

A1-2 - The Evolution of The Internet

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Long ago the websites lived in harmony. But then the enshittification nation attacked

So today I'd like to talk about the rise of phones, the death of StumbleUpon, the failure of Bluesky, and the rise of Neocities. Strap in, cuz this is gonna be a weird one.

In web nostalgia circles, there's a recurring notion that Phones Killed The Web. And by that they specifically mean Cool Websites. You know, stuff you'd find on StumbleUpon or whatever. The recurring notion is that phones somehow made these things obsolete.

How? The rise of the App.

The switch to phones happened around 2010-2013, when smartphones were cheap and ubiquitous enough that everyone could now feasibly buy them. It then became everyone's default computer — its pocket-sized, convenient, easy, and accessible. The desktop or laptop stopped being the main computing device for many — it became the smartphone. People go where it's most convenient.

Back then, responsive design (the ability for websites to flex to different screen sizes) wasn't really a thing yet. And back then, mobile browsers were just kind of clunky. I mean, sure, you could browse, but the experience wasn't too pleasant. So if browsers weren't the way forward, what was?

That's right! Apps!

Apps became the main way people used the Internet back then — because they felt more convenient and actually worked more or less better than websites did back then. This shift to apps eventually caused the death of sites like StumbleUpon and del.icio.us, which were sites that fundamentally were based on desktop. They did have mobile apps, but even then they could not compete with its biggest competitor:

Social media.

Because, back then, social media was — shocker — actually good! Social media actually felt social back then, and there was a lot of focus on simply having fun on apps like these. Old Twitter. Old Facebook. Vine! These apps back then were already focused on providing the best user experience. They filled in the gap other Old Web sites didn't, which caused them to fizzle out. Social media won the content wars.

So that's where people went. Social media and apps were the destination, no longer websites. All was fine for a few years. Then enshittification ensued.

Enshittification is the process of an app worsening its features to squeeze out more profits from its users and shareholders. It's a common refrain seen nowadays in the web — a platform just needs A Bit More Cash, so they worsen the user experience to force people to give em more money by watching ads or being forced to pay for subscriptions or advertising campaigns. An example of enshittification is Instagram's sheer disregard for "small" creators. Back then, you could have a shot at making it on Instagram. You simply just had to put your images out there with a bunch of tags and be set. But Instagram ruined it by:

- Switching to video as its main platform
- Actively removing ways for smaller creators (like me) to be discovered, by literally preventing people from searching for them through hashtags, and finally:
- Removing the ability to follow hashtags to make them show up in their feed. This was one of the last ways i could discover undiscovered creators till Instagram too removed it, for literally no reason.

The end result? To be discovered on Instagram, you're forced to participate in trends, or make reels/short form content, or pay Meta to boost your own posts. You can't just "do your own thing" anymore. You have to either conform to trends, or pay Meta money.

End result? The social media we ended up loving in 2015, is now the bane of our existence in 2025. People simply don't make it anymore because Instagram literally prevented them from doing so. Instagram stopped being an image-sharing platform. It became entertainment media. You don't go on there to share your cool images and see what other small creators share. You simply go there to look at Reels now.

2025 is also a big year for the Web — people have mastered responsive design on the web, new tools have been created that allows for responsive layouts, and perhaps most importantly of all — that people are fucking sick of enshittification. Oh and also phone browsers have now caught up — browsers are now fast, less clunky, have as much features as their desktop counterparts, and are just generally Way Better than they used to. I mean, even websites like e621, a popular folksonomic furry booru, has 80% of its audience on mobile! THAT is how good web dev has caught up to then.

Websites have now caught up to phones. But why isn't anyone still switching?

Because social media has their users locked in handcuffs. They want to leave, but:

- Network effects. Why should I leave, when my mutuals are still on Instagram?
- Addiction. It's proven that social media companies hire psychologists to make their social media as crack cocaine as possible.
- Infinite scroll. The most addicting — not in a good way — way to get content.
- 90% of social media has the content you're probably looking for.
- The simple fact that leaving social media is hard. You're leaving an identity you curated for years. You're leaving your communities. You're diving into the wild west.

People want to leave social media for better alternatives. But they *can't*. That's the problem.

But if you think about it...it's not social media that's the problem. It's the algorithms. The ignoring of smaller creators. The fact that social media — stopped being fun. It was never the users. It was never the content. Meta may have enshittified algorithms and discovery, but they haven't enshittified content. Actually, quite the opposite — you can now add background music to posts, post 10 more images in a carousel, and just do more crazy things with your posts. They didn't touch the content in their pursuit of enshittification. *They touched the way you find the content.*

Here's a fact: There's gazillions of amazing content on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, what have you. But I will never see those, because they only have 10 likes, and since 10 likes is nothing to enshittified Instagram, it gets dumped in the infinitesimally large dumping ground for Internet ephemera. But it doesn't deserve to be.

Because here's the thing. These small creators, while small, have followings. These people know about the content this small creator makes. They followed them for a reason. They want their favorite small creator to break out of the algorithmic barrier, but the most they can do is share a link of their content to their friends' Discord group or something.

Wait.

Share...a *link*.

Share a link! It's right there! The answer to this dilemma is right there! We can't control algorithms or discovery no more, but...we can share links. We can link our content outside of Instagram!

So we take one of these links, and put it into Field Place. We tag it appropriately, and let it loose. Field Place search is non-algorithmic and non-enshittified by design, so if I wanted to find small creators...I can. I literally just can. And I can just click through the link to be led to Instagram. Boom! A small creator that I actually like! They may not be blessed by the algorithm, but they were blessed by Field Place.

And finally, there's the Gen Zs like me. Digital natives. We've grown up — and probably got too addicted to — the Internet. Shits been our third place since time immemorial. We know what social media was like. We know what enshittification is. And we want to get out of here. But for gods sake no Bluesky please that's too boring

Around the time the pandemic struck there was this sudden explosion of Websites. You see theres this website called Carrd that allows you to make landing pages. It was initially supposed to be used by muh adults muh corporate muh LinkedIn but it accidentally ended up appealing to Gen Z because LOOK !!! We've got FONTS!! We've got CUSTOMIZABILITY!! We've got THE ABILITY TO UPLOAD AND CUSTOMIZE IMAGES AESTHETICS TEXT LINKS LOGOS ICONS COLORS AIDIHWODUEOHKXJW

So you can see how that turned out. Carrd stopped becoming Muh Landing Page for Mah LinkedIn it became a subculture unto itself. People started innovating on Carrd's editor -- you could make desktop window-like templates using just the default Carrd tools! People used Carrd in ways that you'd never expect them to do, but they did. And then shit like Carrd Culture happened where people began listing their mental disorders and triggers and do not interacts and before you follows but that's beyond the scope of this chapter/reflection thingy. (Please take care of your privacy on the web please.) But anyway Carrd became huge. Really huge. 80% of my Twitter oomfs have or are using Carrd

So then, what's the next progression from there? More website builders, obviously!

Rentry. Originally used as a text dumping ground. Became a Carrd replacement unto itself.
Neocities. Originally a hipster revival of Geocities. Became an option for more advanced website creation unto itself.

Strawpage. New kid on the block. Became very popular especially since it was focused exclusively on phones and had social media-like features (it had doodle boards and anonymous ask-me-anything widgets where you could send doodles or anonymous messages & questions and the Strawpage owner could feature these on their social media of choice)

Carrds, Rentries, Neometropoli and Strawpages became new forms of social media in their own right. Accessible and fun ways to create digital spaces of your very own making. I'm actually amazed Carrd hasn't debuted a feature that lets you browse Carrds...on Carrd. Hey Carrd Company or whatever it's called it's okay to admit you had a different audience than what you originally intended. No hard feelings. You guys could've been the next proto social media if you let people browse Carrds on Carrd!

So, kids, what can we learn from Gen Z? They yearn for the mines—I mean they yearn for a better experience on the web. They'll grab at anything to reclaim some of that magic on the web. Websites! HTML! Anything but Bluesky's dry ass feeds. I see a lot of videos from Gen Z creators (most of them adults though, so 90s-mid2ks Gen Z) lamenting the loss of the magic of the web. You know, "when the Internet was fun before social media." Fun. Fun. That's the keyword here. The Internet stopped being fun.

So...how does Field Place tie into all of this? Simple. This is the product Gen Z wants: an easy accessible entryway to the best parts of social media. To the indie web. To everything. And it isn't as dry as Bluesky! It's fun! It's exciting, but not toxic! It isn't algorithmic cuz you're a human, you have dignity, you have choice! It supports both social media and indie web, two platforms Gen Z are used to! It uses tags and tag Zoom and semantic search and other field place crap so it's not nearly as hard to use as Bluesky! It lets you support smaller creators! Muh Place of Field is Probably the Solution to Most of your Woes of the Internet (maybe)