

How to Save the Web

 [nytimes.com/2018/12/06/opinion/tim-berners-lee-saving-the-internet.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/06/opinion/tim-berners-lee-saving-the-internet.html)

By Tim Berners-Lee

6 décembre
2018



Advertisement

[Continue reading the main story](#)

[Opinion](#)

Turning Point: *By 2019, 50 percent of the global population will be online.*

In recent years, it has become clear that the web is not living up to the high hopes we had for it. Built as an open tool for collaboration and empowerment, the web has been hijacked by crooks and trolls who have used it to manipulate people all over the world.

To preserve a web that serves all of humanity, not just the privileged and the powerful, we will have to fight for it. That's why I'm asking governments, companies and citizens across the globe to commit to a set of core principles for the web.

By the end of 2019, 50 percent of the world's population will be using the internet, according to a [recent report](#) from the United Nations-affiliated Broadband Commission for Digital Development. At any other time in the web's 30-year history, the collective response to this tipping point would likely have been: "Great! Now let's get everyone else

connected as quickly as possible.” But the world has changed. After years of the web being seen as a potential net force for good, such technological optimism has been eclipsed by fears that the web might be damaging our societies.

These worries are justified. In recent years, we’ve seen governments engage in state-sponsored trolling to quash dissent and attack opposition. We’ve seen hacking and foreign interference distort politics and undermine elections. And we’ve seen how the spread of fake news on social media can trigger chaos, confusion and lethal violence.

Image



Students learn how to use Google on their laptops in Anuppur, IndiaCredit...Atul Loke for The New York Times

When we learned last year that Cambridge Analytica had used the personal information of up to 87 million Facebook users to influence voters in the 2016 American presidential election, we woke up to the fact that we had lost control of our data — and that the consequences could change the world.

You have 3 free articles remaining.

[Subscribe to The Times](#)

But we must not give up on the promise of the web. All technologies come with risks. We drive cars despite the possibility of serious accidents. We take prescription drugs despite the danger of abuse and addiction. We build safeguards into new innovations so we can manage the risks while benefiting from the opportunities.

The web is a global platform — its challenges stretch across borders and cultures. Just as the web was built by millions of people collaborating around the world, its future relies on our collective ability to make it a better tool for everyone.

As we forge the web of tomorrow, we need a set of guiding principles that can define the kind of web we want. Identifying these will not be easy — any agreement that covers a diverse group of countries, cultures and interests will never be. But I believe it's possible to develop a set of basic ideals that we can all agree on, and that will make the web work better for everyone, including the 50 percent of the world's population that has yet to come online.

Governments, companies and individuals all have unique roles to play. The World Wide Web Foundation, an organization I founded in 2009 to protect the web as a public good, has drawn up a set of core principles outlining the responsibilities that each party has to protect a web that serves all of humanity. We're asking everyone to sign on to these principles and join us as we create a formal Contract for the Web in 2019.

Image

A copy of the world's first web page, from 1992.Credit...Fabrice Coffrini/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

The principles specify that governments are responsible for connecting their citizens to an open web that respects their rights. They say that internet companies must play their part in making sure the web is safe, accessible and protects user data. They make it clear that individual citizens have a responsibility to act with compassion and challenge negative behavior they wouldn't tolerate offline. Most importantly, the principles say that we have to stand up and fight for a web that serves everyone. If we, the billions of people using the web, don't defend it, who will?

Based on these fundamental principles, the Contract for the Web will establish a new set of norms to guide the digital policy agendas of governments and the decisions of companies as they build tomorrow's web technologies. Those who support and help develop the contract will not only show their commitment to the future of the web; they will help shape it. If we want a web that works for us, we must work for the web's future.



Tim Berners-LeeCredit...Henry Thomas

Ten years ago, when Rosemary Leith and I started the World Wide Web Foundation, fewer than one in four people were online. Our task was to get more people connected and to keep the web open and free so that everyone could benefit from all it had to offer. The web saves lives and creates livelihoods. It puts the world's information at our fingertips and connects us with friends and family across the globe. It powers social movements and has created countless new industries, fueling widespread innovation.

As a comparatively young invention, this is just the beginning of what the web has to offer. Imagine what we will be able to accomplish once the next huge tranche of the world's population is online and contributing to the web's explosive creativity.

The good news is, the appetite to take on the web's challenges has never been greater. Let's make sure the next billion people connect to a web worth having. Let's make 2019 the year we push back against the forces subverting the open spirit of the web. We need a free and open web for everyone.

I Invented the World Wide Web. Here's How We Can Fix It.

 [nytimes.com/2019/11/24/opinion/world-wide-web.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/24/opinion/world-wide-web.html)

By Tim Berners-Lee

25 novembre
2019



Advertisement

[Continue reading the main story](#)

My parents were mathematicians. My mother helped code one of the first stored-program computers — the Manchester Mark 1. They taught me that when you program a computer, what you can do is limited only by your imagination. That excitement for experimentation and change helped me build the World Wide Web.

I had hoped that 30 years from its creation, we would be using the web foremost for the purpose of serving humanity. Projects like Wikipedia, OpenStreetMap and the world of open source software are the kinds of constructive tools that I hoped would flow from the web.

However, the reality is much more complex. Communities are being ripped apart as prejudice, hate and disinformation are peddled online. Scammers use the web to steal identities, stalkers use it to harass and intimidate their victims, and bad actors subvert democracy using clever digital tactics. The use of targeted political ads in the United

States' 2020 presidential campaign and in elections elsewhere threatens once again to undermine voters' understanding and choices.

We're at a tipping point. How we respond to this abuse will determine whether the web lives up to its potential as a global force for good or leads us into a digital dystopia.

Advertisement

[Continue reading the main story](#)

The web needs radical intervention from all those who have power over its future: governments that can legislate and regulate; companies that design products; civil society groups and activists who hold the powerful to account; and every single web user who interacts with others online.

We have to overcome the stalemate that has characterized previous attempts to solve the problems facing the web. Governments must stop blaming platforms for inaction, and companies must become more constructive in shaping future regulation — not just opposing it.

Unlock more free articles.

[Create an account or log in](#)

I'm introducing a new approach to overcome that stalemate — the [Contract for the Web](#).

The Contract for the Web is a [global plan](#) of action created over the past year by activists, academics, companies, governments and citizens from across the world to make sure our online world is safe, empowering and genuinely for everyone.

The contract outlines steps to prevent the deliberate misuse of the web and our information. For example, it calls on governments to publish public data registries, so that they are no longer able to conceal from their own citizens how their data is being used. If governments are sharing our data with private companies — or buying data broker lists from them — we have a right to know and take action.

The contract sets out ways to improve system design to eradicate incentives that reward clickbait or the spread of disinformation. Targeted political advertising is giving political parties the ability to subvert the debate. We need platforms to open their black boxes and clearly explain how they're minimizing or eliminating risks their products pose to society. In my view, governments should impose an immediate ban on targeted political advertising to restore trust in our public discourse.

Advertisement

[Continue reading the main story](#)

Crucially, the contract also contains concrete actions to tackle the negative — even if unintended — consequences of platform design. For example, why on an exercise app should women [have to worry](#) that their precise jogging routes are shared by default with

other users? Perhaps because they were designed by people not thinking about the safety needs of women. We need a tremendously more diverse work force in our technology industries to make sure their products serve all groups. And companies should release reports that meaningfully demonstrate their progress toward those diversity goals.

To make the online world a place worth being in, we must all use the Contract for the Web to fight now for the web we want.

Governments must support their citizens online and ensure that their rights are protected through effective regulation and enforcement. Companies must look beyond next-quarter results and understand that long-term success means building products that are good for society and that people can trust them.

There's already a powerful coalition backing the contract. The governments of nations such as France, Germany and Ghana have signed on to its principles. The tech giants Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Reddit sit alongside other specialists such as the search engine DuckDuckGo in committing to action. Many civil society organizations, including the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Reporters Without Borders and AccessNow, have joined the growing movement, as well as individuals such as Representative Ro Khanna of California.

In endorsing the contract, governments and companies commit to taking concrete action across several issues. Some changes may take a long time: We are not expecting overnight transformation. But we will track their efforts, and if they fail to make progress, they will lose their status as a backer of the contract.

The contract is already being used to inform policy decisions, as a best-practice guide for government and company officials, and as a tool to help civil society advocate change, measure progress and hold governments and companies accountable.

But that alone is not enough. Our [World Wide Web Foundation](#), together with its global partners, will work to mobilize people around the world. As elections approach, raise these issues with your political representatives and candidates. The best way to change the priorities and actions of those in power is to speak up.

Join our foundation, our partners and people around the world in the fight for the web.

Tim Berners-Lee is the inventor of the World Wide Web and a co-founder of the World Wide Web Foundation.

The Times is committed to publishing [a diversity of letters](#) to the editor. We'd like to hear what you think about this or any of our articles. Here are some [tips](#). And here's our email: letters@nytimes.com.

Review our cookie policy