

By using a computer within a network which is already an integral part of the Internet.

By using a service provider, and connecting to their computer (which is part of the Internet).

Note: A service provider operates in a manner similar to Telecom, charging users for calls made to their computers. The service provider's computer acts as a go-between, sending information between the Internet and the user's computer.

What are some things we could use the Internet for?

Communicating

Educating

Teaching

Pioneering

Deepening

Raising funds

1. Communication

We can use the Internet for communication between individuals, between individuals and institutions, between institutions, between committees and committee members, for communications about news and events and for publishing bulletins and journals.

Individuals both locally and overseas can communicate, work on projects, discuss issues, provide personal support, provide professional advice and assistance, provide Internet access to local community groups and schools, and can strike up friendships with suitable single people. One of the audience members has recently become engaged to a Bahá'í lady he met over the Internet.

Institutions can carry out administrative tasks, publish important messages, publish information about pilgrimage and publish maps of their local areas (such as how to get to places of interest). In Hawaii, new believers can be enrolled electronically.

Individuals can reach institutions on a timely basis, send letters and reports and can even check their place in the pilgrimage queue.

News and events can be easily communicated via the Internet. An international bulletin board is operated over which internationally relevant

messages can be set to and read by the international community. A separate national system has begun in Australia and others already operate in countries such as the United Kingdom.

Bulletins and journals can also be sent electronically. The International Bahá'í News Service is available free of charge. The Tasmanian publication called 'The Beacon' is available. Specialist journals and mailing lists are also maintained around the world, targeting particular themes and groups of people.

2. Education (Distance learning and training)

The Internet can be used to share resources such as education materials, lesson plans and correspondence teachers. It can be used to advertise and locate particular needs and resources. It enables multi-faith and multi-racial interaction between teachers and students around the world. A group called I*EARN operate a network of around 1,000 schools spread over 27 countries which interact electronically, with the children writing about selected topics. The Internet also enables traditional education to be carried out en masse, providing access to multimedia computer programs and access to educational materials including maps, photographs, facts and figures. A single lesson or training program can be delivered to thousands of people at the touch of a button. This can even be used to assist with the professional development and maturation of Local Spiritual Assemblies.

3. Teaching

The Internet enables users to reach people of different races, cultures, religions, economic conditions and social positions. It allows users to access specific groups through bulletin boards, mailing lists and specific Internet sites.

Indigenous peoples, government and the media all have their own areas of the Internet.

There are numerous discussion groups, where issues can be discussed with other Bahá'ís, where issues can be discussed with people of other religions and where issues can be discussed by people participating and being known as Bahá'ís. People of

prominence and capacity can be reached. Bahá'ís can provide input to local and overseas journals of all fields, disseminating material into the wider community. Most Bahá'ís with access to electronic mail sign their name and close their message with a Bahá'í quote.

There is a need for care, especially in the way the faith is taught and represented to people of capacity. Friendship should be the primary objective when getting to know people met on the Internet, as purity of motive can often open doors normally closed to us.

4. Pioneering

The Internet can simplify reaching and networking into the wider local community. Many local councils, libraries and regional institutions are now maintaining their own Internet sites. Some sites provide information about council permits, local trades, and job opportunities. The site of my own local council provides access to a community directory, supplying suitable contact details for even the local Bahá'í community. Overseas, some Local Spiritual Assemblies already maintain their own Internet presence, supplying materials as well as contact details and news of upcoming events.

At the national and international level, electronic mailing lists enable individuals to send messages directly to the Institution or contact desired, for information or assistance. Before visiting a location, a message can be sent to a bulletin board asking for individuals in an area to respond, enabling one to locate suitable contacts. Individual areas and goal towns can set up their own Internet sites, providing information about accommodation, government assistance and regulations, important things like shopping, and even advertising job vacancies.

With virtual reality becoming increasingly realistic and affordable, it will soon be possible to visit a region, checking out suitable locations from the comfort of your chair.

5. Deepening

The Internet can be used to discuss issues and teachings, access the original writings from the World Centre, contact authors of publications, form study groups, collect together compilations and to access and prepare conference presentations.

6. Fundraising

Products can easily be advertised on the Internet, via special sites, electronic mail and bulletin boards. The need for funds for special projects can also be advertised, often drawing responses from as far away as Australia.

Some Other Possibilities

Disaster and crisis management. The Internet can be used to obtain information about people and events, to obtain needed help and advice, and to re-establish contact with individuals and institutions.

Calling for prayers for individuals, projects and institutions in need.

Staying in touch with current issues, news and events. Some sites maintained by commercial newspapers even enable you to search for and obtain articles about a given topic, collecting them together in chronological order.

Reaching people who are visually impaired. Using modern technology, written works are translated into Braille and published by the Institute for the Blind, not far from the conference venue. These materials can be sent and received electronically. Several of the visually impaired staff are prominent on the Internet and are receptive to the faith.

Checking with the weather bureau before outdoor functions.

Accessing the local government network 'Councilnet' for news and advice.

Participating in world events.

The Way Forward (or at least my predictions!)

Within a short time, electronic trade will be more feasible, with financial transactions able to be carried out securely. The first bank recently joined the Internet.

Improved Internet security will lead to increased protection for the transfer of documents and software, leading to more secure publication

of
copyright materials.

The Internet will be able to be accessed more easily.
Infrastructure such as optic fibre cabling will become more common. Local
libraries will
provide Internet access to their patrons, and eventually to their less
advantaged
community members. Fixed locations for access will become less necessary with
increased
use of mobile communications and portable computers.

Voice technologies will improve, reducing the need for
keyboards, and making the Internet more accessible to the physically
handicapped.

Video conferencing via the PC will become more commonplace,
enabling people to work from home and to conduct meetings more easily, making
more
effective use of their time.

Conferences will be held which use the Internet to conduct
sessions.

Virtual reality will enable users to access Internet sites in
3D, like walking down a corridor and opening doors to the rooms desired.

Improvements will occur in global health, due to Internet
communications. An example is a group known as the Global Health Network which
has
significant Bahá'í involvement. The aim of the group is to bring about
dramatic
improvements in world health by providing low cost access to information about
disease,
its monitoring and its prevention world wide.

Concerns

The Internet provides the ability to reach large numbers of
people. This is an opportunity, and a concern. Any mistakes made are going to
be
potentially very big and very visible.

People who join the Internet community could cause problems,
because they don't know what they are doing.

People can cause problems for the faith using the Internet.
The Internet is still not a secure place. Internet sites need to be protected
and people
transmitting messages need to be made aware that others may be reading them.

Lack of technical knowledge and support.

Lack of official guidance and guidelines.

In closing, I've tried to illustrate some of the opportunities that are already available to us right now. Don't just take my word for it, go out there and investigate things for yourselves.

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