



## Profiles in Computing

### **Ronald O. Brown**

President, Ronald O. Brown Consulting  
Casco, ME, USA

#### **Education:**

BSEE (with distinction), University of Maine, Orono ME  
MSEE, Tufts University, Medford MA  
PhD, Queen's University at Kingston, Kingston  
Ontario

**Advice to students:** Two important points: 1) There is no such thing as an unimportant course. 2) Always define the whole problem; otherwise, the laws of unintended consequences will ensnare you.



**Q: Please describe your path to becoming the computing professional you are today.**

**A:** I'm a IT systems engineer, that is I look at the whole issue and integrate the parts. I don't specialize in any particular subsystem, like the computer, network, etc. My spark was lit in a 1961 undergrad class in communications where I learned about speech, hearing, information, computers, and voice, data, and image telecommunications and communications; and business processes. I went on to receive my doctorate in electrical engineering. As a systems engineer, I integrate all of these to make a working system. I first used the cloud in 1979 presentation and implemented the world's first CLEC in 1983. I'm having a great ride!

**Q: Please describe a computing-related work project of which you are most proud.**

**A:** Tough question. There are several candidates, but the winner is conceiving, designing, and directing the implementation of the world's first Competitive Local Exchange (telephone) Company, CLEC, as well as the first all digital synchronous network that converged voice, data, and image communications. After conceiving it, I designed it. I demonstrated that it would work to the customer, Westinghouse Electric. I showed that it would be cost effective. I had to overcome both technical challenges and political ones. For example, a letter from the President of Bell of Pennsylvania stating it would not work. But we completed it on schedule and under budget, and it was a financial success. In 1983, it was the first convergence of voice, data, and image communications and computers. It was the beginning of the cloud!

**Q: What are your hobbies/ interests/ passions beyond working in computing?**

**A:** I'm old enough to retire, but I still take on a few projects a year as an expert in patent, anti-trust, contracts, and other civil matters. I am active in the IEEE, STEM education development, and the Maine Technology Users Group where I direct a STEM scholarship program. I thoroughly enjoy it. I live in a log cabin on a (drinkable) lake and also take time for a myriad of activities! I water ski, sail, and swim in the summer; ice skate, snowshoe, and ski in the winter; then too, there's the symphony and art museum. Most important are five grandchildren whom I see as often as possible. Life is full! Life is good!