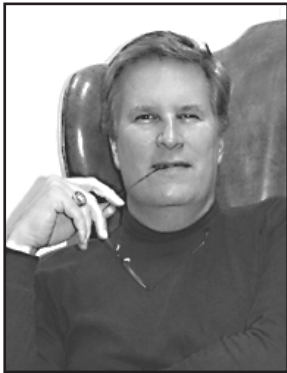


GRAND TOUR

Bully Pulpit

By Bruce W. Cook



TECHNOLOGY IS NOT SO GREAT. Not really. How many times do you end a conversation on a cell phone and call the person back on a land line. Why? So you can hear. Funny thing – you want to hear! Meanwhile, land lines are becoming more obsolete and the phone companies are concerned over lost revenue

and the shift to overall cell usage. Lost revenue? Most folks used to pay one phone bill, and even with long distance charges the monthly usage was somewhat predictable and the cost could be budgeted. Now we have multiple bills, charges that are impossible to understand, let alone question, and the cost of communication can be through the roof if one is not very careful about cell programs and options. And, if your child also has a cell – because every ten year old must for safety reasons – you just might be text messaged into Chapter 11 if guidelines for use are not strictly enforced.

Then there is the fabulous world of computers. Weren't they supposed to reduce and ultimately eliminate paper? Wrong. International Paper stockholders are clipping coupons because we now have messages coming across electronically, backed up by paper. And, just in case the computer message doesn't reach you, a fax may come your way as well.

We should not, I suppose, rail against the computer. They have brought the world closer. What would society be like without internet dating? Some studies opine that more than half of computer internet usage is devoted to pornographic sites. We've all heard that. Some of us have probably heard that little fact while logging on to one of our favorites. Have you checked out *ménageatrios.com*? If you've missed that one, perhaps your 13-year-old son and his friends can fill you in.

The worst part, in my very humble view, is that computer technology has made dialogue with a real person concerning a business matter somewhat of a challenge. Correcting a credit card error, or trying to resolve a shipping mistake on an item ordered from a catalog, booking airline reservations or seeking consumer repair advice on electronic products, including the computer, can lead to years of psychotherapy over the sheer frustration of the experience. Have you ever spent hours on the phone speaking to someone in India, Pakistan or Malaysia attempting to find out why your computer printer is producing copies in Martian?

Technology has made the world run faster. It has not necessarily made it run better. Not yet. Many will disagree, citing all

sorts of examples, especially in science, medicine, and many fields of research, where technology has led to miracles. We would not be in space without technology. We would not have nuclear power. Capital One Credit cards would not be in every household in America and Viagra would not be spreading love worldwide.

In the race to be first, technology has helped to foster the return of the Machiavellian era. The end justifies the means, unless you get caught. Our students are graduating high school and college unable to draft a decent letter, let alone write something of substance. Plagiarism is rampant in schools and in the professional arena. Pull the data off the computer, move it around, present it as your own. Who cares? It's fast, it's easy, it's cheap. And it's fraud. Famous writers have been caught borrowing from the www. What does that say to students? Unfortunately, it says don't get caught.

What is possibly worse is the fact that many people accept what comes off the web as absolute fact. In this brave new Google world, we have turned everything in life into something of a COSTCO model of existence. Get what you want faster, bigger, cheaper. And get it now.

Judgment has gone out the window in favor of the game. And the game is everywhere. Not long ago, leaders predicted and witnessed the demise of communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere under the weight and pressure of the free market in global society. Today our free market, consumer-driven democracy is in danger of destruction because of the evanescence of decency and diligence in the race for riches. First is only better if it comes with the reward of true accomplishment. And that takes hard work, talent, intelligence and all the other ingredients that make human endeavor on any level worthwhile.

Perhaps technology is not the problem. Technology is really amazing, or can be, or has the potential to be. Yet technology is no better or worse than the people creating it and using it. We need to reform the practices and procedures of our present technological model. We need to demand excellence. We need to foster a climate of integrity in academic, business and personal relationships associated with technology. We need to find humanity in the brave new world of computers, robots and marvels to come. I guess technology is not the problem after all. People are. And people are really hard to fix. **GT**

Bruce Cook is the creator of Grand Tour Magazine. He is a twice-weekly columnist for the Los Angeles Times/Daily Pilot, and serves as Editor of the prestigious Bay Window Magazine. Cook has been heard on San Diego radio for the past five years, and is an Emmy nominated television writer and producer responsible for such programs as Entertainment Tonight.