

Notes for "The Edge Against the Hub: The Struggle for Dominance on the Internet"

Yossi Vardi

Yossi Vardi is a social thinker and one of the pioneers of worldwide instant messaging and social software. He was the original investor in ICQ, the instant messaging program that defined global software success and became AOL instant messaging. One of Israel's leading venture capitalists, Yossi continues to focus on how people communicate, how communities develop, and how communication technology can enable social evolution.

In his talk at Harvard, Yossi will address three questions:

Why does technology-enabled communication matter in today's society? How can technology increase cooperation and mutual understanding? How can technology also foster divisiveness? What priorities does this suggest for us?

The Second Superpower has many faces. What is interesting is the "cyber-neurology" of the Second Superpower, and the question of how we form swarms that are "wise mobs" and not just smart ones.

What are the most revolutionary trends emerging on the global scene, as people strive to use technology to communicate? E-presence, telepresence, social software, swarming, virtual identity, and viral propagation are attempts to describe what is going on. What is the significance of these trends for each of us?

The neurology is what makes a group into a swarm. Before our current technology, creating a mob required the ability to look into others' eyes, and respond quickly and reciprocally to what is signaled and sensed. This required physical presence. Now we have electronic communication tools that enable low-latency reciprocal signaling among physically distant people. This gives us e-presence, which in turn enables our swarming behavior to scale and to span physical distance.

Winner-take-all battles, rival camps and non-interoperable communication systems segment our world, while unity and interoperability bring us together but sometimes establish problematic monopolies. What major adoption fights and standards battles are appearing on the horizon, and how might they play out? As users and as concerned citizens, how may these struggles affect us, and what can we do?

Big issues include the battle among mobile phones and the PC, the battle for the living room and the desktop. At a deeper level the first superpower no longer uses brainwashing. Instead, governments seek to control the cyber-neurology of the community. They seem to "wash" the cyber-neurology itself. Open Source is about much more than control of software markets or spectrum. It is about keeping the cyber-neurology of humanity open and evolving.