



A Brief History of Pegasus Networks

By Ian Peter

(Includes “A Short History of the Internet in Australia”)

Pegasus Networks was the first organisation to offer public access to the Internet on an Australia wide basis. While some small local services existed before then, Pegasus achieved national coverage by offering services at local call cost from anywhere in Australia by providing dialup access via Telecom X.25 links to the developing Internet backbone.

Pegasus was formally launched on September 14 1989 at a time when Internet usage in Australia was restricted to academic circles. Initially Pegasus provided its own UUCP links to the USA to pick up mail and newsgroups, but in 1991, via an arrangement sponsored by Melbourne University, it linked into the AARNET backbone for overseas Internet feeds.

As one of the seven founding members of the global Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Pegasus was involved in a project to provide low cost global Internet communications by providing UNIX software ported to the 386 computer. Through this scheme Pegasus was involved in setting up initial Internet connections in several countries in the Asia Pacific region.

By the time connect.com appeared in 1992 Pegasus had established a national user base of several thousand users, including communities of interest covering environment groups, human rights groups, local government, small business, and similar communities of interest.

Pegasus remained one of Australia's 3 largest ISPs until 1995, when Telstra Big Pond and other large and wellcapitalised players entered the market. It was eventually subsumed into OptusNet in 1998.

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Date: Thu, 12 Aug 1999 23:08:12 -0400
From: <ianp@peg.apc.org>
To: firefly@c2o.org
Subject: Re: Oz Internet/ISP origins: was MCI WorldCom offers to buy OzEmail

Continuing the discussion on Australia's first ISP which I've just had a first look at on returning from leave:

We can't determine who was Australia's first ISP without deciding what an ISP is/was (and probably what the Internet is/was). However I believe it is important we have this discussion here while there are a few people around who haven't got Alzheimers yet and can remember the period when this all began. This is all about events about 10 years ago.

I made the claim in private correspondence to Roger Clarke, copied to this list just before Christmas, that Pegasus Networks was the first organisation to offer nationwide public dialup access to the Internet in Australia. It commenced operating in June 1989 with local dialup access, and offered nationwide dialup access from September 14 1989. There would seem to be no dispute that this proceeded RUNX and Dialix, mentioned by Geoff Huston, or that this proceeded Aarnet, also mentioned by Geoff. However before entering into a discussion which will inevitably occur as to whether Pegasus was an ISP or not it's worth mentioning a few other facts, events and relevant activities around that time.

It would be good to create some factual history here. So I hope others can add some relevant facts and dates.

Internet origins in Australia lie within academia. It's important to mention the prominent role played by AVCC (Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee) in starting AARNet in late 1989 and taking a visionary approach under Geoff Huston's leadership to extending Internet availability beyond a mere academic setting. Without that attitude it might have been a long time before things happened in Australia. At a later date (perhaps 1991, please help with exact dates?) this extended to support for establishment of the *.com.au domain, largely due to Hugh Irvine and Connect.com.

Someone might correct me here, but I think AVCC also played an earlier role in establishing the Australian Computing Sciences Network (ACS-Net), which dates from about 1983 I believe.(the legendary Robert Elz and munnari connections which are the beginnings of Internet in Australia are documented elsewhere). ACSNet's sphere of activity was definitely limited to academic circles and computer science, but if we can claim that AARNet was an ISP we may be able to claim that ACS-Net was as well. ACSNet offered mail services, news feeds etc, and certainly began the extending of the Internet outside computing science circles. The domains from this era were of the *.oz.au variety. This is where Pegasus Networks came in, originally as peg.pegasus.oz.au.

Also at the same time there was a lot of activity from a group called Australian Public Access Network Association (APANA). APANA ran many small free hosts - RUNX may well have been one of these. APANA had many roots in the then existing

FIDONet (a MSDOS-based bulletin board system), but had a strong interest and early involvement in making newsgroups and Internet connectivity available (while in most cases maintaining FIDO style addressing). Some of that history would make interesting reading.

In 1989-90 Internet enabled applications were largely newsgroups (UseNet) and email, and fairly limited use of FTP and telnet. Many host computers connected to the Internet, including most countries, had dialup rather than permanent connections. WWW was miles away, and gopher a few years still. The new fast dialup domestic modems were 2400 baud.

Proprietary email systems were all over the place. The personal computer users favoured FIDO systems. Business and government departments used either VANs (some still do), were being persuaded towards X.400 by telcos (some still are), or were introducing internal email by purchasing proprietary email systems that offered no connectivity or compatibility with the Internet (some still do). Telstra itself did not exist, but was soon to form from the merger of OTC and Telecom, both of which offered proprietary email systems that did not talk to each other. Libraries used either one of these systems through Ilanet (originally attached to Dialcomm) or, if they were attached to academic institutions, may have begun using the Internet.

Telecom can probably make only one claim to early involvement in Internet, apart from selling telecommunications services to Aarnet and ACSNet - its PRONet service available as a small sub-service of their Discovery system launched about 1989 did offer access to Internet news groups. However it offered no connectivity with Internet email.

In was in the context of these various activities that Pegasus Networks entered the picture. Commencing in 1989 before any of the current claimants to be Australia's first ISP (RUNX, Dialix, Ozemail(!) Magnadata (!!), Connect, AARNET(?)- who else?), Pegasus offered a national dialup service and local dialup points, initially from Byron Bay. I was its first CEO, and Paul Wilson, now Director-General of APNIC, was its first long term Technical Director. Pegasus used UUCP and TCP/IP connections to exchange mail and newsgroups with the Internet, initially via direct dialup to USA, and later via ACSNet and still later via AARNET. It charged for its services, paid its staff, ran a help desk, offered local call access, used Internet email addressing standards, and was the first organisation in Australia to offer dialup access to Internet services in an open market across Australia. Its organisational history and the various people who played major roles is another story, as is its role in extending Internet availability in various Asian/Pacific countries. None of the original people are still involved with Pegasus today.

All of which amounts to the longest article I've ever written for LINK, or am ever likely to write. However, I encourage others to add to this history so that we do get it right. There is some good early history that should be added to this discussion, and I encourage others to express it here. This is but one thread in a complex social development.

If we do not accurately create a record of our history someone else will create a false history for us and it will enter the public record. The Internet did not have one

common point of origin, but many: and indeed if we want to create a history of the Internet in Australia we will be wise to map the many threads, technical, social, and entrepreneurial that made this happen. Lots of people reading this list know of the individual contributions they and others made to getting this moving in different sectors; Tom Worthington and Peter Talty in getting computer professionals on line, Tony Barry and Sandra Davey with libraries, lots of people convincing government departments, the arts community, activists, local government, commercial organisations, people like Brenda Aynsley as long time activists for a free Internet, etc: its a pretty long list. But can we create it before someone else creates a revised version for us?

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