

The internet that took over the Internet

If you look deep enough, beneath mountains of attention hoarding, illusion photography, trending trends, you'll find the old Internet, the one with content, knowledge, individuality, but you need to look hard. Can it be saved?

There is a video out there, titled [The Fall of The Simpsons: How it Happened](#)^[1]. It starts by introducing a mediocre show that airs every night, called "The Simpsons", and compares it to a genius cartoon, that used to air in the early 90s, called "The Simpsons". *Watch the video, because it's good, and I'm about to use it's conclusion.*

It reckons that the tremendous difference is due to shrinking layers in jokes, and, more importantly, in the characters after season 7. I believe something similar happened online, which made the Internet become the internet.

Many moons ago, while still living in London, the pedal of our flatmate's sewing machine broke down, and I started digging for replacement parts for her. I stumbled upon a detailed website about ancient capacitors^[2]. It resembled other, gorgeous sources of knowledge: one of my all time favourite is [lefoo's site on historical Nikon equipment](#)^[3]. All decades old sites, containing specialist level knowledge on topics only used to be found in books in dusty corners of forgotten libraries.

There's an interesting article about how chronological ordering destroyed the original way of curating content^[4] during the early online era, and I think the article got many things right. Try to imagine a slow web: slow connection, slow updates, slow everything. Take away social networks - no Twitter, no Facebook. Forget news aggregators: no more Hacker News or Reddit, not even Technorati. Grab your laptop and put it down on a desk, preferably in a corner - you're not allowed to move it. Use the HTML version of [DuckDuckGo](#)^[5] to search, and navigate with links from one site to another. That's how it was like; surfing on the *information highway*, and if you really want to experience it, [UbuWeb](#)^[6] will allow you to do so.

Most of the content was hand crafted, arranged to be readable, not searchable; it was human first, not machine first. Nearly everything online had a lot of effort put into it, even if the result was eye-blowing red text on blue background^[7]; somebody worked

a lot on it. If you wanted it out there you learnt HTML, how to use FTP, how to link, how to format your page.

We used to have homepages. Homes on the Internet. *Not profiles, no; profile is something the authorities make about you in dossier.*

6 years ago Anil Dash released a video, "The web we lost"^[8] and lamented the web 2.0 - *I despise this phrase; a horrible buzzword everyone used to label anything with; if you put 'cloud' and 'blockchain' together, you'll get the level of buzz that was 'web 2.0' -*, that fall short to social media, but make no mistake: the Internet, the carefully laboured web 1.0, had already went underground when tools made it simple for anyone to publish with just a few clicks.

The social web lost against social media, because it didn't (couldn't?) keep up with making things even simpler. Always on, always instant, always present. It served the purpose of a disposable web perfectly, where the most common goal is to seek fame, attention, to follow trends, to gain followers.

There are people who never gave up, and are still tirelessly building tools, protocols, ideas, to lead people out of social media. The IndieWeb^[9]'s goals are simple: own your data, have an online home, and connect with others through this. And so it's completely reasonable to hear:

| I want blogging to be as easy as tweeting.^[10]

But... what will this really achieve? This may sound rude and elitist, but the more I think about it the more I believe: the true way out of the swamp of social media is for things to require a little effort.

To make people think about what they produce, to make them connect to their online content. It's like IKEA^[11]: once you put time, and a minor amount of sweat - or swearing - into it, it'll feel more yours, than something comfortably delivered.

The Internet is still present, but it's shrinking. Content people really care about, customised looking homepages, carefully curated photo galleries are all diminishing. It would be fantastic to return to a world of personal websites, but that needs the love and work that used to be put into them, just like 20 years ago.

At this point in time, most people don't seem to relate to their online content. It's expendable. We need to make them care about it, and simpler tooling, on it's own, will not help with the lack of emotional connection.

Links

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqFNbCcyFkk>
2. http://www.vintage-radio.com/repair-restore-information/valve_capacitors.html
3. <http://www.mir.com.my/rb/photography/>
4. <https://stackingthebricks.com/how-blogs-broke-the-web/>
5. <https://duckduckgo.com/html/>
6. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2016/12/ubuwweb_the_20_year_old_website_that_collects_the_forgotten_and_the_unfamiliar.html
7. <http://code.divshot.com/geo-bootstrap/>
8. <http://anildash.com/2012/12/the-web-we-lost.html>
9. <https://indieweb.org>
10. <http://www.manton.org/2018/03/indieweb-generation-4-and-hosted-domains.html>
11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IKEA_effect

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