowhere good)

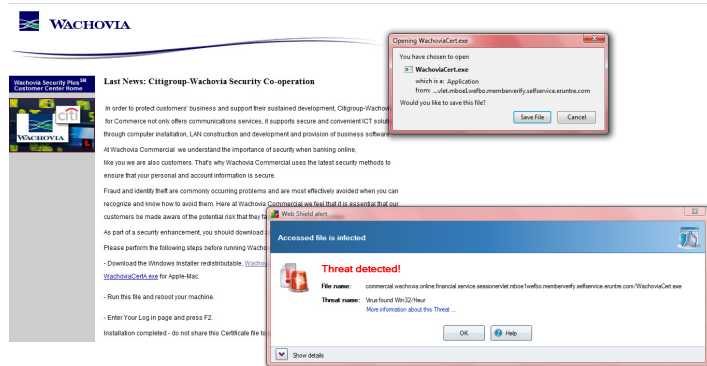
Sincerely, Jonas Womack.
2008 Wachovia Corporation.
All rights reserved.

The Giveaways are Obvious

(1) "Moments ago"? This is something a breathless reporter from the mainstream media might utter. It ain't banker talk.

(2) Wow! They got the apostrophe in the right place.

(3) Would any bank enforce a 48-hour deadline?



The link to nowhere good: <http://commercial.wachovia.online.financial.service.sessionervlet.mboe1wefbo.memberverify.selfservice.eruntre.com/support.htm?securitychallenge/servletdologin/OSL.htm?LOB=853661405&refer=rr8MmBoe1W>

The red part is the actual domain, which claims to be registered to someone who lives in Bo, Pennsylvania, but who also claims to have a Greensboro, North Carolina, phone number and Zip code. The link actually leads to a fraudster's site and attempts to run an executable file that will install malware on your computer.

Bottom line: Be careful out there! **B**

on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

General John J. Pershing is credited with saying, "A competent leader can get efficient service from poor troops while, on the contrary, an incapable leader can demoralize the best of troops."