



SWCP Portal

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What a long, strange trip it's been

Southwest Cyberport at 20

The Internet today is everywhere, so much a daily part of our lives that we forget how deeply it's penetrated. People access the Net not just on their laptops but on phones and tablets, anywhere and anytime, even while driving. Ordinary folks rely upon it for entertainment, to organize meetings, shop, pay bills, and keep in touch with news and friends around the world. Lonely hearts seek out companionship, while criminals try to game it for spectacular heists. Good students depend on the Net to learn and poor ones to cheat. Meanwhile, scientists continue to share vast amounts of experimental data over it, which is actually what the Internet was originally intended for.

How the Net is used and abused have become hot button international issues. For the Internet is changing everything about our world, and upon its future ours largely depends. But it wasn't always so.

Twenty years ago, things were very different. Back in 1994, the Internet was already 25 years old but still relatively unknown. Yet that was the year it really took off. **Email** had been around since the '70s; the World Wide Web was less than 5 years old. The Mosaic Web browser, a direct ancestor of Firefox, had been created the year before.

In '94, Netscape, in many ways the forerunner of Google, introduced **Navigator**, the first popular browser. **AOL** came on the scene and Bill Gates decided to incorporate Internet capabilities into **Microsoft** products. TV talk shows had discovered this mysterious and exciting new medium even if the hosts didn't yet understand how the @ sign worked. Amid the confusion, a new era was dawning.

In that June, **Southwest Cyberport** was born in the home of Mark Costlow and Jamii Corley. Both had been involved with computers for years – Jamii even had an original Apple Macintosh – and they could foresee that the Internet was the Next Coming Thing. First from a spare bedroom and then their den, they began providing access.

It was twenty years ago today...

What was it like back then, this brave new online world? By 1994, personal computers had already been around almost twenty years – one of the earliest, the **Altair 8800**, made right here in town in 1975, came in kit form with a row of switches for input and a row of lights for output.

All that changed after Apple introduced the first mass-market **graphical interface** and **mouse** in '83. In 1994, the first **PlayStations** and **Power Macs** appeared, the latter quickly becoming the preferred choice of artists. Its main rivals were **IBM PC clones** running **Windows 3.1**. **Floppy disks** holding less than 400Kb were the standard storage medium; **CD-ROMs** were just coming into use, flash drives still far in the future. Computers were big, slow, boxes; crude and under-powered, with ridiculously tiny memories, but had they achieved a now recognizable form.

The only way to get online from home was by **dial-up**. The computer would call up a **server**. A melodious exchange then followed as the machines sang to each other to determine how fast they could go. Connections were noisy and slow – the top theoretical connection was a fifth of the lowest broadband speed today – and dial-up did *not* permit phone conversations at the same time. Downloading a still photo took so long one could watch the picture build; the idea of streaming videos was absurd.

Before the Web, life online was dominated by **bulletin boards**. These were the precursors of Internet forums today; places where users could pick up or leave messages. The most popular way of getting to these was with a text-based menu-driven protocol called **Gopher**, still in use today by a few remaining die-hards. Only three years old then, Gopher had few esoteric commands, which made it more user-friendly than previous platforms.

But when the **World Wide Web** took off in 1994, its simplicity of use, colorful graphics, and hyperlinks completely eclipsed everything. Yet pages were just that: motionless and usually ugly. There were no moving GIFs, no interactivity, few ads, and no means to track users online. Even so, the Web was so dazzling that it grew exponentially.

SWCP was there to ride the wave. Timing could not have been better because in 1994, the previously research-only Internet was opened up to the world. Governments and

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commercial interests came online. People marveled that one could now order a pie from Pizza Hut online.

The first commercial search engine, **Yahoo**, was created that year, depending entirely on human cataloging (Google and its algorithms were still 3 years away). How far we've come is shown by the fact that Yahoo's first webpage listed a grand total of 31,897 webpages; less than the results of an average single search among the billions and billions of pages existing today.

Not all trends were good. In 1994, the first **spam** was sent out by a firm of lawyers, which seems fitting. The term was coined in response, inspired by a famous Monty Python sketch of a menu offering limitless portions. Before then, the online community had been largely academic and small enough to regulate themselves. "**Hacker**" still generally meant a computing student learning by playing with code, not a criminal mastermind intent on theft or worse. Yet six years earlier, the first malicious **worm** had struck; its creator was the first person ever jailed for a computer crime. For better and worse, the future had arrived.

The Wild, Wild Web

SWCP grew up along with the Internet. Mark recalls that the high-speed connection was installed at the house during O.J. Simpson's infamous slow-speed chase. But in September 1995, the business moved into a small office in the NE Heights and the first staff members were added – including Daniel Abraham, since gone on to achieve fame as a science fiction writer, as our Tech Support Director. The next year services were expanded to the Santa Fe-Los Alamos region, and our servers were upgraded.

By 1997, due to the need for more space and phone capacity, there was another move to our current location in Uptown, while the next year saw improved connection speeds. A big change began in 1999, when we partnered with various providers to bring **broadband** to our customers, including the phone company, now CenturyLink. During those years, we offered classes and expanded our facilities and our range of services. It was not always easy. On New Year's Eve 1999, worried about the **Y2K bug**, we stayed on-site all night just to make sure nothing went wrong. The next year, when a key DSL provider suddenly failed, we had to scramble over a weekend to find other alternatives for our members.

We began doing our own **DSL installations**, and started providing high-speed access to entire office and apartment complexes. In 2002, we began offering **SWCP DIRECT**, a point-to-point radio service in the metro area and Santa Fe, and in the last several years started providing **LightSpeed**, fiber-based access here in town.

There have been ups and downs along the way. In 2004, we merged with another local ISP, **Thunder Network Technologies**, and two years later with **New Mexico Internet Access**. In the meantime, we managed to survive both the Dot-Com Bubble and the Great Recession, emerging leaner and with better services for our clients.

This newsletter has been around for seven years, and last year we started publishing short fiction by local authors

through **SnackReads**. We also converted part of our office into **Ideas and Coffee**, a pleasant **co-working** space for entrepreneurs, business meetings, and seminars.

But we have not neglected the basics. We now have an **emergency generator** standing by in case of power outages and robust **multiple upstream connections** to keep everyone online. On the other end, we operate our own cloud-based automatic back-up system for clients, **SWCP BUS**. We have tailored our Web-publishing packages to better fit clients' needs and placed them in secure, efficient **webfarms**, and are strong supporters of the **WordPress** platform and **open-source software**. We're **IPv6** capable, and now offer networking services, computer repair, and even free annual computer cleaning for members.


The pace of development of the Internet is beyond dog years; the past 20 have seen greater technical progress than the previous 100. The next 20 promise to be even more amazing. And SWCP hopes to be there, continuing to provide an ever-widening range of **state-of-the-art Internet services** along with the **friendly, local tech support** we are known for. We certainly couldn't have done it without you and wouldn't want to. Thanks, New Mexico, for your ongoing trust. We hope to keep earning it every day.

Save it or Dump it With Southwest Cyberport's 20th Anniversary Goodies

As part of the celebration of our twentieth anniversary, we're offering double peace of mind for two months for free! How? With our Online BackUp Service, **SWCP BUS**.

Sign up before March 31 and receive 2 *free* months of easy, automatic, worry-free backups for either home computers (with 10gb) or for office servers (50gb). Avoid the dangers of losing your important data from computer crashes, theft, disaster and even accidental deletion. Backups are incremental and you choose which files and when.

Accessible anywhere through the cloud and needing just a browser for downloading, SWCP BUS makes transferring or sharing files and folders a breeze. And it supports encryption, so your data's safe, and always your own.

And to further celebrate, how about a little Spring cleaning? SWCP plans to host a **recycling day event**. This will give you a chance to get rid of those old broken and obsolete machines – even old TVs – here for a minimal fee. Details will be announced in a future issue. 



Southwest Cyberport

New Mexico's Expert Internet Service Provider since 1994

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