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# Web Services

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## perspectives

John Perry Barlow ,  
Electronic Freedom Foundation

by Bill Kerig

Although *Yahoo! Internet Life Magazine* called John Perry Barlow “the Thomas Jefferson of Cyberspace,” you won’t find him in French cuffs. No half-glasses perched precariously at the tip of the nose. Attired from cowboy boots to crown in black—noir bandana knotted at the neck—Barlow looks more Johnny Cash than Founding Father. Yet, although the western wear tells a tale of his Wyoming cattle ranching days, that’s not the full measure of the man.

There’s also the tie-dyed Barlow.

A lyricist for the Grateful Dead from 1971 until 1995, he wrote “Hell in a Bucket”, “I Need a Miracle”, and “Mexicali Blues” and dozens more. Although he now writes songs for the String Cheese Incident, a band that he calls Grateful Dead 2.0, you find that there’s as much policy as poetry in his soul.

In 1990 he and Lotus founder Mitchell Kapor founded the Electronic Frontier Foundation to promote freedom of expression in digital media. In addition to Barlow’s role as vice chairman of the EFF, he is also a Fellow at Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, and a Fellow at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.

He has been on the masthead of *Wired Magazine* since it was founded and his piece on the future of copyright, “The Economy of Ideas,” is now taught in many law schools. His manifesto, “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,” has been widely distributed on the Net and can be found on more than 20,000 sites.

A speaker, writer, and consultant, Barlow is a guy who’s hard to pin down. He has been called an expert on: information economics, digitized intellectual goods, cyber liberties, virtual community, electronic cash, cryptography policy, privacy, and the social, cultural, and legal conditions in Cyberspace.

The signature on his emails reads “John Perry Barlow, Cognitive Dissident,” a vagary that comes as close to pinning him down as anything. The truth is, he’s a dynamically changing process ill definable in time and space. You never know where or who you’re going to find when you go looking for Barlow. A peripatetic shadow in black, he moves nearly friction free on a global plane. He alights briefly at his homes in Wyoming, New York’s Chinatown, San Francisco and Salt Lake City. *Digital iQ* found him in transit and asked his thoughts on Web services and the future of the Internet.

**Wasatch Digital iQ:** How big a deal are Web services?

**John Perry Barlow:** They could become a very big deal. You want to have commerce happen in a way that’s invisible to the customer and Web services promises to do that.

There’s also the ability to use processors in a distributed fashion. If you’ve really got Web services, you’ve got all the processors on the Net available; you can harness the equivalent of a super-processor. You can also find software that you don’t necessarily have and be able to operate it remotely. This needs to be done in a way that doesn’t involve a lot of heavy lifting or getting Unix all over you. Then there’s the matter

of peer-to-peer which is a wonderful thing. Web services can finally deliver on the dream of the Internet, which is to have every machine connected to every machine with a completely flat architecture in a symmetrical and democratic environment.

**DiQ:** So are Web services really coming to a computer near you?

**JPB:** In Web services, we're in the same condition we were in when there was the battle between Novell and TCIP. People trying to network systems together wanted something that was interoperable. They needed something that they could tweak and put together with the other systems that they were buying. Novell didn't take TCIP seriously for a long time. When it finally did, there was so much inertia and bureaucratic momentum with pre-existing contracts that it made it difficult for them to switch gears.

wasn't on the Microsoft payroll. I hate to sound grandiose, but what it really comes down to is Microsoft versus the world.

**DiQ:** Which is a battle that no single company can win.

**JPB:** Don't be too sure. Microsoft is powerful enough in the marketplace. It's not a positive thing. I didn't like totalitarianism when it was public-spirited; I really don't like it when it's private and only designed to protect someone's financial status.

**DiQ:** So there's nothing democratic about Microsoft.NET?

**JPB:** No. It's a highly centralized system of control and planning. It's a Soviet existence. People in the communist world used to have their affairs controlled by people they couldn't influence.

Now we're moving toward a world where nobody can influence the people who define the architecture of the Internet. Architecture is

If the Web is going to live up to its promise, it's got to be possible for a kid in Norway to get on his computer and change the world, not just for a kid in Redmond to do that.

**DiQ:** So the proprietary system model wasn't working?

**JPB:** Unless you've got enormous clout in the marketplace, you're not going to be able to prevail with proprietary systems. Microsoft is a special case, but the people at Novell thought it was a special case too, and they had a good argument. Their protocols were faster and more efficient, but they were not ubiquitous.

**DiQ:** So today the battle over Network services is XML verses Microsoft?

**JPB:** Not really. Microsoft is adopting, embracing, and altering; they have their own flavor of XML. Microsoft has a habit of grabbing things like SOAP and coming up with extensions in the name of efficiency. Then they make new systems that are closed. Dave Weiner, one of the architects of SOAP, negotiated with Microsoft and thought they were strangely cooperative. Then he realized that they were only cooperative up to a point and their plan was not going to benefit anyone who

politics and if you can't change it yourself, or effect change, you're part of the proletariat. You're a serf. In many ways, Windows is the new chains of the working class. People use Microsoft because they don't have any choice, and I'm a big fan of choice.

**DiQ:** But choice wins out in the end.

**JPB:** Over the long run, human beings will choose an open uncertainty over a closed certainty, but it took 70 years to affect that change in the Soviet Union.

**DiQ:** What if we all just switched and Microsoft.NET was the only infrastructure out there?

**JPB:** If everybody in the world were using .NET and using Windows and swallowing the privacy considerations involved in using Passport, it would make things easier for a while. I admit that. But the problem is it would freeze technology around a standard that's behind closed doors. Over the longer haul that would be devastating for the development of technology.

As soon as DOS became the ubiquitous operating system, things ground to a halt. If someone had told me in 1985 that we'd still be looking at blinking cursors, I'd have told them that was ridiculous.

Microsoft was extremely effective in stopping development. I hold Microsoft responsible for the fact that almost everybody hates their computer. I don't know anybody who hates their Linux machine.

**DiQ:** The open-source business model is similar the story of the rise of the Grateful Dead. You were a band that allowed people to tape record concerts and distribute tapes as much as they liked.

**JPB:** Yeah. The Grateful Dead produced open-source music. We inadvertently invented viral marketing. We let anyone and everyone tape our music and created a huge audience that came to us for the services that had to be provided in real time: our concerts. The commercially produced material was hugely successful too. People bought and still buy our records and CDs.

**DiQ:** Was there ever a conscious decision made to go to open-source, to allow bootlegging?

**JPB:** We weren't making much money at the time, and we just felt that it would be mean to Deadheads to kick them out for bringing in tape recorders. We assumed that decision would cost us money. That seemed obvious.

**DiQ:** And it didn't.

**JPB:** Not at all. It was a happy accident. We would have never believed how much money was generated. Open-source is like having a common grazing pasture where the more animals you put out there, the taller the grass gets. The more people use open-source, the more people want to use it.

**DiQ:** And after your Dead days, you and Mitch Kapor became Founding Fathers of the Internet.

**JPB:** From the Well on up, I've watched the incredible explosion of open-source software over the last 20 years. Now we're at such a critical junction.

**DiQ:** So the future of the Internet really hinges on the battle between open-source and .NET.

**JPB:** Yes. When it comes to corporate systems, the install base is formidable. Microsoft has embedded .NET and all of its related standards into the O/S and also all of their enterprise systems. They've done it in a way that makes it very hard for customer to get by without it. If you're in IT at a company you'll never get fired for buying Microsoft.

**DiQ:** You're also one of the founders of the Electronic Freedom Foundation. What are you at the EFF doing to counter this?

**JPB:** The EFF wants the Internet to be open. We want any kind of information to be able to be transported across the Internet without obstacles. We're in favor of free speech and also free bits.

The primary thing we're doing is fighting copyright battles all across the board. We're trying to keep copyright law from unfairly suppressing development in the marketplace. Right now, our big push is to prevent the Hollings Bill, which would require virtual black boxes to be implanted in hardware as a matter of law. This would stifle technological development and give unfair advantage to the entertainment industry and companies like Microsoft.

**DiQ:** So any proprietary systems stifle development?

**JPB:** Of course. The possibility of tweaking and perfecting and extending does not exist with proprietary systems. They're brittle and not open to manipulation by engineers. Nobody can disassemble Windows and change it to make it work better for their system. With open source, you can change anything if you're talented enough, and that's better for the consumer because you end up with better products.

That's why IBM has decided to support open-source. They want to enable their customers to alter their software so that it works better for them. This favors creative and imaginative people. It favors ambition.

**DiQ:** Overall, how's that battle going?

**JPB:** I think we're faring pretty well, except that there's another standard being developed that's tougher to fight. That's the standard for digital TV broadcasting. It's the same type of regulation that favors closed systems, and it's going to be required by the FCC and probably passed. Once it's in place it's easy to use that standard for any digital information.

**DiQ:** Does the public know this fight is going on?

**JPB:** That's a problem. All of this is extremely low profile stuff. We feel like a small voice in a big wind.

**DiQ:** So Web services are not a done deal—the question of Microsoft versus the rest of the computing world still needs to play out?

**JPB:** Yes, and they may prevail. I sure hope they don't. The world will be a better place—in more ways than I can enumerate—if people reject Microsoft. If the Web is going to live up to its promise, it's got to be possible for a kid in Norway to get on his computer and change the world, not just for a kid in Redmond to do that. ☐