

Howard Tuckman: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The story is told of the police sergeant who was on his way to work in the morning and saw a pig wandering down the street. Being very frustrated at the idea of this pig disrupting traffic, he picked up his radio and called into the station and said, “I’d like you to send an officer out here to take the pig to the zoo.” The next morning he got to the police station, and parked right across the street from the station was a van. And in the van was the pig with its snout hanging out and looking across the street. The sergeant, in some degree of distress, walked into the station and said, “I thought I gave instructions for this pig to be taken to the zoo.” The people in the precinct said, “Yes. And he had such a good time that today we’re taking him to the art museum.”

I always thought there was a message in that story. I think the message is that we take communication very much for granted as long as it works.

One of the very fascinating things about this session today is that we’re going to be talking about communication in a very different form. You really can’t live in a society like ours today without being barraged constantly with the notion of the Internet and what it can do for you and what it can do for society. And if that doesn’t bewilder you enough, along come the “dot-bombs.” And the dot-bombs are accompanied by all sorts of questions about whether we have put too much faith in the Internet.

I was asked about a year ago to contribute a chapter to a volume which is put out every 10 years called “The Handbook for the Nonprofit Sector.” I started out to do research on the effects of commercialization of the nonprofit sector, and the more deeply I got into it, the more I realized that it was a sector that was totally ignored, and that that was the commercialization that was going on over the Internet.

And so I began to almost arbitrarily visit nonprofit websites. As my research and my interest deepened with each excursion, I came to the conclusion that we have faced a revolution that’s gone on in front of our noses – just like those pig snouts – and we were not even realizing what was going on.

So when this conference came up, I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity, particularly for those who are doing research in the area, or those who are practitioners in the area, to do a reality check and figure out how much of this is hype and how much of this is very real.

INDEPENDENT SECTOR has done a marvelous job of putting together a very eclectic group, if I may introduce the group in that fashion. They come from very different backgrounds; they have very different perspectives. We spent the last hour culling through their presentations to make sure that they don’t overlap. And the question that I posed to all of these people is a question that I’ve heard from this group in the morning and again at lunch. And that is not simply generalizations about what the Internet does, but specifics of what can you learn, what can you take away about the goods and the bads of participating in the Internet as a nonprofit.

We have an interesting order. We’re going to start first with Larry Kirkman, who’s the president of the Benton Foundation. Larry will give you a very interesting sense of the Internet as a portal for nonprofit organizations. I think he’ll share with many of you for the first time knowledge about a portal that actually gives you access in a very significant way to over 850 worldwide nonprofits.

We’ll switch from there to talk with Bill Galston. Bill is a professor and director of the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy at the University of Maryland, and he will give you a theoretical perspective that I suspect will differ from Larry’s, and hopefully blend into what will become a very interesting discussion.

We’ll then hear from Vinay Bhagat, CEO of Convio. He indeed has worked with a number of nonprofits and will be doing a very interesting PowerPoint presentation that I think you’ll find will be well worth taking notes on.

And finally Edward Lang, who assures me that he has done this once or twice before and also has quite a fascinating PowerPoint presentation.

Let’s have our first speaker – Larry Kirkland, president of the Benton Foundation.