

Ten Years of Computers, Freedom, and Privacy

“Four hundred people from every conceivable corner of America’s electronic community. As a science fiction writer, I have been to some weird gigs in my day, but this thing is truly *beyond the pale*,” wrote Bruce Sterling about the first Computers, Freedom, and Privacy Conference, held in San Francisco in 1991. Jim Warren organized the first CFP conference in an effort to bring together the law enforcement and hacker communities to debate and explain each other’s worlds, and to reduce the paranoia level in each community.

Ten years later, CFP2000 was held 4–7 April 2000 in Toronto, Canada. For the tenth time, this eclectic event attracted attendees from a wide variety of disciplines—students, professors, lawyers, policymakers, computer professionals, law enforcement officers, librarians, journalists, hackers, and many others who share a common interest in impacting computer and Internet-related policy debates. Indeed, over the years, many of the discussions begun at CFP conferences have had an impact on policy decisions. A late-night session sponsored by the National Research Council cryptography committee at CFP95 is often noted as a classic CFP event. Dozens of CFP attendees stayed up well past midnight to give their views to a National Research Council committee. The committee members were impressed with the response, and this event is said to have played an influential role in shaping the report that the committee eventually issued. And the fact that each year an increasing number of government officials from around the world submit session proposals and requests to participate suggests that policymakers take CFP very seriously.

At the time of the first CFP conference, the Internet was a subject discussed for the most part only at technical conferences. And while freedom, privacy, and policy issues were the subject of many conferences, these topics were rarely discussed side by side with computers. Now online issues are central to privacy conferences, policy issues have become an important part of many technical conferences (especially those dealing with the Internet and encryption), and cyberspace policy conferences are proliferating. But the CFP conference remains a unique event due to its diverse participants, intense schedule, and a certain edginess that is hard to find at more academic-oriented conferences.

Over the years, the CFP conferences have typically included a half day or full day of tutorials, followed by

2 to 3 days of panel sessions and keynote talks. Parallel sessions are kept to a minimum, with most of the program organized as plenary sessions. The program typically starts with breakfast and a plenary session early in the morning and features “Birds-of-a-Feather” sessions that run well into the evening. From the dozens of proposals submitted, the program committee selects panel sessions that feature a high level of controversy and examine emerging issues or provide new insights into ongoing policy debates. The more controversial sessions typically bring large numbers of audience members to the microphones to participate in the debate.

Over the years the CFP conference participants have debated encryption policy, privacy, censorship, commercialization of cyberspace, online democracy, intellectual property law, and many other topics. CFP attendees have watched cyberspace evolve from electronic frontier to electronic suburbia.

CFP has always been held in North America (except for CFP2000, it has always been held in the United States); however, for the past few years CFP program chairs have made an effort to broaden international participation in the conference. At CFP2000, a session on Internet usage and policy issues in Italy and Spain provided attendees with new insights into how the Internet is perceived around the world. In this issue we present a paper by two of the speakers, Giancarlo Livraghi and Andrea Monti, that examines the Italian situation in more detail.

A workshop on the first day of CFP2000 provided an opportunity for CFP participants to talk about ways in which technology designers could develop technologies intended to bring about political change. Leonard Foner discusses the motivations behind the workshop and the workshop proceedings and outcomes.

These two papers provide only a small glimpse into the CFP2000 proceedings. Additional papers and audio recordings of the entire CFP2000 conference, as well as papers and recordings from some of the other CFP conferences, are available from the conference web site at <http://www.cfp.org>.

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