

W3C – Conference: Top stories and highlights

The World Wide Web Consortium, a network of technology organizations all around the globe which gathers specialists focused on the development of the Web, organizes a yearly conference – the W3C – to foster its task of defining the standards and raising the discussion about web-related themes. The W3C has a central role in the task of “leading the Web to its full potential” thanks to the renowned experts and representatives from the world-over who are involved with it.

The 2012 edition was held in Lyon and next year's conference will be in Rio de Janeiro – a great opportunity to demonstrate Brazil's commitment to the development of the web and its attempts at having a world-leading position in the field.

About Lyon



Lyon, France's second largest city is situated in the heart of Europe and stands at the point where the Rhône River meets the Saône River. This conurbation of a million inhabitants has a fascinating history that stretches to the Roman Empire. The city's old districts have been classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site since 1998. To the delight of the attendees, Lyon is also the 'gastronomic' capital of France! **Source:** <http://www2012.wwwconference.org/>

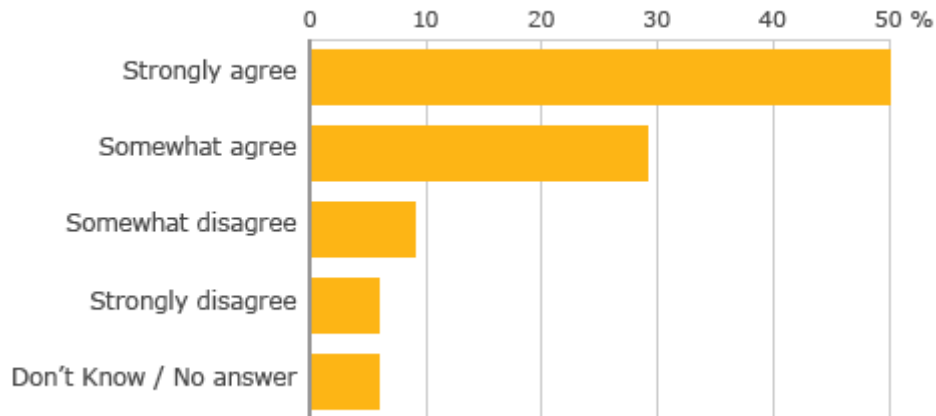
An essential question: *Is the Web a Human-right?*

The main theme put forth by the event centered around the question whether the web may be considered an essential human need and therefore a human-right or if, despite its clear importance today, it is not deserving of such a high status. This discussion has gained center stage recently with the notable role the web played in recent political movements starting in the Arab world in 2011 and then spreading elsewhere around the world.

To give a background to this discussion the event's organizers made the results of a recent survey available on its website as well an alternative perspectives on this issue given respected web expert Vint Cerf.

A summary of the findings of the survey conducted by the BBC World Service follows:

Should the internet be a fundamental right?



Source: GlobeScan/average of 26 countries, 2010

“Four in five adults (79%) regard internet access as their fundamental right, according to a new global poll conducted across 26 countries for BBC World Service. The poll of more than 27,000 adults conducted by GlobeScan found that 87 per cent of those who used the internet felt that internet access should be “the fundamental right of all people.”

More than seven in ten (71%) non-internet users also felt that they should have the right to access the web. (...) Most web users are very positive about the changes the internet has brought to their lives, with strong support for the information available, the greater freedom it brings and social networking. However there was caution about expressing opinions online and fraud.”

Source: goo.gl/tZAwR

Vint Cerf, one of the fathers of the web as well as one of Google's top consultants, has a different view. While he recognizes the importance of the web for political movements around the world today, he believes that the web is not *in itself* a human right. He argues instead that the web is an *enabler of rights*, therefore something that strengthens human rights and contributes to their protection. In an article for the *New York Times*, he uses an interesting example to illustrate his perspective on the issue:

“It is a mistake to place any particular technology in this exalted category, since over time we will end up valuing the wrong things. For example, at one time if you didn't have a horse it was hard to make a living. But the important right in that case was the right to make a living, not the right to a horse. Today, if I were granted a right to have a horse, I'm not sure where I would put it”

source: <http://goo.gl/2U9Ux>

Brazil is one of the countries where, according to the study, the internet is considered to be a fundamental right. **What is your opinion on this subject?** Do you believe the internet could have a role in social change here in Brazil? Which ways could be used to make it universal?

Keynote speaker

The Conference hosted a large number of discussion panels on different themes concerning the Web, from the most technical to the more user-friendly themes. These panels are an essential part of the event since they allow a trully global exchange of research findings and points of view on the webs current and future necessities. (All the papers presented are available on the conference's website. For a list of the papers that won the the “best paper award” follow this link → goo.gl/UJ0X9

The main event however were the lectures delivered by the Keynote speakers, renowned guests whose exceptional knowledge and involvement with web-related matters made for very interesting presentations. We are featuring one of them below, none other than the father of the web: Tim Berners-Lee.

Tim Berners-Lee



A graduate of Oxford University, Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, an Internet-based hypermedia initiative for global information sharing while at CERN, the European Particle Physics Laboratory, in 1989. He wrote the first web client and server in 1990. His specifications of URIs, HTTP and HTML were refined as Web technology spread.

He is a winner of many prizes and is Professor of Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and he is also a Professor in the Electronics and Computer Science Department at the University of Southampton, UK.

He is the Director of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and he is also a Director of the World Wide Web Foundation, launched in 2009 to fund and coordinate efforts to further the potential of the Web to benefit humanity.

Highlights of TBL's lecture

Tim Berners-Lee centered his lecture on the social side of the web. The web and all its aspects, he argued, is made *by* people *for* people. He gave a definitive *no* to the following question “**Internet: only a tool or more than that ?**”. He discussed the fact that a web link does not only have a technical aspect, but also a social one since it must be constructed by someone and used by someone else.

He disputed the commonplace notion that the web is the maximum example of a decentralized network, reminding the audience that the domain-name system is heavily centralized (something that NicBr employees know quite well!). He also expressed worries about the attempts to limit the potential of the web by introducing a number of barriers and limits to what users can do.

By doing this he referred to the need to keep the potential of the web as a “general purpose network” open to users and operators around the world. He made reference to Cory Doctorow similar debate on the question of “general purpose computing” (which can be accessed at → goo.gl/zc9yb) and sided with the Canadian author by reaffirming the need to keep the web open, to protect the privacy of its users and to strengthen standards and government oversight.

Government's role, according to TBL, is not only to monitor the web and protect users from ill-practices. It must itself open its data and be as transparent as possible, something to which there still remains a lot of resistance to.

To conclude he emphasized how access to someone's web usage and history can unlock virtually everything about such a person and that this can become very dangerous when used against public officials, politicians and high-level state and private actors. Therefore privacy remains a central issue and one that has to be a top priority on any discussion on the future of the web.