
ENGENDERING WORLD WIDE WEB RESISTANCE: AN INTERNET WORKSHOP FOR ACTIVISTS

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"Shot heard 'round the World"

Ever since subcommandante Marcos blasted an electronic communique from the Lacondon Jungle on New Years Day, 1994, electronic communications as embodied by email and the world wide web have become essential tools for radical activists. The Zapatista email messages, complete with their declaration of indigenous resistance against NAFTA and the context to their uprising, beat the Mexican government's PR spin to the major media outlets in North America, possibly saving them from complete annihilation at the hands of the Mexican military. Their resistance, coming so soon after the victory of pro-free trade forces in Ottawa, Washington DC, and Mexico City, helped reinvigorate a dejected labor movement, and created through sheer weight of historic experience and convergence with popular sentiment in the US and Canada, renewed links between disparate struggles against globalization. Eventually, the surging communication and collaboration between activists around the world, partially brought about by the internet revolution and globalization itself, would coalesce a new global justice movement. By the late 1990s, the movement itself would become strong enough to tackle the almighty pillars of the global economy, and in 1999, was able to shut down the World Trade Organization in a street victory of historic proportions.

"Internet Generation"

The internet, ironically a byproduct of decades of military research and public funding through grants to universities, was instrumental in the success of all these efforts, and a new generation of activists made full use of it in the organizing of direct actions. Radicals from North and South countries were able to communicate across the vast distances of culture, language, and even infrastructure, united in the common goal of opposing the instruments of corporate globalization.

Unfortunately, the anti-WTO actions and other protests against globalization reflected the limitations of this style of organizing. The internet has remained the purview of students, college educated professionals, and white collar workers. Although strides have been made to hook up every school and library to the internet, the growing divide between rich and poor remains reflected in differing levels of access, a phenomenon that even mainstream politicians have attempted to address.

However, despite the lower levels of access, a recent survey reported that disadvantaged minorities derived greater practical usage from the internet than their white counterparts, indicating a keen interest in applying such a tool to socioeconomic advancement. Further afield in the Global South, the internet has proven effective in applications as various as administering AIDS drugs on a mass scale cheaply, to reviving local economies through greater transparency in financial transactions, to providing access to information and thus circumventing repressive governmental censorship.

Internet Workshop Proposal

In the proposed workshop, we hope to introduce the many uses of the internet to new activists and friends who have either had little previous exposure to computers and electronic communications or who wish to be updated with the most recent tools available on the web. The workshop would serve the dual purpose of educating current activists and reaching out those less exposed to information technology. The outreach potential is tremendous, partly due to the fun and focused nature of the training that cannot be attained anywhere else without a price, and the centrality of internet communications in the current economic system. At a later stage, such workshops could play an integral role in building the communication infrastructure necessary for effective community organizing and political mobilization.

Below find the draft outline of the workshop. Computer laboratories can be booked at any convenient school or college where our activist network has connections. Optionally, an LCD projector and internet-ready laptop can be used to demonstrate each of the described tools.

1. Introduction

- Why communicate electronically?
- Necessary infrastructure (e.g., small office – computer, printer, scanner, digital camcorder, internet connection)

2. Email

- HTML or plain text?
- How to properly format text
- How to avoid an information glut

3. Managing Mailing Lists

- Setting guidelines ahead of time
- To moderate or not to moderate (e.g., free speech vs. common courtesy)
- Sending pertinent information
- Using online listservs (e.g., Topica, Yahoogroups)

4. WWW

- Design issues
- Maintenance issues
- Graphics and color schemes
- Navigation
- Most importantly, content

5. The Virtual Office

- Universal access from anywhere
- Setting up an intranet
- The works: calendaring, bulletin boards, online chat, file sharing
- Building an online community

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