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## **What Use Is The Internet?**

The internet is the world's largest, globally inter-linked network of computer systems. It allows users to transmit and receive data digitally, across the telephone network system. This concept of data transmission on a world-wide scale, has opened the doors to a vast range of possibilities for this data sharing capability.

Initially, the internet was developed under a government funded project called ARPANET (Advanced Research Project Agency), in late 1962, directed by members of MIT who saw great potential in the ability to transmit data across a global network system i.e. the telephone system. The intention was mainly to design a system that would enable the sharing of information on research and development on scientific and military aspects. In addition, it was to provide an alternative communication network, which could be re-directed across a number of alternative routes, in the event that a site was destroyed by nuclear attack.

Since the internet's first stages of development, today, it is still used as a data sharing agent. Whilst in the past, it was used primarily used by government specialist and large organizations, it can now be found in use, in the homes of more than 500 million households worldwide, according to estimated statistics at Telecom from a number of surveys in August 2001. This figure accounts for around 100% of the world population. The increasing number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) has allowed millions of remote country residents', access to the network, contributing to the 17% growth rate in internet usage. Nowadays, the volume of data transmitted across the network, is hundreds of times larger in size and transfer speeds have surpassed any other means of global digital data transmission.

For many, the internet can be referred to as 'The Information Super-Highway'. The millions of users connected to the internet can broadcast their data from their computer to the network, providing the user with a near limitless scope of fields of information and educational resources, such as current news, sports, inventions, discoveries and research material. The main problem with this is that some of it may not be very reliable and often specific topics may be difficult to find.

Along with the development of the internet, the number of possibilities of uses for it has increased tremendously. Besides simple text-based information, the foundation of the internet, a variety of audio and visual components is now available. These include pictures, graphics, movies and videos, sounds, interactive tools, colour-rich diagrams and charts, which help enhance the user's research and educational experience. A minor drawback of this is that these types of data tend to be very large and often slows the transmission speeds.

Perhaps one of the most popular uses of the internet is its global communication service. While this was the basis of the entire internet in 1962, applications such as, E-mail (Electronic Mail), Instant Messaging and chat-room services provide a more user-friendly interface, fast and reliable means of communication. The major problem of this communication method is the lack of confidentiality. However, it is still sufficient to

nearly completely eliminate the use of the conventional mail system for text-based communication.

For many, the internet is a source of entertainment. Many types of software in a wide range of interests, including music creation, animation and graphic design and other forms of Computer Aided Design (CAD) applications, music, movies, games and learning tools are also available to the user for download or real-time playing. However, downloading these files are to be taken with extreme caution, as some may be harmful to the computer system.

Recent developments in the internet, have taken effect which may revolutionize the way in which people engage in business transactions. Hundreds of people are turning to the internet for shopping, investing, selling and advertising. Online shopping sites allow the user to purchase goods from the comfort of their own home. They can view the details and price of the product before buying it and pay for them online. A survey done by British Telecom, estimated over \$1 trillion dollars (US) in online business transactions in the year 2002. People can now trade stocks on the New York Stock Exchange via online financial brokers. Online advertising is a business in itself as well. Many organizations will offer to pay popular sites to advertise their products on their web-site. A major concern of this aspect however, is that many people are reluctant to submit personal information. In fact, there is now much more misuse of information due to these online shopping sites. Customer's credit card numbers have reportedly been stolen and used without authorization. It is a very risky process and confidentiality is never always certain.

The internet can be seen as a remarkable development. However, just like all of man's creations, it is not perfect and has many serious drawbacks and disadvantages. Since its early stages of development, where uses of this data sharing capability was limited, as more people turn to the internet for its many uses, it is difficult to see what the future uses may be like.