

are the difficulties of any revolution.”

That revolution will probably continue to impact nearly every area of life. Take the problem of finding a job in a particular country. Greg Machler, owner of Enterprise Integration Corporation and an active Brigada participant, feels that one of the Internet's primary contributions to tentmaking is its ability to create new and innovative contracts and job opportunities—in and of itself! “In the area of tentmaking, the Internet enables access to research on all business subjects worldwide. This enables smaller groups of engineers and researchers to develop products or implement projects that were not even thinkable in the 70s and 80s. At that time only very large and fairly large corporations had the budgets and staff to own large repositories of scientific and research information which their staff alone could benefit from.” The impact of this factor is probably not yet fully realized. We need engineers and designers who are creative enough to spot global opportunities, then patch them together with the people who can live for Christ while meeting a real felt need. Pardon me for pointing out that Greg is right—that's a job that was made for the Internet.

### **Friendships**

Do these work relationships ever turn into Godly friendships? You bet! I can speak from personal experience on that. One of the “techs” who helped us launch Brigada in January '95 has become one of my best friends. I know that night or day, regardless of what time it might be in the morning, I could call Jonathan Marsden and ask him for the shirt off his back. (He'd find some way to send it to me in electronic packets, I'm

sure.) If you add up all the time we have spent with one another in “real” situations (that is, face-to-face), maybe the sum would not be more than a few short hours. But, we've learned to appreciate one another's gifts across the last 30 months even though most often we live on opposite ends of the country! Funny how I never had a “paper mail” pen pal before in my entire life. But sometimes, I will write Eric Derry, another on-line associate, and just say, “Good morning, “How's your day going?” And

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that's it. Because the Internet has provided a way to do that... cheaply, quickly, efficiently, and still carry meaning.

So will face-to-face communication disappear? Not likely. In seemingly every situation we are seeing, those who perhaps first met on the Internet are creating forums and opportunities that eventually result in face-to-face encounters. When I first met Jonathan face to face, I was quite surprised. He wasn't anything like I pictured him. But then, that's not surprising. The person we get to know on the Internet doesn't really have to “look” or “present him/herself” well. In a way, the Internet levels the playing field. You can email a famous researcher like Patrick Johnstone, author of *Operation World* and prob-

ably get an answer back overnight. Of course, your uncle will probably answer you in about the same number of hours—if he's already Internet savvy, that is.

However, if your uncle wants to talk to you while you are working in some lowland area of Bangladesh, he had better become Internet savvy, because in the future the Internet is probably the best way for him to stay in touch.

In this article we have briefly explored some of the security pitfalls, and merely scratched the surface of the potential and future of the Internet. But with millions and millions of users, and thousands and thousands of places to go, people to see, things to do, it is fitting that a brief article like this should remain only a “teaser” of the real thing. Like the Internet, we all share in the future of its applications—if we are willing to bring something to the table, there is a place on the Internet for all of us!

### **End Notes**

1. To receive a free subscription, just send email to <hub@xc.org> with these words in the text of the message: subscribe brigada.
2. For information about sending PGP encrypted mail go to: <http://www.ifi.uio.no/pgp/>
3. There is a discussion group in the Brigada family called Brigada-projects-security where ventures like those can be addressed. To join, just send email to <hub@xc.org> with only the words “subscribe brigada-project s-security” (without the quotes).

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MS in Missions from a website and am in the process of beginning that degree, as the formal training portion of my preparation. My contact, in the city that I will be going to, communicates with me via email. (We went to graduate school together and do some joint work, which will become my 'tentmaking' while I am over there). Finally, I anticipate that one of the early aspects of my work will be to establish email links between US and believers in the city—electronic prayer partners of sorts."

### **Job Assistance**

Many tentmakers are using the Internet for help in their job. In those arenas, there is absolutely no compromise whatsoever when it comes to international communication. For example, Brigada participant Dave Henry is putting together a mining operation in Mexico (which he hopes to use for God's glory in global missions). He wrote, "We were in serious need of an extractive metallurgist and I didn't know where to find one. They aren't on every street corner. I put an ad out on the Internet. Within a few days two qualified gentlemen emailed back to me their interest. One did his Ph.D. thesis at the university of London in precisely the kind of metal extraction that we are employing. He also is a Christian from a region of Africa where we are being offered a large mining concession. This week we are flying our prospective metallurgist out to our mine site and laboratory for the purpose of hiring him. It appears to be a beautiful fit from our interviews with him. We can make a lot of tents with this operation and by God's grace we will."

Do these issues imply that security concerns are ill-founded? Not at all. Thorough discussion of issues such as encryption, "tunneling," and using satellite telephones to generate

"vertical" connections to the Internet must continue.<sup>2</sup> But these are beyond the scope of this article.<sup>3</sup> Even more importantly, we reckon that someday all those issues will be a thing of the past. Just as printed mail was less secure in the old days (remember the Pony Express?), somewhere in the Internet's future is a solid form of communication that cannot be read by every Tom, Dick and Mohammed. In that day, security concerns will not disappear, but they will be minimized by technology and good practices.

### **Network of Support**

One of the key areas already mentioned above is preparation. Remember "Mike," the tentmaker headed to the Middle East? He is doing his grad degree on the Internet! Another user did his homework prior to departing and located many Christians in the area where he was going to live, not the least of which was his success at finding a local church to join immediately upon arrival! And remember Richard in Japan? He shared, "If I have a problem, personal, prayer need, administrative, etc., I can quickly contact others for help and get many people praying within hours if needed." On the surface of that comment is his assurance that people will pray for his needs. But there is something much deeper, if you stop to think about it.

In past years, when certain tentmakers took on individual contracts in remote countries, sometimes that meant isolation and certain despair, especially for those who longed for camaraderie with other like-minded souls. But the potential of the Internet is to unlock global networks of encouragement and support—and to do so in a timely, cost-efficient manner! Heinz Suter, a Swiss Brigada participant, wrote, "The Internet could become a great network, if it would be

linked with the different Christian business people around the world, where a potential tentmaker could search for professional cooperation, assistance and linking. Also vice versa: Christian businesses around the world could launch new ventures in the restricted-access world, and via the Internet, discover professional tentmakers who would fill the gap. Through the Internet they could 'find' each other (match making)."

Let's not forget the "significant others" back home. Church members, children, parents, friends, and in certain situations, even spouses can stay in touch with each other across oceans. One Brigada user in Singapore, PohLeng Yu, described an example of this when remembering a recent mobilization event on the other side of the world! "The greatest impact came during the 1996 Olympics. From the Internet I was able to find out on the latest update and read the testimonies on how God moves during the event. It was encouraging to read of the fervency and unity of the Christians." So the potential actually becomes broader than the tentmaker alone!

### **The Future**

So what lies in the future for those who want to use this tool? Well, for one thing, there will be more of it! And that volume of information will force us to be "smarter" about our Internet consumption. Ron Kernahan an active Internet contributor and Brigada participant, wrote, "The Information Revolution is taking its toll. While there is energy anew among many leaders, all are being bombarded with pressure to be yet more informed. Now there is a cry of 'information over-load'—too much input—so much it cripples output. Indecisiveness, lack of communication or inability to concentrate are but a few of the symptoms. But such

# The Internet: Tentmaker's Coffeeshop for the Nineties

*Years ago friends used to gather at coffeeshops to talk about struggles, interests, and discoveries. The practice has not changed, but the venue has. The Internet has become the most effective, efficient, and productive mission meeting grounds for the nineties into the 21st century.*

by Doug Lucas

**T**he Internet is proving to be the most effective, efficient, and productive meeting grounds for the nineties. I began to discover this personally around the beginning of 1995 when I was asked to lead a missions mobilization event in Lexington, KY for the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Focus groups had advised us to concentrate on building "action projects" that sought to adopt frontier people groups. The first problem I encountered was trying to get information about which groups were already being approached by church planting teams and which groups were seemingly left untouched.

## **Brigada Network**

I ended up proposing a network of email discussion groups on the Internet, grouped under the name Brigada. (Brigada is Spanish and Russian for "Brigade.") The idea was that we would form a kind of "bucket brigade" to hand ammo our pails of water to the next person in our line of frontier workers. I thought these discussions would be people-group focused, small, and relatively narrow in focus. What I didn't realize was the way in which the Internet would create a forum for previously unrelated people to come

together to share victories, trials, and discoveries. The first month the network took off and has not stopped growing since. Within a few short months, hundreds of people were involved, many of them tentmakers serving in all parts of the globe. Now, just over two years later, we are closing in on some 6000 participants. There are conferences on language learning, medical issues, urban realities, frontier missions, and dozens of people-specific conferences (with dozens more topics and information).<sup>1</sup>

## **Security Issues**

One of our early concerns in this project was the issue of security. We were hearing all kinds of horror stories about tentmakers and their fear of the Internet. Many were concerned that their lines were "bugged" and that in turn, their Internet activity would be measured and monitored carefully. But we were surprised by tentmakers' willingness to be involved.

First of all, many live in non-restrictive "friendly" lands. A Department of Ecological Engineering specialist tentmaking in a Japanese university wrote, "While I am fully

appreciative of the security problems of some tentmakers, Japan does not have such problems. Unfortunately some people do not understand this and are reluctant to release my address and other information to other tentmakers and potential tentmakers. I am trying to 'advertise' Japan because the door is wide open here to anyone who has the right qualifications to work here." (R. Brown, <brown@earth2.eco.tut.ac.jp>)

## **Preparation**

Just as important as the security issue, many tentmakers are relying heavily on the Internet during the preparation phase of their ministry. Even if their field position will not allow them to use it quite so heavily once they have reached their destination, that will not change their appreciation of its usefulness prior to departure. One Brigada participant—we will call him "Mike" because he would like to remain anonymous—is headed to a Middle Eastern city in the next few months. He wrote, "From your Brigada newsletter on the Internet, I first learned details of the Caleb project, AD2000, Joshua Project, the 10/40 Window, etc. I found out about Pacific Christian's distance learning