

► Opinion

The banner features the 7D NEWS OPINION logo on the left. On the right, there is a portrait of Tony Broadbent, an older man with white hair, wearing a dark suit and a light-colored shirt. Below the portrait is a blue box with white text: "Tony Broadbent" followed by "Award-winning author, writer, speaker, brand-strategist, and Beatles expert." At the bottom of the banner, the title "The World Wide Web at 30-Plus : And Who's Counting?" is displayed in white text, with a small orange navigation icon (left and right arrows) to its right. The background is a light blue globe with white grid lines.

The World Wide Web At 30-Plus. And Who's Counting?

Media & Culture | Tony Broadbent | 19 Mar, 2019

When Sir Tim Berners-Lee announced a major birthday milestone on Monday 11th March, it struck me that he didn't send a card through the mail inviting people to celebrate it, or simply turn to the Web, or rely on Facebook's bots to in-box those friends linked to him on the social networking website, to remind them to let him know they were thinking of him. Instead, the inventor of the web and the World Wide Web Foundation, he also founded, took out a full-page advertisement in a British national newspaper that prints editions all around the world: the Financial Times, to be exact. And very striking the ad was, too. You probably saw it. But if you didn't, let me quickly count the ways:

Front section of the newspaper; right side, premium positioning, 'recto' to those in the trade, guaranteed-to-be-seen. Which was also, no doubt, why the ad was so very simple, in design. With no tricky 'clickbait' headline or quirky number of reasons to try and hook you in.

Just three words in a sans-serif type font; each word ranged left and stacked one atop the other; white letters out of solid black background; first letter of each word capitalised; thick horizontal red line strikethrough, cancelling out the first two words to give: **World Wide Web**.

The eye immediately looking for context; duly delivered in the simple, but much smaller type-size sub-head below the fold: 'The web turns 30 today, but it's still not world wide.' Below which was a brief paragraph suggesting it was high time to give a damn. That all led to the all but mandatory web address at the foot of the page. Directly opposite, bottom right: logos for the World Wide Web Foundation and its new initiative: 'For The Web'.

Type the web address: <https://fortheweb.webfoundation.org> into your search engine of choice et voila Tim Berners-Lee's 'Open Letter' to the world at large is on your mobile, your tablet, or desktop. With attendant hash-tags: #Web30 and #ForThe Web.

All very simple and all very nicely done and all of it designed to suit the medium so you couldn't help but get the message: 'The Father of the World Wide Web Says It Needs Major Fixing on Its 30th Birthday.'

Only, afterwards, did Sir Tim take to Twitter with a nicely posed, very poised near 'selfie' of himself reading his own full-page ad in the FT, early the same day it was published in London. Printed on presses in Frankfurt, in all probability, and not a million miles from the CERN laboratory in Geneva, where he first conceived the web, and close to where the World Wide Web Foundation headquarters are now located. His 'Open Letter' instantly made available to all the major news agencies and anyone else, everywhere else in the world already informed of the link. Demonstrating, yet, again, the

light speed at which news and data transfer occurs in the beginning fourth decade of the web. The circle squared multiple times over unto infinity.

The key point of Sir Tim's 'Open Letter': "If we give up on building a better web now, then the web will not have failed us. We will have failed the web."

Berners-Lee, pointedly, calling throughout the letter for immediate action to stem the dysfunction afflicting so much of today's web. And for all of us, together, to do all we can to fix it. To combat the deliberate, malicious intent that increasingly pervades the web: the state-sponsored hacking attacks, the outright criminal behaviour, the online harassment, and outraged and polarised tone and quality of so much online discourse.

As for who to blame and how to fix it, he offered: "You can't just blame one government, one social network, or the human spirit. To get this right, we will need to come together as a global web community."

Then went on to say: "The fight for the web is one of the most important causes of our time. Today, half of the world is online. It is more urgent than ever to ensure the other half are not left behind offline, and that everyone contributes to a web that drives equality, opportunity and creativity."

All and everything, on the go forward, coming down to the question of trust: Whom to trust? What to trust? That immediately put me in mind of one of the markers of trustworthiness in the City of London, of old, where, when someone made inquiry as to a person or company's creditworthiness, would, in the very best of circumstances, elicit the response: "Undoubted."

And what, prey, can be counted on as "undoubted" in an era awash in competing news sources; most of them trusted, true, but far too many of them downright questionable (I'm loathe to use the term 'fake' for the awful freight 'fake news' already carries).

Which is why I, today; as you no doubt also do; pull from numerous news sources from all around the web; some pay-walled, some not; all of whom I've learned to trust; present company, a good example. All to get a quick sense of what's happened, what's happening. Then I take a deep dive into whatever news items have caught my eye, before turning to the day's newsprint or weekly news magazine; but always from more than one source: safety in numbers and all that.

I have to say I was immensely tickled the father of the World Wide Web didn't eschew one of the world's most important news mediums, but rather chose to trust his all-important message to one of the world's more respected newspapers. Tickled, too, he then cleverly chose to broadcast the fact in the echo chamber that is Twitter. It tells me that, at least for the foreseeable, a better-informed world still likely rests upon the dissemination of world news via multiple media sources. Safety in numbers, again. And hats off to all the many journalists, world wide, who in all too often parlous conditions, do so much to keep us all better informed.

And so, with the World Wide Web already now 30 years old and counting, the overarching question: What news vehicles and sources do you rely on when it really matters? Who and what do you trust when it really counts?

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