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Like any other technology that changes the way we live and work, the Internet is prey to all kinds of nonsensical speculation, hype and myth. I don't mean the kinds of myths that circulate via e-mail and cause millions of people to write their Congressman to oppose legislation that doesn't exist. Or even the hucksters trying to con you out of your life savings. I'm talking about the myths about the Internet itself.

Mythology has beset every major technological advance, from the printing press to the automobile. The printing press, for example, found almost immediate commercial success as a means to publish inexpensive pornography (you didn't really believe it was just used to print Bibles, did you?). But the public, commercial Internet is now in its 13th year, and it is time we shed a few of our most cherished myths:

The Internet is dangerous for children. You know the lurid tales. One in five children online have been approached by a sexual predator. There are more than 50,000 predators online at any time. Children can easily find pornography on the Net without even looking for it. Nice stories, but they are mostly just that. The Internet is inherently no more dangerous than anywhere else, and the real threat to children — with a modicum of parental guidance — is minimal. If you are interested, you can find a better analysis of this by Benjamin Radford, editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine, online at [www.livescience.com/othernews/060516\\_predatorpanic.html](http://www.livescience.com/othernews/060516_predatorpanic.html).

- **There is a huge racial “digital divide” in America.**

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- There is a more complicated myth, because it hinges on what you can't dig out behind.” A whopping 77 percent of Americans have Internet access at home, but some other countries do have a larger online population or more broadband connections. But these countries tend to be small, with populations centered in a few urban areas, unlike the United States with its 3.5 million square miles with which to contend. These small countries are easier to wire, and in many cases can use cheaper technologies. In deployment of fiber — the Internet of the future — we enjoy a solid and growing lead.
- **The Internet is tax-free.** Okay, most accountants don't fall for this old saw, but you'd be amazed at how many others do. The reality is that online companies are not presently required to collect sales taxes for every transaction. The tax hasn't gone away; you're supposed to keep track of the purchases and remit the sales tax yourself. And local governments are becoming increasingly aggressive about going after those who don't.
  - **The Internet began as a simple and peaceful academic network** where everyone got along and treated each other with respect. Before we hold hands and sing “Kumbayah,” let's just point out that the Internet has, since its inception, been a chaotic jumble of interconnected networks where it was common to find power struggles, jealousy, e-mail flame wars, bitter accusations and acrimony. We like to think otherwise for the same reason we think of the Fifties as “the good old days.”

There are certainly more myths. Like the idea that you can be anonymous online (You can't. It's getting easier to track you online every day, especially if you are breaking the law). Or the idea that everything you say online is protected free speech. Or that the Internet is a reliable way to communicate. Myths arise from a lack of understanding. For many Americans, the onset of this technology and its rapid emergence as a key consumer product have been difficult

to grasp effectively. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Internet

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