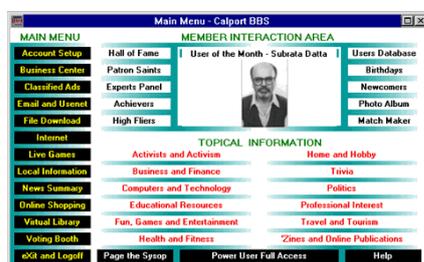


Calport BBS - in Kolkata, India since 1994

A public access Bulletin Board System launched in Kolkata, India in 1994. Originally based on [Waffle](#), Calport BBS was the first to offer [RFC #822](#) compliant internet email, usenet news and file downloads to users in eastern India.

The BBS was accessed over dial-up [modem](#) via a [DOS](#) / Windows text based [terminal emulator](#). Winmail, a [UUCP](#) based [off-line reader](#), could also be used by those who were accessing the service over long-distance calls or did not have an [error-correcting](#) modem - Winmail would dial into the BBS (and more often than not, keep redialing while the phone line was busy), login via a script, download email and usenet newsfeeds, upload replies and log off within seconds; the user could then read and reply to messages offline.



This workflow offered by Calport BBS was more convenient for users than the always-need-to-be-online terminal emulator based internet offered by ISPs such as VSNL in the years 1995 to 2000 - VSNL users were expected to read email and compose replies online using a relatively primitive and difficult to use text interface, on PSTN lines which would frequently cause a 'drop carrier' (the state owned telco would insert a beep every three minutes, causing modems to hiccup or worse) and with power utilities using the practice of 'load shedding' to cut off electricity to city blocks willy nilly. These were challenging times to run an online service in India.

Telecom Charges in India in the 1990's

India had one of the highest telephone charges (and lowest tele-densities) in the world.

Call type	Unit charge	Per hour charge
Local call	Rs. 1 per 3 min	Rs. 20
Long distance call	Rs. 60 per min	Rs. 3600
International long distance call	Rs. 100 per min	Rs. 6000

The undocumented history of internet in India

Calport BBS was started a few months after [Shamit khemka's](#) Live Wire BBS, which was the first to operate in this part of the world. Online services were beginning to pop up all over India in the late '90s and [Suchit Nanda's Live Wire BBS](#) in Mumbai - the first public access Bulletin Board System in India - acted as the Fidonet hub to which many BBSs connected and exchanged news and mail, thereby creating India's first

online community. As a result of this, there was a group of people all over India who were able to communicate with each other via private email and public Fidonet posts just by logging into a BBS local to their city. Each BBS in turn would connect to Suchit Nanda's Live Wire BBS which would act like a central post office and facilitate the sorting and delivery of messages to the appropriate BBS in India and indeed to any Fidonet enabled BBS user in the world.

The online community in India prior to the advent of the dial-up internet services offered by VSNL in 1995 was limited to a set of geeky affluent Indians but was nevertheless widespread and vibrant. Unfortunately, this early chapter of the history of internet in India has not been documented in any of the news reports, magazine articles and (singleton) book written on the subject.

List of BBS's in India

[+]

Rise and fall of Calport BBS

Niel Hirjee, Sysop of Calport BBS was mentioned in [Arun Katiyar's](#) article, [Wiring into the World](#), published on July 31, 1994. Started as a public access BBS on a single phone line, it grew quickly in terms of users, phone lines and downstream hubs in Kolkata and various cities in Eastern India. Calport BBS made it to the January 1996 [US BBS List](#), the [IAPS map of UUCP sitemames](#) as `uunet!nwnexus!calport!` and was listed in [NSRC's Connectivity Providers Database](#) in May 1998.

Soon after, as the dotcom bubble of 2000 was beginning to form, Calport BBS was mentioned in the book "Global Road Warrior" by Sibylla Putzi. Indian newspapers and magazines variously featured the BBS and business was booming due to Calport's unique selling proposition of low cost offline email - the killer app of the internet. Thanks are due to [Anurag Jalan](#), sysop of another BBS in Kolkata who donated a 4 port i/o card from his own BBS before he moved to Mumbai; Siddhartha Lodha who handed over CDs containing shareware after he closed down his BBS to manage the family business. The spirit of sysops sharing knowledge and resources, as was the norm in the US, was very evident in India as well.

Calport BBS was upgraded to [PowerBBS](#) in 1999 and offered users a GUI based interface: a big thing in those days. Additionally users could access tcp/ip based internet, play multi-user online games and do what is today known as ecommerce. Sandeep Nowlakra's Fillers was the first business to get listed on Calport BBS and Kolkata had its first online pizza delivery with Fillers Pizza. KC Das, the legendary sweetmeat shop and inventor of the [rosogolla](#), would follow soon after, as would a number of other businesses.

At its zenith Calport had 29 points of presence in various cities in eastern India serving about 6000 users before Government of India regulations, which required a licence fee of Rs. 1 and bank guarantee of Rs. 10 million, forced it to cease acting as a public access BBS.

Calport BBS is still online and can be accessed via a JavaScript based terminal emulator running in a web browser but is rarely used anymore, even by its Sysop, Niel Hirjee.

Some myths and false claims about Indian internet history

Every wannabe dotcom in India during the days of the global dotcom bubble would claim to be the 'first' or the 'only' in India to be able to offer a certain service. This was easy to spot in the advertisements which they would publish from the amazing amount of funding which they would raise in those heady days.

Surprisingly, even today Rediff.com claims that theirs is "the first website domain name registered in India

in 1996" on the [Rediff Wikipedia page](#) - however Shomit Khemka's lwbbs.com was registered a full year earlier, in 1995 and Suchit Nanda's lwbbs.net shortly thereafter.

Calport's first domain, indiax.com was registered on 16 January 1996, before Rediff.com was registered and here is the proof:

<https://www.networksolutions.com/whois/results.jsp?domain=indiax.com>

And with that another Indian internet myth is busted: so is it indiax.com which is today the oldest surviving dotcom domain name which was registered by an Indian entity?