

# Toilet-training the Internet

Some call it a bringer of knowledge, peace and democracy; others (myself included) call it the most boring subject in the world. It is the Internet and it is suffering a serious case of over-exposure.

Whether in print or on television, the Internet has become a favourite subject for news editors and producers. Apparently, audiences are still failing to acknowledge the Internet's ability to deliver us from the tedium of yesterday into the point-and-click utopia of tomorrow. Fortunately, we have journalists who have resolved to flog us daily with the inevitability of Internet domination.

Vapid stories about new applications, websites, modems, and what they all mean to our future, are featured regularly in the "news". And shows with names like "The Technology File" (or perhaps "The Technophile") are common.

There is no denying the Internet's many attributes, but reporters who theorize about the Internet's affect on our future are joining a long and distinguished line of failed prophets. In 30 years (watch me prophesize) we will look back on the journalists of today and enjoy their naiveté, the same way we now enjoy vintage news reports about the future of the amphibian car, the flying car, the miracle of polyester, or the wonders of radio.

Certainly the Internet will outlive polyester (which by the way is virtually indestructible), and no doubt it will change our lives more than a beige leisure suit ever could, but the current hype must someday die. Many people once predicted radio would change the world and it did, to some extent, until television blew it out of the water.

The advent of television brought similar excitement.

Modern science has invented the ultimate combination of audio and visual entertainment; and then they found a way to add colour, and don't forget stereo sound. Television cruised for several decades, becoming more and more prominent in our culture until, in the 1980s, it mushroomed into the cable-TV

## Editorial

monster it is today.

Technology mixed with culture, matures in skewered and unusual ways. Imagining the future is fine if you're George Orwell, but far too many journalists insist on having their kick at the can.

In an attack on *Wired* magazine (a publication dedicated entirely to predictions about our happy, liberated computer-driven future) in the Dec. 22 issue of the *Globe and Mail*, the *Globe's* Doug Saunders writes of the magazine's prognostication: "The future, after all, has none of the organic texture of the past or present. It won't sue you for libel, it isn't subject to fact checking and it can't be quoted. In short, it makes for lousy journalism."

Lousy journalism indeed, whether it's predictions of future glory or some re-hashed tale about a funky grandma with her own website — it's all shit.

Needing to find some sort of tangible proof that the Internet is garnering more than its share of media coverage, I sauntered over to the Killam Library to do a little research. There in the reference room I found the Canadian Business and Current Affairs database (watch me use a computer) which contains listings of the articles which have appeared in publications like the

*Halifax Chronicle Herald*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Globe and Mail* and just about any Canadian periodical you can think of. Limiting my search to the most recent and up-to-date years available, 1995 and 96, I did keyword searches for a few random words; every story with the keyword in its headline or synopsis counted as a hit. My method may have been crude, but the results are interesting:

- Taxes: 5, 846 hits — a narrow winner.
- Internet: 5, 826 hits — not the all-out victory I had expected, but a respectable showing.
- Education: 5, 825 hits — just one less than internet.
- Sex: 1, 692 hits — I really thought sex could be a contender.
- Healthcare: 168 — I found this staggeringly low.

It is quite likely that today the number of Internet stories has continued to climb. They are boring, excessive and borderline silly stories. But the media will continue to squawk and flap their wings until the Internet becomes as commonplace as radios or televisions.

In the December issue of *SPY* magazine, Daniel Radosh put together a compendium of ridiculous pronouncements by newspapers about the Internet coming of age.

Wrote Radosh about his list: "Genuinely mature media — newspapers, television, sidewalk preachers — do not inspire incessant stories about their maturity. The Internet, on the other hand, is like a toddler proudly hailed as a big boy every time he goes potty with slightly less mess than expected."

I wish I said that.

ANDREW SIMPSON

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Student Union Building, Dalhousie University, 6136 University Ave. rm 312, Halifax, NS, B3H 4J2.  
editorial tel. 902 494-2507, facsimile 902 494-8890, e-mail. GAZETTE@is2.dal.ca

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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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# Letters

## Real British culture

To the editor,

In response to Robert Speirs' letter to the editor ("Good Riddance to lies" — Jan. 8, 1998), Speirs' letters should be filed away in a dusty brown folder marked "correspondence from goobers". Mr. Speirs makes several disjointed, semi-literate attacks against Stephen Ellis' letter and produces very little evidence to support his arguments.

He asserts that "The British culture has proven to be the most civilised culture". According to who? Ask Italians who endured the rampaging of English soccer hooligans during the 1992 World Cup about British culture. Perhaps we should examine some British exports to gauge British culture. Neither "The Benny Hill Show" nor The Sex Pistols exemplify the characteristic of civility that Mr. Speirs attributes to British culture.

However, I am sure that Mr. Speirs is an accomplished social anthropologist who could substantiate his claims given the chance. If he does get that chance I would like to see him discuss his claim that "Britain civilised much of the world" and compare that to my contention that Britain oppressed indigenous peoples worldwide and destroyed their ways of life in pursuit of spurious, egotistical visions of world conquest.

The second statement that troubles me is Mr. Speirs contention that Mr. Ellis should be thankful that "Britain civilised much of the world" because Mr. Speirs assumes that Mr. Ellis is of British ancestry because of his last name. What kind of logic is that? My last name is British, should I be thankful? I am not actually of British descent so should I still be thankful?

If we judge people solely by their last names am I forced to conclude that people named Speirs are not the sharpest pencils in the pack? This would follow my personal experience that every Speirs I have ever seen published in a newspaper is an idiot. To conclude I would like to quote SCTV's Queen Haters' song "I Hate the Bloody Queen"; "I hate the bloody queen/she taxes me to death and I can't afford me dope."

MICHAEL HOLLINGER

## About the "meal plan joke"

To the editor,

In response to the "Meal Plan Joke" (Jan. 8, 1998) letter submitted by Kari Jones, I have a few words to say to Kari and fellow picky eaters who do not realize how good they have it.

I have lived in Howe Hall for two years and I admit that I was not the most receptive student to this new feeding environment, but at least I did something about it. I not only "fed" my complaints to the appropriate people, I gave positive suggestions and asked for what I wanted. And for the most part I got it.

Thanks to the efforts of many dissatisfied students (not unlike yourself), committees have formed to ameliorate the obvious problem

associated with trying to feed 1200 mouths and make everyone as happy as possible. For your information there is a food and environment committee that meets regularly with the purpose of representing student views on food, to the food services. Other efforts have been held in the past that focused on student health, variety and service, and with this input they revised the menu.

With my math ability I figured out that for \$9.07 you get three meals a day, dishes washed, a paid staff that cooks, serves and cleans up for you and food costs covered. Not to mention that you are getting reimbursed \$124, (based on 31 weeks at four dollars/week), for missed meals. For nine dollars a day to be served a well balanced meal and get cleaned up after is quite a deal. Wait until you live off campus and spend at least an hour a day shopping, cooking and cleaning up after yourself.

Besides, have you seen some of the options at other universities? My little sister is in her first year at McMaster and her choices for dinner are grease, grease or grease. At least here, if you make the effort, you can eat healthy food. And if the fruit was not washed properly that one day, tell someone or wash it your lazy self.

Compared to two years ago, you have a lot more variety (grab and go breakfast, self serve, bagels galore, and more choice overall). If you want spice ask for it on the side; most people will not share your individual taste for seasoning and some are even allergic to it.

Regarding your comment that you did not expect "Mama's home cooking", I must ask, "What did you expect?" You are not in Kansas anymore. If you love your tongue, go to your house food representative to lodge your complaints and make suggestions on what you would like to see in your cafeteria.

Speaking from experience, Beaver (now known as Cara) staff bend over backwards to try and please students (vegetarians, allergies, late meals, boxed lunches, dietary requests, birthdays etc.). The food supervisors have even made personal trips to special stores in order to please their customers.

Cara Foods is a food service, they do not practice mind reading. Maybe if you quit your complaining and do something about a situation that you have to fashion communication goes a long way. And just maybe, your mouth will be filled with food you find enjoyable instead of hot air.

ANDREA SMITH  
Ex-Howe Hall Food  
and Environment Chairperson

## Misplaced Holocaust Gallery

To the editor,

Well, it's 1998 and Happy New Year! At this time of year I begin to reflect upon happier moments of the past year. However, when I look back on the Canadian War Museum, I am shocked, appalled and thoroughly disgusted.

I am referring to the planned addition of a Holocaust Gallery at the War Museum. As part of the Operation Legacy program that is