Convergence In Communications And Technology Essay, Research Paper

The concept of a ?global village? or a united community around the world has only in these last few years become a concept widely thought of. However, it seems that the idea of a large-scale sharing of information has long been developing, whether intended or not.

The tools of communication have long served a single purpose, that of transmitting information from people to people. Direct communication was long ago realised with sign language and speech, but when people spread out, a kind indirect communication was needed. Thus we created (or rather, hired) the messenger. (Necessity is the mother of invention.) This evolved later into a postal service, connected around the world by a network of synchronised offices of a similar nature. For a long time, indirect communication was the only way to communicate over long distances. Once the telegraph came along, however, people were able to instantly communicate information over long distances. This evolved somewhat into the telephone, which spawned the radio and television. As these were developed, the efficiency and clarity of these transmissions improved, and this allowed the world to know what was happening anywhere else in the world at any given time.

At this same time, programmable computers were finally coming to be used. Information was input to these machines and stored on tapes that could be put onto different computers to be run. This paralleled postal mail in a form of indirect communication. However, computers were also already based in intercommunication, because computers are systems of smaller functioning devices connected to perform a function or process. The evolution of computers? communicating then evolved by extending direct connections between these large systems, sharing information. With the invention of the modem, computers could communicate piggybacking a system that people already used. As the modem developed, communications speeds increased.

The state of convergence began when people were communicating increased types of information through these computers. First program data, statistics, stock market quotes, news, specific interest information, and finally personal information. Computers became a method of communication within themselves.

The increased usage of modems for things like e-mail and on-line forums came about even before the Internet. Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) had a short-lived but popular life in the years leading up to the many commercial Internet providers we see today. As communication increased in popularity in this on-line form, companies became conscious of these opportunities and began to advertise on-line. This mark a point of acceleration, because once Corporate America finds an opportunity to turn a profit, then almost anything can become a growth industry. BBSs became more elaborate with colourful interfaces, developed their own client software for ease of use, and formed networks of several bulletin boards permanently connected to provide an increased realm of communication.

This concept of large interconnected networks brought recognition to the long established government networks such as ARPA-Net, and those used with universities and libraries to exchange information. When these were combined, they formed massive networks circling the globe, which provided for long distance communication between computers instantaneously. Commercial ?providers? spawned, giving access to this network to individuals from the comfort of their homes.

As the technology evolved, such as in the development of HTTP and HTML, the Internet became easy to use and appealed to people other than those highly experienced with computers. To simplify the experience even further, companies tried to cut out the computer in the equation, shaping technologies like E-mail capable cell phones and WebTV. Conversely, as people were able to use TVs for the internet, TV cable companies began to use their massive house-to-house networks of previously laid dedicated cable (which was higher in quality to the traditional telephone lines) to offer the internet on faster, dedicated lines, that conveniently did not tie up phone lines while in use. (This improving technology also allowed us the bandwidth to connect an ?Internet phone call? with someone any distance away, with excellent clarity and no long distance fees.)

Other combinations of computers and television are available in Cable TV tuner cards that allow users to watch TV programs on their computers, but computers can also use televisions now instead of the regular monitors. New High Definition TVs also offer high-resolution images comparable to those of a large computer monitor when supplied with a digital TV signal.

So where are all of these combinations of current and developing technologies leading to? Well, through trial and error, some of these will no doubt lose popularity or disappear due to redundancy. We are now given the choice to use our computer, connected through the internet via our TV cable outlet and displayed on our High-Definition TV, to watch a ?TV show? broadcast via the internet.

The ultimate point of convergence I envision for the future is a single fibre-optic cable in our homes (perhaps brought to us by ShawTel?) as a conduit to what we know now as the Internet. Fad appliances like WebTV will be eliminated due to their inadequateness and will be replaced by integrated systems within a household. They will provide for our entertainment needs with interactive broadcast programs, news reports of only the stories or areas we request, and communication via a video and audio connection to anyone, anywhere in the world.

This battle for supremacy over who will control the future of communication will be fought largely between the telecommunications companies and the Cable TV companies. Perhaps mergers will be sought, or some companies will be run out of business because of their inability to keep up. Millions of dollars will be lost and billions will be made, but the end product will create a closely-knit global community, able to communicate instantly regardless of language or location.