



'Help me  
save the  
web' says  
its  
inventor

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Exactly 28 years and one day ago, Tim Berners-Lee proposed creating a world wide web. He hoped it would lead to a more equal world for all — but now he fears the opposite is happening. Why?

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It has been 28 years since Tim Berners-Lee proposed the creation of a free online space, where anyone with the right technology could access information. Of course, his dream came true. In the decades since, the world wide web has revolutionised society.

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But yesterday its inventor published a warning in a leading newspaper: the web is in crisis. Three trends particularly worried him.

Firstly, he said, websites are collecting huge amounts of personal data from users. This means that governments can watch “our every move” online through surveillance laws. That has a “chilling effect on free speech”.

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Secondly, that same data can be used by platforms like Google and Facebook to fuel algorithms which help fake news to spread “like wildfire”.

Finally, he warned that political adverts online are being used in “unethical ways” — such as to keep voters away from polls. “Is that democratic?” he asked.

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When he first envisioned the web in 1989, he pictured a space that was free and **egalitarian**, “a tool that serves all of humanity”. It would allow “everyone, everywhere to share information, access opportunities, and collaborate across geographic and cultural boundaries.”

In many ways, that is what we have. But the dominance of a small handful of websites could make the problems he worries about worse.

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In 2015, five companies shared 65% of the money from online advertising. Around 40% of web traffic goes through Google. And allowing anyone to post information means that falsehoods can spread on these sites as quickly as truth.

“It has taken all of us to build the web we have, and now it is up to all of us to build the web we want,” Berners-Lee said yesterday. His solutions include putting data control in the hands of ordinary people, challenging surveillance laws, and encouraging social networks to fight fake news.

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# Can the web live up to its founding ideals?

## Web of lies

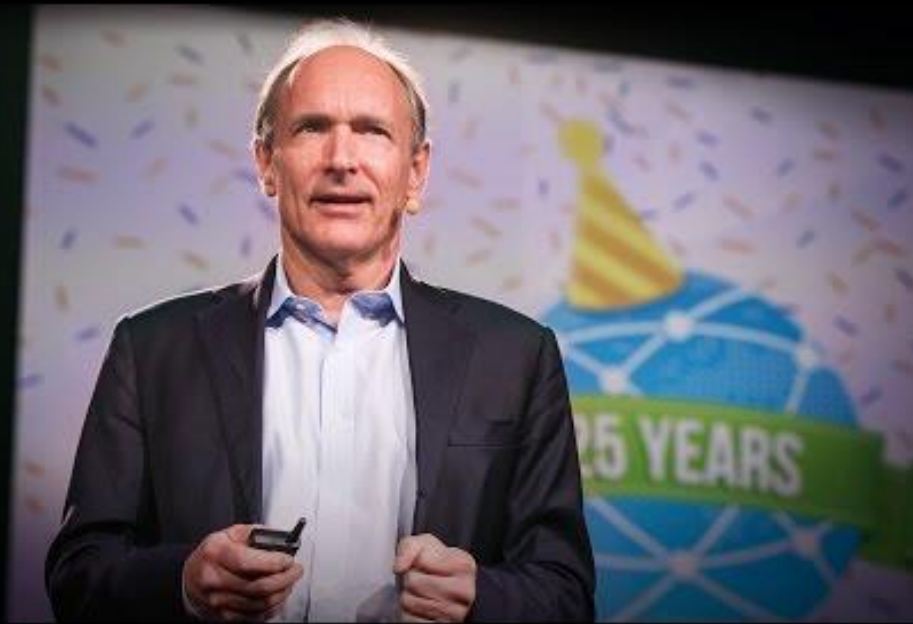
Yes, say some. When Berners-Lee appeared on stage at the London 2012 Olympics, he tweeted a promise that lit up the stadium: "This is for everyone." It must be kept that way. The web should not be controlled by just a few companies in **Silicon Valley**, and it certainly should not be used to spy on people, suppress free speech or damage democracy. Who better to remind us of that than its creator?

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This is too idealistic, argue others. For a long time, WWW might as well have stood for “wild wild west”. It was a chaotic world where anyone could say anything. It was exciting, but dangerous. Surveillance laws help to keep an eye on its darker side. And while Google and Facebook are not perfect, they give people what they actually want: order, simplicity, and connections with others. It is hardly a crisis.

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On it's 25th birthday, Tim Berners-Lee discussed what we want the world wide web to become...

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# YOU DECIDE

Is the world wide web in crisis?

Do you agree with Tim Berners-Lee's proposed solutions?

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We need diversity of thought in the world to face  
the new challenges.

(Tim Berners Lee)

adjective of the day

# egalitarian

believing that all people are equally important and should have the same rights and opportunities in life:  
an egalitarian society.

*The party's principles are basically **egalitarian**.*

noun of the day

# Silicon Valley

an area in northern California where there are many companies that make or use computer materials and electronic devices.



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# WORD CHECK

In which subject would you use the following words?

What do they mean?

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# WORD CHECK

visualisation

symbolism

soliloquy

causation

vinculum

situation ethics

anomalous

aesthetics

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