

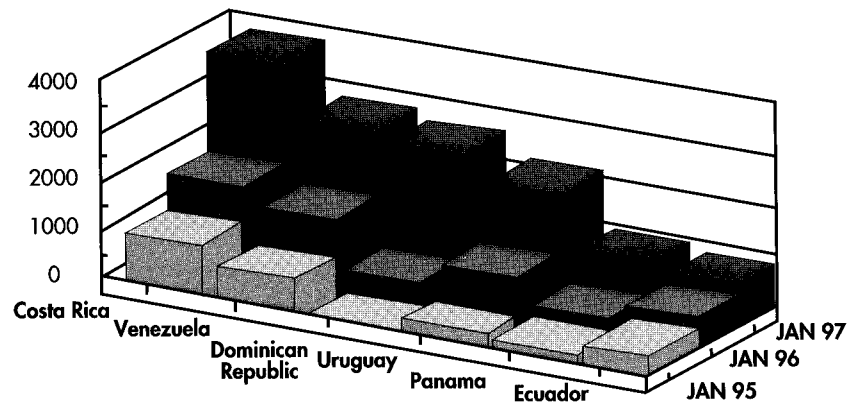
WIDENING THE WESTERN WEB

by Saúl Hahn

Computer networking in Latin America and the Caribbean has grown impressively during the past two years. According to recent statistics, some of these regional networks have had the highest rates of growth worldwide. And the Internet research company Network Wizards reports that ten nations of the region have more than one thousand hosts: 77,148 interconnected hosts in Brazil; 29,840 hosts in Mexico; 15,885 in Chile; 12,688 in Argentina; 9,054 in Colombia; 3,491 in Costa Rica; 5,192 in Peru; 2,417 in Venezuela; 2,301 in the Dominican Republic; and 1,823 in Uruguay.

Chile and Costa Rica have the largest number of connections in relation to their population, a number similar, in fact, to some European countries. The Peruvian network, Red Científica Peruana (RCP), a consortium of hundreds of institutions, became connected to the Internet in 1994 and is experiencing very rapid growth.

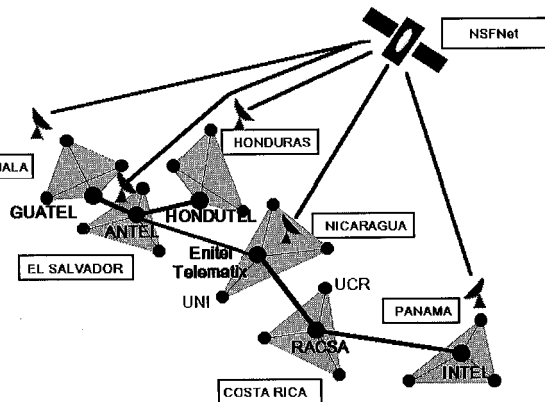
Growth of Hosts in Latin America and the Caribbean January 1995-97



	Costa Rica	Venezuela	Dominican Republic	Uruguay	Panama	Ecuador
JAN 95	798	529		172	17	325
JAN 96	1,495	1,165	139	626	148	504
JAN 97	3,491	2,417	2,301	1,823	751	590

Source: Network Wizards ([HTTP://WWW.NW.COM](http://www.nw.com))

Central America



The University of Costa Rica and the Costa Rican National Research Network (CRNet), which has a large number of affiliated Costa Rican educational and research users, has established Internet connections to the rest of the Central

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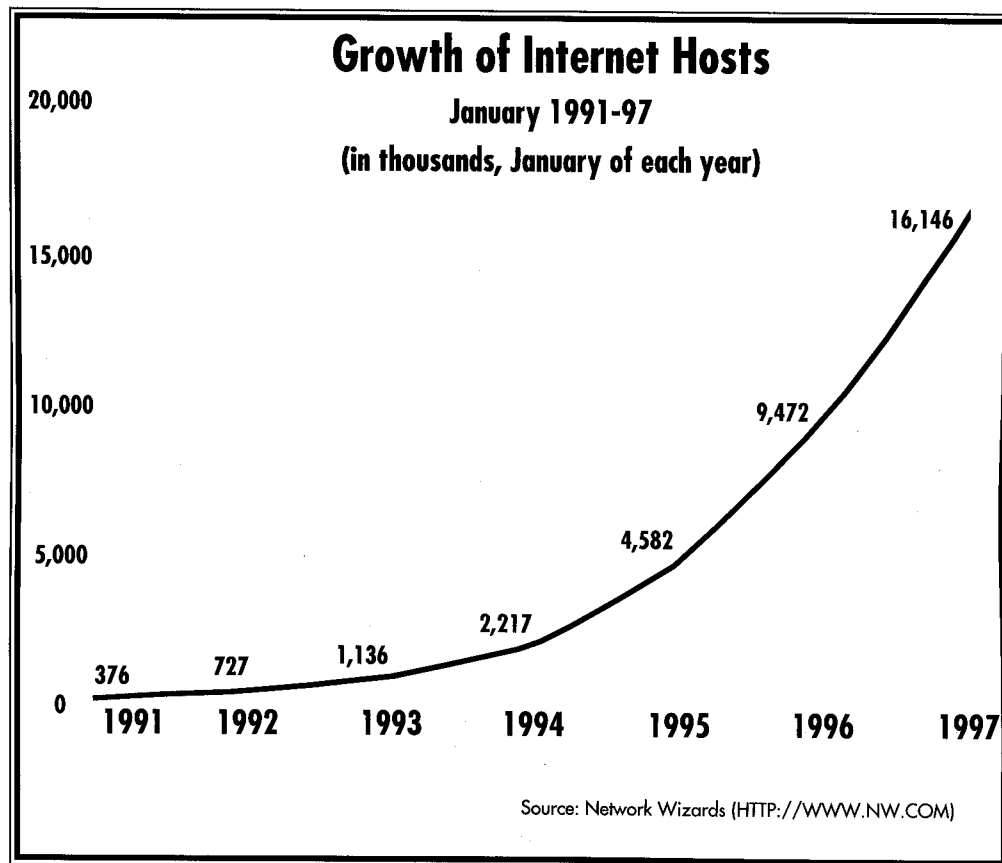
American nations, some of which have additional connections through direct satellite uplinks to the U.S. Following the recommendations of the Plan of Action that emanated from the Summit of the Americas, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE), the Costa Rican Ministry of Science and Technology, and CRNet recently agreed to interconnect the academic networks in Central America, using the

current infrastructure developed within the framework of the OAS Hemispheric-Wide Inter-University Scientific and Information Network (RedHUCyT). Recently, RedHUCyT provided an earth station for satellite communication, which will enhance the capability of CRNet.

The OAS General Assembly approved the RedHUCyT project in 1991, charging it with connecting member countries to the Internet and integrating an electronic network for the exchange of scientific and technological information among professors, researchers, and specialists at different universities. Substantial funding was provided by the U.S. and other member state governments.

Through the RedHUCyT project, the OAS helped local initiatives in the member states in either the creation or expansion of networks in their countries. The project provides high-tech equipment, technical support, and specialized training. In addition, RedHUCyT sponsors technical workshops and seminars in the region in order to improve skills, share knowledge, and train network managers. Close collaboration has been established with other agencies, particularly the U.S. National Science Foundation.

Today, all of the Latin American and most of the Caribbean countries are fully connected to the Internet, and the remainder will be connected soon. Some of these networks became national service providers with thousands of users.



However, the Summit's Plan of Action encourages further expansion of the telecommunications and information infrastructure, ensuring that the benefits of these technologies will be available to all members of our societies. The Plan of Action, building on the work of the RedHUCyT project, stresses that major universities, libraries, hospitals, and government agencies in all member states must have access to information networks.

The project is also particularly interested in fostering new, innovative developments and applications. For example, to increase and facilitate Internet communications between Latin American countries, a project called SLAB (Spatial Latin American Backbone) will be sponsored, which, with some additional equipment and modest investment, will allow a broader range of communications.

Through RedHUCyT, the OAS is now focusing on expanding the Internet by supporting the extension of

local area networks in order to provide the service to many more individuals. To this end, OAS member nations have allocated more than US\$1 million, to be disbursed through the OAS Inter-American Council for Integral Development. To match OAS contributions of training, equipment, and seed funding, the governments of the member states have made major investments in telecommunications. This facile and rapidly developing partnership will carry the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean along the information highway into the twenty-first century.