

# Author pushes Net attitude

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Just because tech stocks nose-dived, don't think the Internet has peaked. According to John Patrick, IBM's VP of Internet Technology, it's just getting started. One expert quoted in his new book said we're only 3 percent there, with 97 percent of the world's population not yet on the Net.

That sounds about right, though even the percentage of people and businesses that think they're using the Internet to their best advantage may be self-delusional. For example, Patrick cites numerous companies that maintain the illusion of customer service on their web sites, though they actually refer assistance-seekers to toll-free telephone numbers instead of providing Web-based solutions. Those firms that do, indeed, "get it" reap the benefits, both in lower costs and happier customers.

The others fail to perceive that buyers demand service and empowerment, and that the Internet is clearly the best, most cost-effective means to ensure their survival by excelling in these areas. If everyone from the techno-rabble rousers behind the Cluetrain Manifesto to re-engineering guru Michael Hammer seems to understand this, why do so many firms — including companies that you think would have to excel in these areas — fail so miserably when it comes to implementing sound Internet strategies?

## Covering the bases

To some, Patrick's discussion in his book "Net Attitude: What It Is, How to Get It, and Why Your Company Can't Survive Without It" may be painfully obvious, though he nonetheless performs a responsible and enthusiastic service in covering the bases.

For example: "When Intel introduced its new Pentium

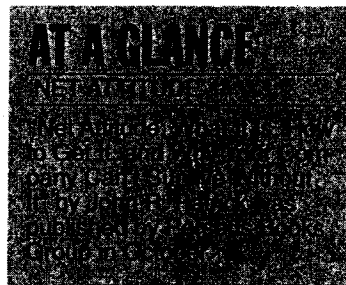
## Book Review

processor in 1994, an error was discovered in how it performed certain kinds of arithmetic calculations — how it converted 'floating point' numbers (e.g., 123.876423) for use in certain calculations. The result was that the Pentium made a math error on certain calculations. Most people would never see the error, and some engineers said that the error would likely occur only once every 27,000 years. However, the company was less than forthcoming about the problem, reasoning that not many people would be affected since the problem occurred so rarely and only during sophisticated number crunching.

"Reports began to appear on the Web, and Internet newsgroups began to alert people about the math bug. Intel seemed indifferent and announced no plans to recall the flawed processors. The flood of negative reaction from customers, who voiced their dissatisfaction via the Internet, quickly changed Intel's mind. In fact, the dissemination of information and open discussion of the problem on the Internet changed Intel's course of action. It apologized to its customers and spent a lot of money to fix the problem. Adam Mayers of the Toronto Star wrote a column called 'People power rules in Intel's hard, expensive lesson.'

"He said, 'Among the many outcomes is to affirm a power many people think they've lost. Intel's humbling was about people power, the power of individuals, not lobby groups.'

"In 2000 Intel began to ship its Pentium 4 processor. Personal computer makers received an improper piece of software for use with the new processor. None of the Pentium 4 processors with the incorrect software reached consumers



and arguably the error was inconsequential. But being sensitive to their previous experience with the Internet and knowing the incredible power of the people, Intel was quick to make a full disclosure of what had happened. Lesson learned! Net attitude adopted!"

In addition to such examples and explications of the theoretical underpinnings of the information economy, Patrick offers remedies to firms seeking to get off the dime and get on the high road. It's a path well worth considering, especially given the antiquated alternative.