

Cutting through the net

I thought I was becoming solidly fossilized in the era of pen and paper until my parents bought a PC and had it hooked-up. Suddenly I was online, wired, surfing the net, buzzword, buzzword, buzzword...

Previously, I was as pure an internet virgin as you can get, and nowadays they're a rare creature. With the constant barrage of pro-internet propaganda, not believing in the internet is akin to an Orwellian thought-crime. Television, our cultural dictator, tells us that to be hip and happy we don't need friends or family, just a modem.

Broadcast news relentlessly plugs the internet, disguising fluff as serious news. And although these stories about new websites and online high schools make easy filler, such mindless flogging is a journalistic cop out.

A further annoyance is the blindness of internet coverage. All of the "Rah-rah-rah! Don't we live in such an advanced society?" kind of reporting is misleading. If little Timmy's school gets onto the internet, we get wonderful stories about how Timmy can go online with students all over the world.

Never mind that Timmy's reading and writing skills are atrocious. Never mind that he has trouble relating and interacting with other children and never mind that Timmy is poorly clothed and malnourished. At least while the other kids are eating, Timmy can forget his hunger by checking-out some cool websites.

Granted, I'm being a little melodramatic, but my point is that we're confusing technological progress with societal

progress. Engineers and inventors provide us with advanced toys that shield us from the knowledge that we are less educated, less prosperous and as a result, less intelligent than previous generations.

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Technology is wonderful. Knowing how to operate technology does not make us wonderful.

In spite of everything, I'm not a backward clinging grouch. Before the mainstream media swamped me with net-hype, I was open minded about the internet and technology in general. I can still, if prodded, admit that e-mail has an endless array of practical applications — its speed and paper-free ease are a communications triumph.

For most people, however, e-mail is a novelty, not a necessity. Professors who insist that assignments be submitted by e-mail (and who aren't computer science profs) give me a rash. E-mail saves paper, but I doubt they're always as environmentally con-

scious — e-mail just happens to be kinda nifty.

I'm lucky not to be swamped by all the forwarded chain letters and electronic junk mail that people are so fond of sending one another. Nothing says "I'm

thinking of you...but I can't be bothered to write anything myself" better than forwarded e-mail.

I've had some close calls with technology. In my first year, an over-zealous computer lab employee signed me up for an e-mail account after I inquired about word processing. I tried to tell her that I didn't want e-mail or the internet.

"Yes you do," she insisted. "Everybody does."

Three years later I would succumb to the pressure, and willingly surf the internet's placid waters.

formation in recorded history. Anybody and their uncle can create a website and fill it with whatever trivial, sophomoric or commercial garbage they please. I support freedom of expression, but if your expression is garbage, don't expect me to sit around and smell it.

Sure the internet has a few pluses. It's educational — but I'm still partial to real libraries, real books and real life experience. It has chatrooms full of people who enjoy sitting home on Saturday nights, and you can find as many conspiracy/coverup theories as your paranoid brain can handle. Last but not least there's porn — easy access, without the awkward inconvenience of going to the newsstand. If only I was still 12...

During my stay in cyberspace the hidden gems I constantly hear about were a little too well hidden and I was left thoroughly unimpressed. Hunting through thousands of poorly-produced websites in search of info on my favourite athlete, or a nude photo of the chick from the X-files isn't worth the effort.

So why do people produce such idiotic websites, and why do they think anyone will read

them? I'm more than a little fed up with people trying to push this stuff on me. Check out this editorial at Gazette online at <http://is2.dal.ca/~gazette/home.html>.

ANDREW SIMPSON

If only Oscar Wilde could see us today. We have access to the most elaborate collection of useless information in recorded history.

Oscar Wilde wrote, "It is a sad thing that nowadays there is so little useless information."

If only Oscar could see us today. We have access to the most elaborate collection of useless in-

Due to the impending break the Gazette will not be publishing an edition next week. **Sorry.** But we just don't feel like it. Be sure to catch our next issue on March 6, 1996. **Don't cry.**

letters

Immature student

I was surprised to read the rather immature letter from NB in the Gazette on January 9. Is this person a university student? Is s/he not aware of the well-documented relationship between head injuries and not wearing a bicycle helmet? As a confirmed city bicyclist in most weather (not fresh snow or ice because of the extra dangers from car drivers) I wouldn't ride without a helmet.

A quick lit search on medicine revealed a wealth of studies from Australia, Canada, Holland, Israel, New Zealand, the USA and the UK. Effectiveness studies in journals like JAMA, Sport Medicine, Paediatrics, Trauma, Public Health and, more to the point, the Morbid Mortality Weekly Review! Without exception, the results of prospective cohort studies, case control studies, reports on successes of community bicycle helmet campaigns, and cost effectiveness studies looking at mandating helmets and the perceived cost to individuals conclude that bicycle helmets are an important safety idea that reduce the severity and incidence of head injuries in bicycle accidents.

Lock your helmet to your bike; sweating on a 30 degree day happens whether one wears a helmet or not, small price to pay for protection. And never mention a study without a reference! The same debate occurred when seat belt legislation was tabled! Personal decision indeed. The problem is, we all pay for the cost of the emergency health care.

So I urge readers to call and write to their MLAs and also the Spinal Cord Injury Prevention Association — and give full support to the passage of legislation that would encourage bicyclists to practice safe biking!

Frances Jamieson

Naive Karen

After laughing our heads off at your "bubble world" (Gazette, Feb. 13) we decided that in the spirit of responsibility we really should respond to your puritan ideas of what IDS students are all about. Have you even seen these Pepsi-drinking, leather-wearing, coffee-buying, tobacco-inhaling, paper-using, resource-depleting, real live students? Welcome to the world. IDS is not a religion, nor is it a way of life — for that you may want to try something along the lines of Hinduism. Last time we checked there was no morality requirement for IDS.

Understanding that we can in no way speak for the IDA, the Department, or the students (the real, live, IDS students), what we can do is give you a dose of reality. Your assessment of that multinational world is correct, we'll give you that, but here's what you missed: we all live in it. Yes, we learn, read, talk, and complain about the world, MNCs, the IMF, the World Bank, structural adjustment and nuclear war, and yes, it is all bad, and yes, we should not associate ourselves with anything remotely connected to the destruction of our planet, environment, world, people or pets. When did you see IDS students sewing their own clothes in a cooperative?

You ask, "What does IDS have in common with a pub crawl?" What does any department have in common with a pub crawl? Is it more acceptable for other students to engage in such activities only because you assume they don't know or care? Are IDS students solely responsible for correcting all the wrongs in the world?

Anyways, we are having a movie night in March, we will be using technology — would shadow puppets be more appropriate?

As the Guinean proverb goes, "One Camel does not make fun of the other camel's hump."

Sara Siebert & Nalini Naidoo

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Letters may be edited for length above 300 words and we reserve the right to edit commentary.

All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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