Legacy of the Information Age

Every era of human history is designated by an "age," such as the Iron Age, the Industrial Age, the Space Age, and the Age of Flared Pants and Shirt Lapels Big Enough to Shade Municipal Stadiums. How will our age be remembered by future historians? What earth-changing creations of our era will take place alongside the wheel, the printing press, the factory, the telephone, and stone-washed jeans?

The namesake invention of our era should be so pervasive that it affects the way we work, play, and think. And the winner becomes painfully self-evident to me as I type this column on my *word processor* in preparation to *E-mail* it to our *Webmaster:* We'll be remembered as the Age of Multilevel Marketing Schemes. I tell you, it's the wave of the future, taking advantage of the vast network of family and friends you already have and providing almost limitless opportunities to anger and alienate them—although they'll someday thank you when their hard work blossoms into never-ending wealth for some schmuck two levels above you.

However, my grandparents have been around for nearly a century, and they believe the biggest invention of their lifetimes—even ahead of television, the airplane, and "The Clapper"—has been the computer. They may have a point. It's hard to appreciate what an impact they've had on society (computers, not my grandparents) without stepping back and imagining how key historical periods would have been altered if the players had had the benefits of computers:

Martin Luther: I hath thrice E-mailed thee without response. Art thou hastily printing my Biblical translation?

Johannes Gutenberg: Nay, I art ensnared in a game of Mule Simulator II. Didst thou send thy file?

Luther: Thou hast not seen it? I hath sent it erenow a fortnight!

Gutenberg: Perchance my mail server doth have the palsy anew. Lo, a half moon aforehence I hath received a scrip that I couldst not readeth, for verily it wert not properly unencoded.

Luther: Must I nail the scrip to thy door? I shall sendeth a new copyeth so thou canst printeth in hasteth!

Gutenberg: Have not a heifer! Lo, I am bound to take respite from my toils at present, for my press art incompatible with "Parchment 1495." I awaiteth a hardware upgrade and a beta of "Parchment 1500."

Luther: The Reformation canst not wait! When wilt it arrive?

Gutenberg: Perchance decades. After all, I dieth in 1468.

Luther: Forsooth! Thou dost yield the ghost 15 years before my very birth. 'Tis truly vexing we chance to speak!

Gutenberg: Yea. And shouldn't we be speaking German?

So you can see why we owe such a debt of gratitude to computers. For example, the above exchange demonstrates how computers enhance our effectiveness in one of the most critical aspects of business: having a believable excuse for not getting stuff done.

The old technology just wasn't working right. Receptionists always blather to annoying clients that they left the phone message "right on your chair." The postal service has become too reliable for anyone to believe "the check is in the mail." So we were long overdue for the powerful alibis computers provide:

"Our E-mail is down."

"My voice mail system erased your message."

"My dog ate my network password."

"Our E-mail ate your network."

"Your voice mail erased my dog."

We all experience these problems from time to time, so people believe us. And with no humans in the electronic loop, these excuses are tough to disprove.

I'd share other ways computers improve our lives, but unfortunately, a virus scrambled them on my hard drive—which demonstrates the need for *reliable* computers you can buy from people you *trust.* There's a huge untapped market for this type of buying—the path to financial independence! If you get in on the ground floor now by selling reasonably priced computer products to your family and friends (and get them to sell to their friends, and so on), I guarantee that you'll soon have nothing to do but kick back on your new yacht and tell your forklift driver where to deposit the morning's usual incoming bale of $100 bills.

Send $100 in care of this journal, and I'll forward information on this exciting opportunity just as soon as I cash your check—that is, unless my E-mail server gets the palsy. If you experience delays, just leave me a voice mail.   – Lorin May

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