THE INTERNET

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The Internet, a global computer network which embraces millions of users all over the world, began in the United States in 1969 as a military experiment.

It was designed to survive a nuclear war. Information sent over internet takes the shortest path available from one computer to another.

Because of this, any two computers on the Internet will be able to stay in touch with each other as long as there is a single route between them. This technology is called packet switching.

Owing to this technology, if some computers on the network are knocked out (by a nuclear explosion, for example), information will just route around them. One such packet switching network already survived a war. It was the Iraqi computer network, which was not knocked out during the Gulf War.
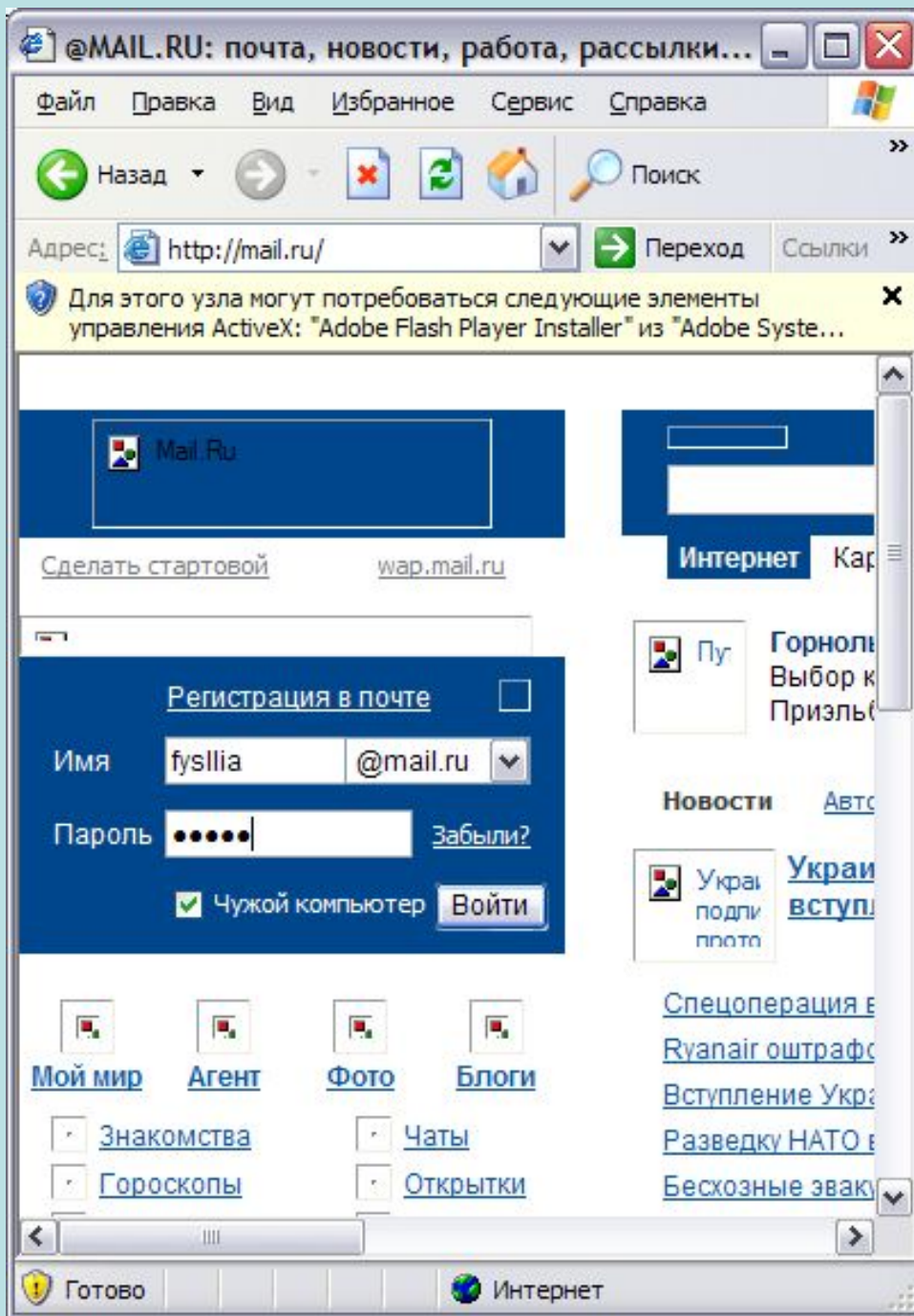
The most popular Internet service is e-mail. Most of the people, who have access to the Internet, use the network only for sending and receiving e-mail messages.

However, other popular services are available on the Internet: reading USENET News, using the World-Wide Web, telnet, FTP, and Gopher.
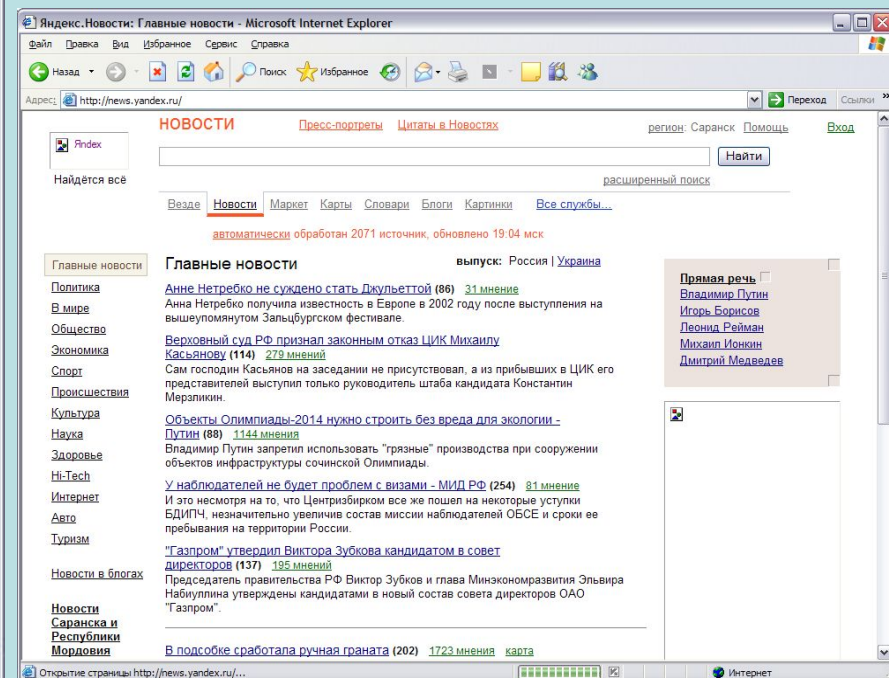
In many developing countries the Internet may provide businessmen with a reliable alternative to the expensive and unreliable telecommunications systems of these countries.

Commercial users can communicate over the Internet with the rest of the world and can do it very cheaply.

If people see that they can make money from the Internet, commercial use of this network will drastically increase. For example, some western architecture companies and garment centers already transmit their basic designs and concepts over the Internet into China, where they are reworked and refined by skilled - but inexpensive - Chinese computer-aided-design specialists.
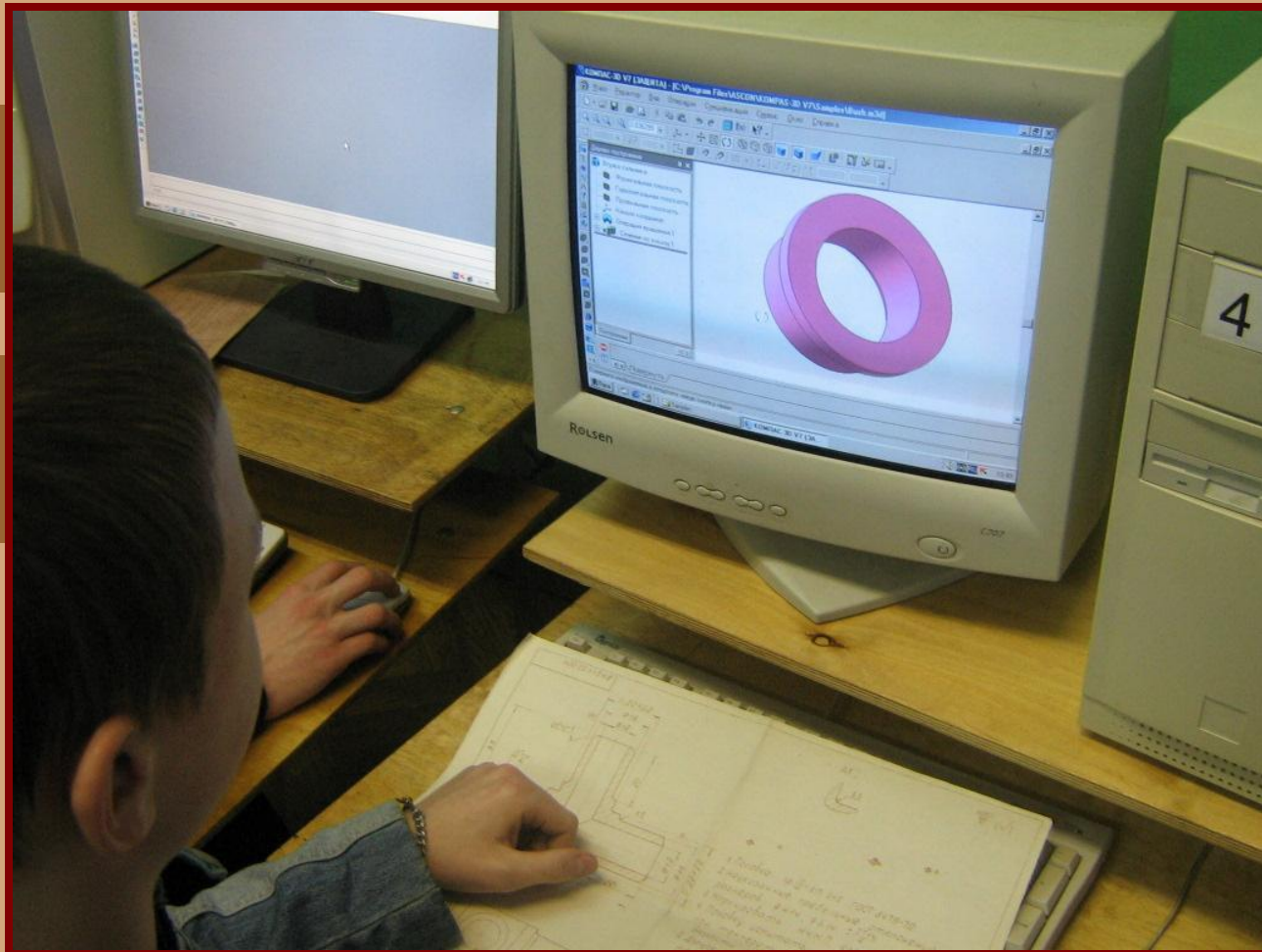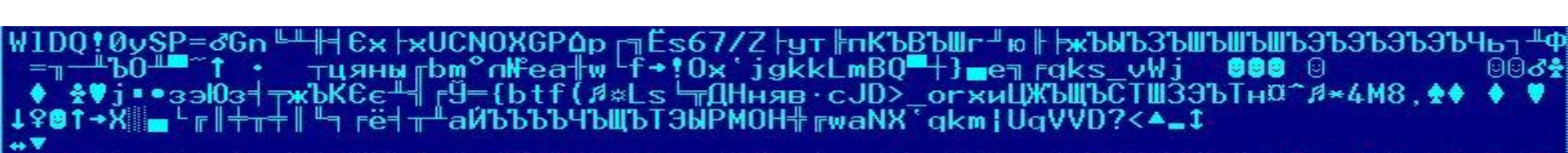
However, some problems remain. The most important is security. When you send an e-mail message to somebody, this message can travel through many different networks and computers. It is possible to get into any of computers along the route, intercept and even change the data being sent over the Internet. In spite of the fact that there are many strong encoding programs available, nearly all the information being sent over the internet is transmitted without any form of encoding, i.e. "in the clear". But when it becomes necessary to send important information over the network, these encoding programs may be useful.
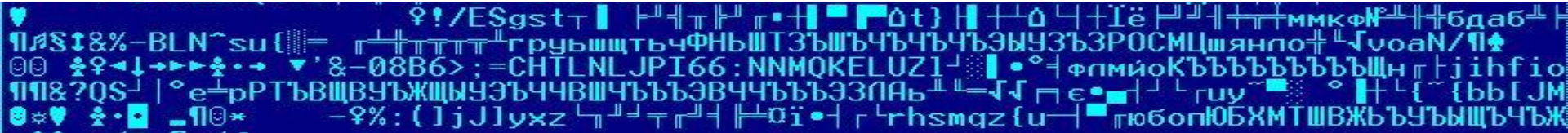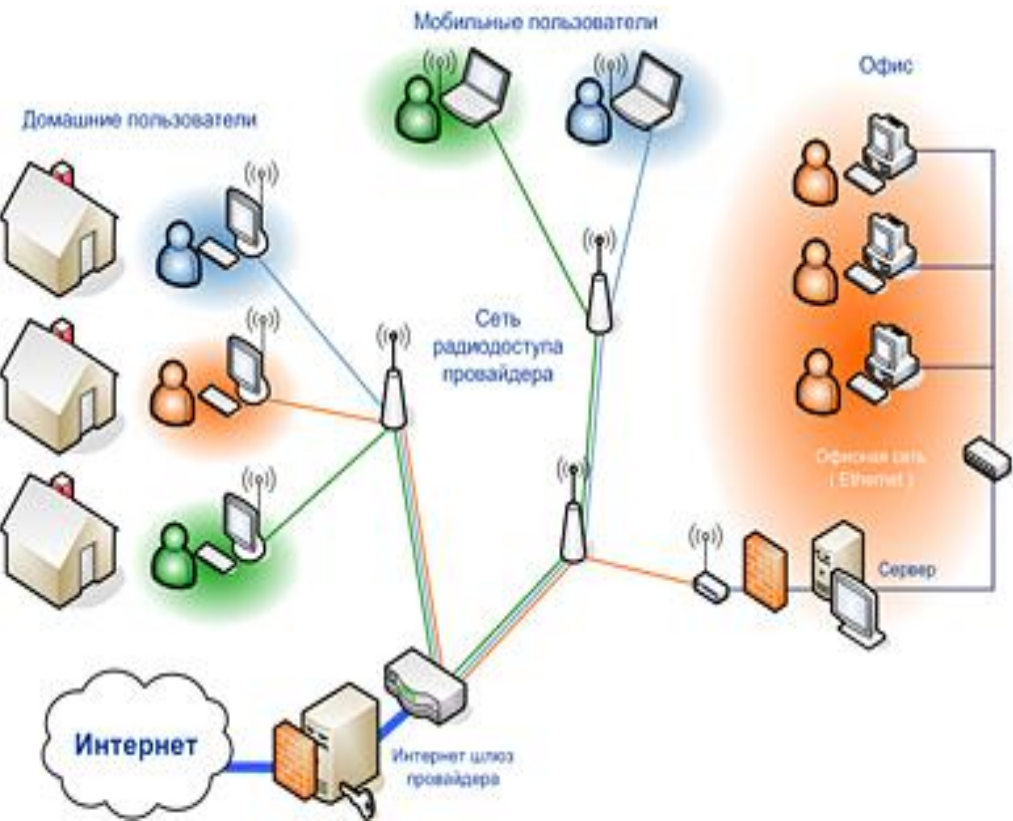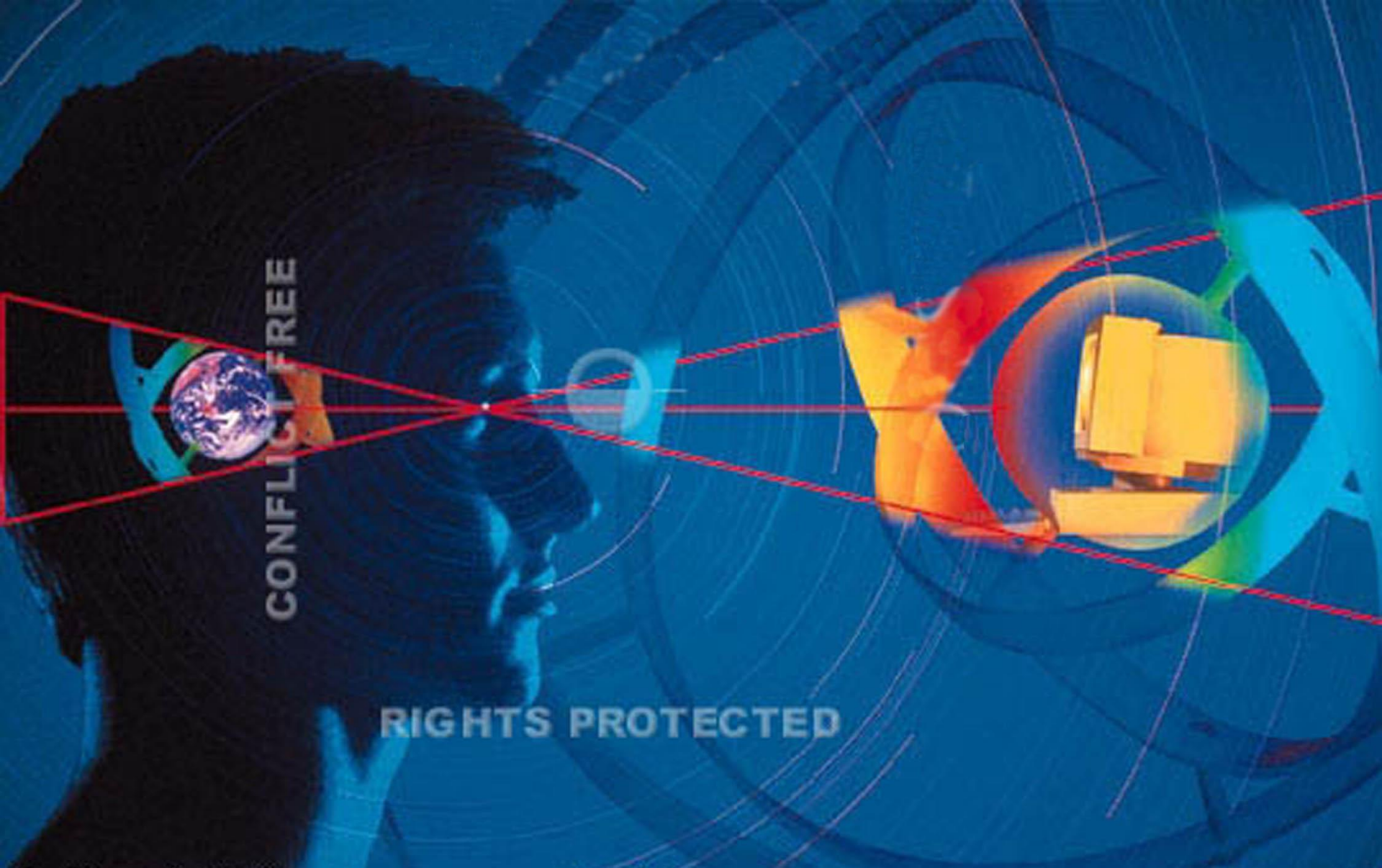
Some American banks and companies even conduct transactions over the Internet. However, there are still both commercial and technical problems, which will take time to be resolved.

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