

# INTERNET AND CHANGE



## DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE

By Barry Cassidy

I have previously written about the internet bringing people closer together than ever. Social media lets us know people's every move. It is now possible to let Google know your location, have amazon send all your needs through prime membership, or put your address phone number and birthdate on Facebook so all your "friends" know. We have become reliant on our electronic information stream and to form our social networks.

People today expect you to answer an email as soon as you get it. I have been traveling and not paying attention to my phone other than using the Bluetooth function to my car radio. I answer something like four hours later and I already have a second email asking why I did not respond to the first email.

Yesterday I was reading about a magnetic reversal flip in the poles and how it is overdue. Normally we have one every 450,000 years, and the Matuyama-Brunhes reversal occurred about 780,000 years ago. The article did make the point that the cosmic radiation may knock out some communications satellites, perhaps for an extended period. If that were to happen a whole generation will be lost.

Everything that they remember will be wiped away, bringing us back to life in a simpler time. Information will be on a slow-down, and the age of instant information will be wiped away for a while. It would be like it was before we had the computer and cell phones. I think some would have a hard time adapting. Someone like me would have an advantage, because the know-how that has been ascertained by my generation

ends when the last one of my generation dies, because no one does it that way anymore. It is the generation who learned to first write with a pen you dipped in the inkwell on your desk.

In a way I would like to equate the use of electronics to the invention of the cotton gin, which was the first improvement in removing seeds from cotton since the 16th century. That led to more cotton being produced into cloth, but it also created more demand for cotton pickers, and although unintended, created a larger slave trade into the United States. The skill that was lost was the use of the 16th century technology. I am sure for hundreds of years that knowledge was key to a successful enterprise in cotton.

The instant communications through electronic means has done a lot to our society. A modern-day potentially unintended consequence is that every one looks at their phones with more frequency. Even if you are looking at pictures you have seen 100 times, but you have nothing else to do but check them out again. These were times that perhaps we would otherwise interact with people around us, and get to know them better.

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**DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE**

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It is like we know people now, but in many cases, we really know them more electronically than personally. Your "personal friends" can be merged with your "work friends" because they are people you double up with personal and electronic contact. It makes for a strong pull, maybe not to every one of the group, but probably some of them make that leap — Someone like Sue from Accounting who helped with a payroll issue and posts a lot of items about the Italian cooking.

Here is a recent example: I order my eye-glass frames from London England. I like a certain brand and they are bespoke (to your order). I found this company and communicated with Ben. I had some issues with my optometrist's lab losing my newly ordered frames. So, I had the lab contact Ben to order a replacement. I had a little more contact with Ben than the usual guy at a mail order place. When I went to England I thought I would stop by the place and meet Ben and order a couple of pairs of glasses. I could not do that because it is a factory and they do not do business that way.

I looked online in London for an eye-wear store near my hotel. I found one about two blocks away and met Richard Simms. Richard had worked for that eye-glass company that made my glasses, and he was forthcoming concerning his love for the product. Then I mentioned Ben, and he knew Ben, and we talked about Ben, but really Ben was my electronic acquaintance. But we did go on and on and I made my order and they refurbished my existing frames to make sure they were operating correctly.

When I went to my Facebook page, I realized that I have a lot of friends that I have no idea about them personally, but I certainly know what they think. Are they laid back and sending kitten videos, or are they politically opinionated in one way or another? What made me think was that I knew if their mother died, or if their kid was having a birthday. Personally, knowing someone as a causal friend, I would not know most of that stuff. I would have personal face to face time, but we may only talk about sports or the weather.

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The electronic friends, which may be friends of friends on Facebook whom I have not met personally at all, I know more about their lives.

There is a difference developing on how we know people today from when I was growing up. I think there will be a different way of relating from one individual to another in the future. It is already taking place, and a lot of interpersonal skills will change.

If the communications system goes down or is limited for a long time, I believe that there will be a disorientation which will lead to the partial collapse of society — Not only in our lifestyle and work environment, but also in the way we relate to people. Instant gratification would be on a delayed basis, and personal behavior rests on the experience of reinforcement and punishment. Someone would have blocked goal attainment because of the lack of information normally found on online social media areas which would be seriously slashed.

You can already see the attempts to change the lexicon through social media. I stopped using the term “retarded” in

August after the Pennsylvania State regulations changed it. But up until this past August, it still was the official term of the regulations governing their well-being. As actions are condemned by groups working together, we see behavior changes, so the reward and punishment is already at work. The lack of that guidance would be devastating to society as we know it.

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