Welcome to the World of "Netizens"

Katsuaki Suzuki, Ph.D.
Professor, Faculty of Software and Information Science
Iwate Prefectural University, 020-0193, JAPAN
ksuzuki@soft.iwate-pu.ac.jp
http://www.iwate-pu.ac.jp/home/ksuzuki/

Have you ever heard of the word "Netizens"? This word was invented by Michael Hauben* in 1995 by combining two words "Network" and "citizens". Michael was a graduate student of Columbia University, U.S.A., at that time. Netizens mean citizens of the digital network, or network citizens (net-citizens). It means people who are using the digital network, such as the Internet, to communicate with other people, to find information, or to express their ideas via network.

Michael says that the Netizens are the people trying to make the world of digital network a better place for all other Netizens. The Netizens may make a technological contribution, such as making the speed of the network transmission faster, or finding a way to exchange information safely. The other Netizens may make a social contribution, such as trying to answer to the questions that someone asks on a BBS, or presenting information on the Web that other people wanted to know. The Netizens are not just users of the network (Lurkers), but contributors of the network. They are not only using the network to get something from it, but also trying to give back something to the network.

How much do you think you are a Netizen? How much do you think your friends may be judged as a Netizen? Are they more Netizen than yourself? Or, are you more Netizen than your friends? Why do you think so? How can you judge the degree of Netizenship of someone? If someone often uses the Internet to send and receive e-mails, are they Netizens? If someone has a Web site of his/her own, are they Netizens? How can you become a Netizen, or a better Netizen?

We are living as citizens of the country that we were born. For example, if you are born in Japan, you will become a Japanese, or a citizen of Japan. So we are either Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or the citizen of whatever the country we are born. As a citizen of our own country, we should try to make our own country a better place to live. In your family, you are doing something to help your family as a member of the family. In your school, you are doing something to make your school a better place to attend. Just like your family and school, we need to contribute to our society as a citizen. This can also help to make the entire world a better place if we can contribute, not only to our own country, but also to the world internationally.

We have our passport when we go abroad. It is the passport of our own country. Our names, birthdays, photos, etc. are written in our passports. The passports are issued by the government of our country. So we know for sure that we are citizens of our own

country. The same thing can be applied to Netizens. If you think you are a Netizen, then do you have a passport as a Netizen? How can we obtain our passport as a Netizen?

I can give you a Netizen passport, if you are using the network to communicate with your friends in distance: A good start to build international friendship. If you are working together with your teammates over the network to come up with a report you want to share with other people, I will give you one: A good start to build international collaboration. If you are enjoying whatever you can do over the network, and as the result, also looking for the chance of the face-to-face meeting with your teammates, I will give you one. We need to know each other not only via network, but also by meeting directly, to make our friendship stronger.

Or, if you study English very hard at home and at school, so that you can communicate with your friends in different countries using the network, I will give you one. We need English as a tool of international communication. And moreover, if you are trying to do something not only for yourself, but also for other people on the network, I will give you one. We need more people especially young ones helping others and contributing to the network society.

But, I can also say this to you: You can give a Netizen passport for yourself. If you think you know enough about how to use the network, give yourself a Netizen passport. If you think you are actually using your network skills and knowledge well enough to do whatever you want to, give yourself the passport. And if you want to do more things over the network to contribute something to the world, give yourself the passport. Because it is the Netizen's right to judge if he or she is a Netizen, you don't have to wait for somebody to give you the Netizen's passport to you. A Netizen can decide whether or not to become a member of this virtual society of the digital network.

By participating WYM2003, I hope you feel like giving the Netizen Passport to yourself. Participation to WYM2003 is, in itself, a contribution to the network society, because we are the group of people trying to make this world a better place. I hope you can also become friends with many more Netizens among yourselves. Making one good friend during WYM2003 is, in itself, one step to make the network society better. If you can keep that goal in your minds, WYM2003 will become a big success. WYM2003 will contribute to make the world of Netizens a better place to live.

Welcome to the world of Netizens, and good luck to each and all of you!

---

*Michael Hauben' Web site: http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/