Enter the World Wide Web

Even as the Internet’s growth continued its upward spiral, it was still mysterious and difficult to understand. Only the most astute programmers (often called “computer geeks” or “techies”) knew how to navigate through the complicated maze in order to use its resources. For one thing, even though there were hundreds of thousands of host computers connected to the Internet, there was no way to search for them. If a user was lucky enough to run across an excellent source of information, there was no way to bookmark its location. In order to return to particular sites, people had to write down the numerical addresses and build their own lists. The computer mouse was still not a common accessory, so users could not simply “point and click.” Instead, they had to manually type in long strings of numbers (or commands) every time they wanted to gain access to a site. In addition, every computer that was connected to the Internet had its own unique password. So, along with compiling extensive lists of host sites, users also had to keep track of all the different passwords.

Even making a connection with another computer did not guarantee that files could be accessed because getting at the data was far from easy. After navigating through a complicated maze of technical-sounding terms, a user had to type in the commands in precisely the right order. If even one symbol were typed incorrectly—such as a semicolon instead of a period, or a number sign instead of an asterisk—the host computer would not respond. Finding information on the Internet was so tedious and difficult that many people grew frustrated very quickly.

A “Magical Doorway”

Tim Berners-Lee, a computer consultant with a research organization in Switzerland called CERN, believed there had to be a way of simplifying the Internet. Berners-Lee himself had a great deal of technical knowledge, but he was convinced that if the Internet was easier to use, its vast store of information would become more valuable than ever. He devised software that made the information on the Internet accessible to people across the globe. He named his creation the World Wide Web.