



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**LOCATION:**  
*Elon, NC, US*

**ORGANIZATION:**  
The Imagining the Internet Center

**YEAR:**  
*2011*

**ORGANIZATION URL:**  
<http://www.imaginingtheinternet.org>

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**PROJECT NAME:**  
Imagining the Internet

**CATEGORY:**  
*Training/Education*

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

Imagining the Internet - a public, online resource - is using information technology to benefit society, educating people about key future technology issues. Its mission is to explore and provide insights into emerging network innovations, global development, dynamics, diffusion and governance. Its research holds a mirror to humanity's use of communications technologies, informs policy development, exposes potential futures and provides a historic record. It works to illuminate issues in order to serve the greater good, making its work public, free and open. The center is a network of faculty, students, staff, alumni, advisers and friends working to identify, explore and engage with the challenges and opportunities of evolving communications forms and issues. They investigate the tangible and potential pros and cons of new-media channels through active research. Among the spectrum of issues addressed are power, politics, privacy, property, augmented and virtual reality, control and the rapid changes spurred by accelerating technology. The Imagining the Internet Center sponsors work that brings people together to share their visions for the future of communications and the future of the world, recording it all to educate the public. It exposes future possibilities while simultaneously providing a peek back at the past. In it, you will find the words of thousands of people from every corner of the world, from today and from yesterday, making thousands of predictive pronouncements about the future of humankind. It includes: special explanatory sections on the future and past development of communications networks; videos recorded at global conferences that reveal future hopes and challenges as expressed by hundreds of Internet leaders, including Vint Cerf, Douglas Engelbart and Robert Kahn; informative areas targeted to benefit children under 12 (KidZone), and to help teachers of elementary, middle school, high school and college students use the site to educate; thousands of world citizens' discussions of our future – from top experts (Predictions Surveys) to your neighbor down the block or a computer programmer in Nigeria (Voices of the People); encourages you to add your vision to the collection by opening up a "Share Your Prediction" form and telling us what you think; shares a look back at what people were saying in the 1990s during



the "awe" stage of the development of the Internet; records a legacy of predictive statements as they are made, continuously building a historic record of lasting value that documents the way we see ourselves as we move into an explosion of changes wrought by the combination of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics as they leverage our future networks. This project - 99 percent the work of the students, faculty and staff at Elon University - encourages young people to do research about the future of information technology as they help produce the content for this educational site. The site has been used by policy people in the US government and at the UN's Internet Governance Forum to educate people and illuminate issues.

## **SOCIETAL BENEFITS**

It provides insights into emerging innovations, global development, dynamics, diffusion, and governance, holding a mirror to humanity's use of communications technologies, informing policy development, exposing potential futures and providing a historic record, illuminating issues and educating people, serving the greater good, making its work public, free and open.

## **PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE**

I am listing several examples: Imagining the Internet provides key data annually to the Pew Internet & American Life Project - <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/predictions/expertsurveys/default.xhtml>. Lee Rainie of the Pew Internet & American Life Project ([lrainie@pewinternet.org](mailto:lrainie@pewinternet.org)) helped inspire the beginning work by Elon University on the site, and Pew Internet provides minor financial assistance in sponsoring the "Future of the Internet" surveys we conduct for Pew Internet. Elon University is the primary funder of the project, providing tens of thousands of dollars of support annually. The initial research I did into the Internet in the early 1990s for Imagining the Internet and the following "Future of the Internet" surveys led to five full-length books tied to results; most of that information - literally thousands of pages of data - is also posted on Imagining the Internet as a free resource. The Internet Society cites Imagining the Internet as a key resource. The U.S. Library of Congress is including all updates of the site in its Digital Archives. The organizers of the World Wide Web 2010 conference asked Imagining the Internet to record its key proceedings and to plan, host and document a collocated conference - FutureWeb (<http://www.elon.edu/e-web/predictions/futureweb2010/default.xhtml>, WWW2010 co-chair Paul Jones of ibiblio is a contact - [pjones@ibiblio.org](mailto:pjones@ibiblio.org)). Vint Cerf and other Internet leaders - many Internet Society board members and others - have been of great assistance and support for the efforts of Imagining the Internet. Markus Kummer ([mkummer@unopg.ch](mailto:mkummer@unopg.ch)) of the United Nations Secretariat for the Internet Governance Forum and his staff have used the resources of Imagining the Internet to inform the operation of the global IGF and the content is part of the official archives there. Marilyn Cade, a leader of the Internet Governance Forum-USA ([marilynscale@hotmail.com](mailto:marilynscale@hotmail.com), has asked Imagining the Internet to provide the official documentation of IGF-USA conferences in 2009 and 2010. All of the data gathered has been and continues to be a substantial informational foundation for anyone looking into the past, present and future of the Internet.

**IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE?** Yes

## **ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION**



It's vital that you go online to [www.imagingtheinternet.org](http://www.imagingtheinternet.org) and spend at least an hour looking around the site to comprehend the full extent of the resources being offered here. It has more than 6,000 pages of information and hundreds of videos, collecting more than 25,000 predictive statements about the future of information technology. This was built as a labor of love. Nobody working on this site is making a living doing it full time. It is work that has been accomplished on nights and weekends by volunteers.