

Generation Web

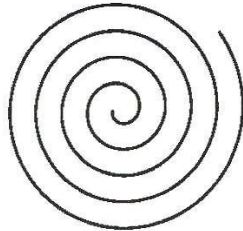
Part 1: A new revolution?

Introduction

In this series of articles I want to survey the phenomenon of the internet, thinking particularly about how it affects young people.

Many people are saying that we are living through a revolution. That the changes that are unfolding around us at present are as momentous as such a key moment in history as the industrial revolution. Are they right?

If it is a big turning point in human history, one of the things that characterises it is the acceleration of the pace of change. It is as if our forward journey is a spiral, and the turns are getting tighter and tighter, and change is happening faster and faster.



The pace of change

The world's first programmable digital computer was secretly built during World War 2 at Bletchley Park. That's comfortably within one human lifetime. Since then, their complexity and influence has grown at an exponential rate.

There is in computing something called Moore's Law, which states that the number of transistors that can be placed inexpensively on an integrated circuit has doubled approximately every two years. Gordon Moore, one of the co-founders of Intel, the silicon chip manufacturers, made this prediction in a paper written in 1965. Up to today, it still holds true.

If I'd invented a computer back in 1965 with the intention of helping God to deliver on one of his promises – to count the hairs on our heads – and my first prototype could count, say 100 hairs a minute, then if I'd been able to improve it in line with Moore's law, I would now have something that could count the hairs on every

person's head on the planet, not just in a minute, but once every second.

I'd have something that I might just be able to sell to God, in order to give his recording angels the day off.

Disruptive technology.

Every now and then there comes along a new invention that makes such an impact on human life that things are never the same again. Here's an example.

The printing press.

When Johan Gutenberg found a new use for a wine-press in the 15th century, he started a revolution. The Chinese had invented the printing press nearly 800 years earlier, but it didn't change their culture, because their alphabet was too complicated. Our simpler code of just 26 symbols arranged in different ways, combined with the ability to make one original and then print off an indefinite number of copies led to an explosion. Together they amounted to a disruptive technology.

It actually changed the way people thought. It gave birth to the logical, ordered way of thinking that our Western society has flourished under, right up until the post-modern influence began last century.

And now, another marriage of two technologies has given birth to a disruptive technology. When Sir Tim Berners-Lee combined the visual element of television with the communication power of the telephone, and invented the World Wide Web, another disruptive technology was born.

No longer do we think in such logical, straight-line ways. Images have taken over from words. To see what I mean, think for a moment how these words affect you.

The girl is sad.

Now turn the page and look at the picture, and think again about the affect that it has.



While the basic content of the image is the same as that conveyed by the printed words, the impact is, for most of us, radically different. So, even if a picture isn't worth a thousand words, it's certainly worth a thousand feelings.

So – feelings, emotions, images and impressions are beginning to supersede ideas, arguments, propositions and debates. Our technology is changing us.

Next month, we'll take a closer look at some aspects of this technology, and the new lifestyles it is beginning to create.

Rev Nick Sharp

'Open house, open mind'

There are many people who have joined the congregation at All Saints in recent months, and some who have been with us many years, who have expressed interest in an informal discussion group to explore, or re-explore some of the basic elements of Christian belief and lifestyle.

Gerry Booker has kindly offered the use of his living room for four Monday evenings in June and July, starting at 8pm:

June 14th and 28th, July 12th and 26th

and he and I will happily chip in the fruits of our experience and studies wherever it seems helpful.

However, the idea is to seek and learn together in an open atmosphere, with no 'right answers'. Each evening would have a

general theme, and if you are interested in joining, we would encourage you to let Jo, Gerry or myself know (quite confidentially) if there is a particular area you would like to talk about - there's nothing off limits. Here are a few ideas that we might use to get started:

Jesus - Great Guy or God; what does he mean to you?

What do I 'have to' believe?

'It ain't what you do.....' ethics, morality and faith.

Red, yellow, blue, green - how can faith fit in to the world of politics and economics? (a nice topical one after the election)

Praise and prayer - what are we trying to say to God?

None of these needs to take up a whole evening on its own, we'll let the agenda go wherever you want to take it. And if it all goes well, we'll have some more meetings in the Autumn.

Please let Gerry, Jo or myself know if you are interested (it's always handy to have a rough idea of numbers), or ask us if you want to know more.

Geoff Oates

