

The Real Internet Visionary



DID YOU HEAR THE ONE about the former, Democratic vice president who invented the Internet?

Accompanying this summer's *sturm und drang* over funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, there was a wealth of news coverage. No item was more interesting than the remarks made by President Lyndon Johnson on the day he signed into law the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

Two years before the Department of Defense began sending messages over what would evolve into the Internet, the president of the United States was envisioning the power of such a network to change lives and to enhance our way of life.

LBJ saw a "student in a small college tapping the resources of the greatest university in the hemisphere" and a "country doctor getting help from a distant laboratory or a teaching hospital." Likewise, he told how "a famous teacher could reach with ideas and inspirations into some far-off classroom." Seems like LBJ invented distance learning, too.

"Eventually, I think this electronic knowledge bank could be as valuable as the Federal Reserve Bank," he said, explaining the underlying principal of knowledge management.

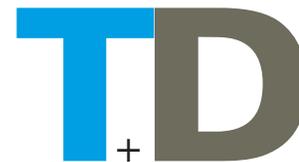
"A wild and visionary idea?" LBJ asked. "Not at all. Yesterday's strangest dreams are today's headlines and change is getting swifter every moment."

A president often criticized for making bold moves, Johnson knew that to turn his dream into reality would require action from the government. "I have already asked my advisers to begin to explore the possibility of a network for knowledge—and then to draw up a suggested blueprint for it," he promised in 1967.

Changes in technologies and the laws that affect them, both subtle and immense, are on the horizon. Nearly every one of those changes could have an impact on the delivery of, or access to, workplace learning. Reassignment of broadcast wavelengths, access to broadband services, peer-to-peer file sharing, wireless communication enhancements, digital television, RFID, and hundreds of other advancements and resulting regulations are about to land on you.

You owe it to yourself to keep abreast of technology and to speak up when the potential changes will keep you from doing your job to the best of your ability. LBJ envisioned a powerful tool for learning. You are responsible for keeping that tool sharp.

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