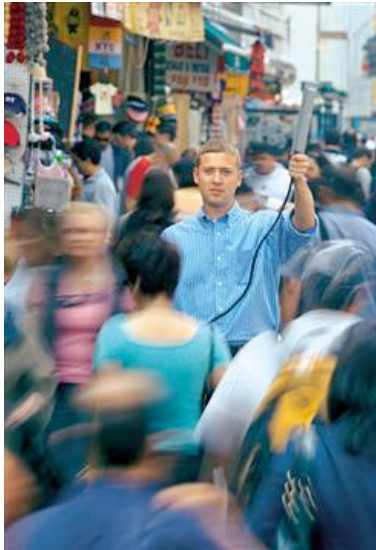




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Ethan Hill for Newsweek For the masses: Anthony Townsend

A Few Who Got Us Here

When most people in the tech business were focusing on selling stuff on the Net, some were thinking outside the box

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June 7 issue - We know Bill Gates as the father of Windows, Steve Jobs as the man behind the iPod and Sergey Brin and Larry Page as the geeks who brought us Google. When it comes to the new wireless revolution, however, many of its pioneers aren't even as well known as "American Idol" reject William Hung. Here is an eclectic mix of communications gurus who helped transform our lives.

ANTHONY TOWNSEND COFOUNDER, NYCWIRELESS

Like many ideas that changed the world, this one began on a college campus. As a graduate student in urban planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the late '90s, Anthony

Townsend, through his friends at MIT's renowned Media Lab, became turned on to the possibilities of what we know today as Wi-Fi. On his return to New York City in 2000, Townsend became obsessed with the idea of free, shared wireless connectivity in public spaces. A year later he and a dozen other like-minded New Yorkers founded a nonprofit called NYCwireless, cajoling coffee shops, office buildings and neighborhood parks into making Wi-Fi signals freely available to the unplugged masses. "We got the initial idea from groups in other cities," says Townsend. "But our unique contribution

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was staking a claim to the wireless mind-share of public spaces. We were afraid that commercial companies would do it first, but if we could stake our claim to places like Bryant Park, they wouldn't be able to. Just as park benches and drinking fountains are free, we felt we could turn Wi-Fi into a public amenity."

Bryant Park, behind the New York Public Library, became NYCwireless's most visible success. Townsend and another founder, Marcos Lara, approached the park's directors and convinced them that it would be the perfect place to launch a public wireless network. Today scores of students and office workers on lunch breaks sit on benches and surf the Web in the noonday sun.

 NEWSWEEK ON AIR | 5/30/04

Next Frontiers I: The Wireless Revolution
Steven Levy, NEWSWEEK technology columnist, and **Anthony Townsend**, co-founder, NYC Wireles

- Listen to the audio
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But for Townsend, now 30, that's old hat. As public Wi-Fi access has taken off around the globe, he's focused on bigger issues. He and

NYCwireless are lobbying the FCC to gain public access to unused parts of the radio spectrum. They're raising awareness of security flaws in Wi-Fi. And they're encouraging gearheads to come up with more compelling uses for wireless. "What's shocking to me is that there are almost no local applications for Wi-Fi," says Townsend. "Right now the killer app is accessing the Net. We're looking for interesting things to do with Wi-Fi that help build local communities, not help people escape them." The revolution, it seems, will be digitized.

MIKE LAZARIDIS PRESIDENT AND CO-CEO, RIM LTD.

Mike Lazaridis was up in the middle of the night with his newborn son when the idea struck: wouldn't it be great if parents could check their work e-mail while they were at home, on a business trip or even coaching a Little League game? It was back in 1995, and Lazaridis, the president and CEO of Research in Motion, a nine-year-old company that specialized in the then tiny niche market of wireless data transmission, started scribbling. Three years later he had another new baby to share with the world. He called it the BlackBerry (a corporate-branding expert suggested the name, in part because the keys looked a little like berry seeds)—and e-mail has never been the same.

Lazaridis's interest in wireless began in high school in the late 1970s, when his electronics teacher advised him not to get too "distracted" by computers, which were then in their infancy. "He thought the future was in wireless," says Lazaridis, now 43, "and the real key would be in combining the two technologies." At the University of Waterloo in Ontario, he became fascinated with the idea of e-mail. "Even then I understood that it was going to become a dominant form of communication," he says. "It linked people in different time zones when it was convenient for them."

LIVE VOTE

Has wireless technology improved your life?

- Yes. I love being connected all the time
- No. I feel like I'm always working
- I don't have any wireless technology

Vote to see results

Just a month before graduation, Lazaridis dropped out. With a \$15,000 loan from his Greek-immigrant parents and a small government grant, he and a friend launched RIM and got to work on

wireless data transmission. RIM went public in 1997, the year before the BlackBerry hit the market. With his midnight dream now a reality, Lazaridis can manage his wireless empire from the sidelines of a soccer game—or wherever else in the world he might



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LEE KI TAE
PRESIDENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS, SAMSUNG

With a military background in communications, Lee Ki Tae naturally gravitated toward Samsung's transistor-radio division when he joined the company in 1971. A decade later, as color-television sales boomed, most of his colleagues switched to what they saw as the wave of the future. But Lee stuck with radio, which he saw as his "destiny"—and thus was in a perfect position to take over Samsung's cell-phone division, just in time for it to become one of the company's most important products.

Lee, 55, weathered some difficult times. The low point was in 1995, when chairman Lee Kun Hee, disturbed by reports of quality problems, ordered the public burning of 150,000 brand-new Samsung phones. Since then Lee Ki Tae's division has emerged as a worldwide leader in cell-phone quality and technology. The company has roughly 12 percent of the world market, behind only Nokia and Motorola.

With a near-captive domestic market in cell-phone-crazed South Korea, Samsung has been able to engineer, test and roll out new features before many of its competitors do, and to command a premium price for its phones as well. It was the first company to introduce cell phones with televisions, cameras, camcorders and MP3 players. The company is still scrambling to stay ahead of the curve, envisioning a future in which the cell phone "will no longer be a phone," as Lee puts it, but "the hub of all gadgets, for watching television, listening to music or surfing the Internet." Of course, makers of notebook computers and handheld communicators think the same thing, but as far as Lee believes, the cell phone has already won the war.

RAJIV MODY
CHAIRMAN, SASKEN LTD.

The next time a New Yorker dials 911 on a cell phone and his location pops up on the emergency operator's screen, the caller should thank an unassuming software engineer thousands of miles away in Ban-galore, India. The man is 46-year-old Rajiv Mody, founder and chairman of Sasken Ltd., one of the world's leading providers of wireless-communications software. When Japan's NEC looked for a way to provide two-way wireless video-conferencing, it turned to Sasken, and so have companies like Ericsson, Intel and Sharp as they sought to upgrade their products' multimedia capabilities.

This icon of Indian technology was founded, oddly enough, in a Silicon Valley garage, on about \$40,000 of Mody's savings. Two years later, in 1991, Mody—who was born in Gujarat state and educated at Brooklyn Polytechnic—moved his fledging company to Bangalore, a daring step at a time when Indian bureaucracy and currency regulations laid down a formidable barrier to international business. But it gave him an edge in hiring the best graduates of India's technical universities, and helped infuse Sasken with an austere corporate culture. Everyone works in identical cubicles and flies coach class—modesty inspired by Mody's two great heroes, Mahatma Gandhi and Warren Buffett. Austere but, at the same time, ferocious: "Everybody in this country has fire in his or her belly," Mody says. "We have a great future before us."

Reporting by N'Gai Croal, Elisa Williams, Sudip Mazumdar and B. J. Lee

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