In America, if something is important, it is often mistaken for having an extraordinary economic value. The Internet is one of the most important communication and productivity tools since Gutenberg invented the printing press. It allows the democratization of information by providing it to everyone, everywhere, at the same time, at almost no cost. No one owns it and everyone can use it and add to it.

Many businesses exhaled with the dot com bust. It was as if they already had enough to worry about and now they did not have to include the Internet on that list. Most businesses had the equivalent of an electronic brochure and an e-mail link on their web sites, so they thought they had covered their bases.

The mistake of simply offering customers an electronic version of a company brochure is highlighted at Cluetrain.com . The site states that a powerful global conversation has begun. Through the Internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter—and getting smarter faster than most companies. Networked markets are beginning to self-organize faster than the companies that have traditionally served them. Markets are becoming better informed, smarter, and more demanding of qualities missing from most business organizations.

John Gilmore, one of the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) states, “The Internet interprets censorship as damage and routes around it.” Companies can no longer be in exclusive control of information relating to the application of their products and services. With hundreds of formats available for information exchange, consumers can access an unlimited amount of information on the products they are interested in and the companies that provide them, often at independent web sites. This information flow allows the balance of power, once controlled by the supply side, to shift to the demand side, creating tremendous benefit to end users and consumers.

According to Doc Searls and David Weinberger at the web site World of Ends, the true nature of the Internet isn’t hard to understand. In fact, they have reduced the Internet to a simple 10-item list:

1. The Internet isn’t complicated.

2. The Internet isn't a thing. It's an agreement.
3. The Internet is stupid.
4. Adding value to the Internet lowers its value.
5. All the Internet's value grows on its edges.
6. Money moves to the suburbs.
7. The end of the world? Nah, the world of ends.
8. The Internet's three virtues: No one owns it, everyone can use it, anyone can improve it.
9. If the Internet is so simple, why have so many been so boneheaded about it?

Visit World of Ends for No. 10 and more detailed explanations.

If you publish a web site, make it easy and make it informative. Provide visitors with a way of interacting with you and possibly with each other.

When Reliabilityweb.com was launched, we had no idea if maintenance and reliability professionals would respond positively. After all, everyone is busy and Internet access was severely restricted inside most maintenance departments.

Now, our online community has grown to more than 10,000 maintenance and reliability professionals from around the world. Most have joined the online reliability discussion e-mail forum that allows them "to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed" as envisioned by the folks at Cluetrain. You can be part of the information revolution that includes empowerment through information access and networking. All you need to do is to log onto your favorite maintenance web site today.

We are proud of our association with MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY magazine and for the incredible support they have provided as we make our own journey to reliability with you online at www.mt-online.com and www.reliabilityweb.com. **MT**

INTERNET TIP: ELIMINATE SPYWARE

Is there anything more inconvenient and aggravating than Spam? Recently we discovered something worse—spy-ware that installs itself on your computer without your knowledge. Spy-ware reports every web site you visit to an unknown advertiser who will pop up ads and send e-mails based on your surfing habits.

If you see new toolbars in your browser that you did not install, if your browser crashes, or if your browser start page has changed by itself, you probably have spy-ware.

Even if you do not see anything you may be infected, because more and more spy-ware is emerging that is silently tracking your surfing behavior to create a marketing profile of you that will be sold to advertising companies.

Antivirus applications do not cover spy-ware. But you can check for spy-ware and eliminate it by downloading a free copy of Spybot--Search & Destroy which will detect and remove different kinds of spy-ware from your computer.