

# Information technologies essay sample



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Information and communication technologies have significantly altered the ways in which we work and live. They have changed practice at both the individual and institutional level. Many of us have come to rely on certain technologies, such as email, mobile phone technologies, e-commerce etc. Having vast quantities of information at our fingertips has become a way of life. We are able, at the click of a mouse to keep up to date with current events, discover that hard to find article for an assignment or communicate in real-time via text, audio, video or all of the above, with colleagues, friends and strangers from around the globe.

In short, information technologies and the Internet specifically, have become powerful agents for change and the exciting part is – the development and continued evolution of this amazing technology has occurred in our lifetime. We are actually part of the making of history, every day, with our online interactions and we have the opportunity to engage actively and intelligently in this evolutionary process. Any evolution requires a past, and to be active intelligent users of the Internet, one thus requires an understanding of the history of this technology.

The term ‘ information technology’ in the past, has referred to the computer on a desk in a workplace. Computers were used in these environments as a tool – a typewriter, calculator or storage device. The relative expense of computers prevented many people from using them in their homes, when a typewriter would perform the same task at a fraction of the cost. The advent of email triggered a gradual change in the perception of computers merely as a ‘ glorified typewriter’. Computers now began to have some of the qualities of a communication medium as email was more widely embraced.

With the subsequent development and expansion of the Internet, computers came to be seen as ‘media’. Information and news is broadcast on the Internet, similar to television, and consequently has the potential to reach a much wider audience than was the case with email. It is this broadcast quality that has put information technology into a similar category as the mediums of radio and television. People now talk about the Internet and computers in terms of a ‘communication and information technology’ (Kitchen, 1998).

The Internet had its beginnings with the development of the packet switching concept by Paul Baran from Rand in 1962. Tim Berners Lee’s development of the “Hypertext Markup Language” in 1990 was a significant development and I remember that! I was working in the computer industry all through the 1990s and witnessed my office connecting to the Internet for the first time. You don’t feel the same sense of familiarity with the history of Australia for instance. Captain Cook is no longer alive and you certainly can’t email him and get a response! The dream behind the Web is of a common information space in which we communicate by sharing information. ” (Berners Lee, n. d. ).

The Internet is seen by many to be a virtual informational sphere (Kitchen, 1998; Mann, 2001; McQuivey, 1996). In fact, it is dependent on the transmission of information. According to Jordan (1999), information is the key to power, but how do we access the enormous wealth of information available on the Internet, find the information we need? The answer lies, to a fundamental extent, in our abilities to Search, retrieve, filter, organize and store this information.

I had always suspected that Search was not just about Google or Yahoo. I now realize that it is of critical importance for advanced Internet users to understand how search engines function and to develop skills in advanced methods of searching for information. Using Boolean terms in search queries, or using advanced search features (if available), exploring a variety of search engines to perform individual searches and discovering ways to plumb the deep or hidden web, are amongst the lessons I have learned. All information is not equal on the Internet.

By applying advanced knowledge about ‘ searching’ to the quest for information, the advanced user of the Internet can more rapidly and precisely, sift the valuable information from the less valuable (Concept 29). Intelligent Internet users evaluate the way they actively acquire information. Just as importantly, one must guard against the very real possibility of information overload by learning to categorize and organize their own personal libraries (Concept 32). Blogs are a communication and information tool that I’d never previously considered before the commencement of this unit.

I have discovered they are an extraordinarily powerful medium for communication of thoughts and ideas, and for gathering and collating information from a variety of news sources. The use of RSS feeds, as a tool for reducing information overload cannot be underemphasized! Without having to visit innumerable websites on a daily basis to catch up on news, topical articles or merely information of interest, RSS feeds allow the Advanced Internet user to browse the topics and click only on those required.

As RSS feeds and similar technologies continue to evolve, so too does the power of the advanced Internet user. Not only is the internet a nexus of information, but it is important to realize that it is a hub of communication. As many theorists argue, Cyberspace has provided society with a new community space in which, ultralistically, “ all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force or station of birth” (Barlow, February 8th 1996). The way in which we communicate has fundamentally changed with the advent of the Internet.

Email, Usenet, bulletin boards, forums, mailing lists and chat rooms provide a means by which people can realistically become active participants (and not merely remain passive citizens) of the global community (Kitchen, 1998). By examining these many different forms of communication in cyberspace, and the ethics of Internet communication (net etiquette) I have become more aware of my own identity and the way this identity is constructed within cyberspace. Communication within cyberspace takes place behind the computer screen, without the visual cues and vocal expression you have with real-time conversations.

As such, when communicating via email, in chat rooms, discussion boards, newsgroups and the like, an understanding of the way in which communication in cyberspace is structured is critical. “ The Internet imposes responsibility on all its users to be both effective ‘ speakers’ and ‘ listeners’, who are each aware of the differences between internet chat and face-to-face communication and who compensate for the learnt preference of humans for a communication style that involves gestures, intonations etc

that cannot be directly transmitted over the net” (Concept 18)(Advanced Internet User Skills: Concepts document).

Having said that, smileys and emoticons are ways in which people have attempted to compensate for the lack of facial expression and intonations in cyberspace. After examining topics such as Net Etiquette, email, newsgroups etc. and having evaluated the way in which I, personally, communicate on the Internet, email still remains my primary method of communication. Although I had a play with chat rooms and newsgroups as part of this course, there were several things about them I didn't like.

In chat rooms, where, like in other forms of cyber-communication, identity is constructed, I felt uncomfortable 'chatting' to the constructed identities of real people! Had I been bold enough to construct my own identity (I could be male/female, white/black, a shy retiring individual or an outgoing party animal), chat rooms may have been more interesting. However, I could probably (given more leisure time) get right into MUDs and MOOs. I found the free newsgroups to be full of spam, often pornography, and flame wars between various participants.

After many hours of search and observation, I found nothing that would inspire me to become a part of these particular online communities. Nardi and O'Day (1999) view information and communication technology as “ a lively human, intensely social place, even if it incorporates very advanced technologies. It has many different resources and materials and allows for individual proclivities and interests” (p. 52) – in essence an information 'ecology'.

As technologies such as the Internet continue to develop and become more entrenched in work environments, schools and homes, the people using these technologies have the opportunity to become actively engaged in this evolution. It is a continual process and must not stop at the end of this unit of study. To be active, intelligent Internet users, it is vital to continually reinvent oneself – to find new ways of doing things, be informed, and be a designer or producer if you like, rather than merely a consumer of information.