

# Essay on interactive communications in society



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BUSTER**

It is a pleasure to be here today and be part of such a distinguished panel. What I'd like to do in the time allotted is to share some thoughts on the influence of technology on learning in high schools. But first let me make clear what I'm talking about. The technology that is shaping our future and our children's is not, as many assume, the computer. These machines have been with us for decades and now, with their advanced multimedia capability, they deserve considerable credit for enhancing learning among people of all ages. But I propose that there is an even greater technology on the rise.

I am speaking about the new and emerging forms of interactive communications, such as the Internet, that allow us to capitalize on our greatest learning resource -? the minds of people all over the globe. We are just beginning to experience the impact of this connection of people to people, and can only guess how transforming its effects will be in the coming years. I also contend, however, that if we make the right choices now, we can substantially change for the better how we and our children learn, and more important, how the young people of today and generations to come are taught to learn.

To succeed at that task requires a concerted and coordinated effort -? a partnership if you will -? among our families, schools, youth organizations, and communities say that because I am mindful that technology itself is never the reason things change. Rather, it is how people choose to apply technology and whether they make wise decisions and address real needs that makes the difference in the long. There is a quote learned and here I quote: The real power of interactive communications is people as the ultimate source of knowledge.

It is not the computers, the physical mass of wires, the complex of networks or the vast databases of information. Rather, it is people and their knowledge, relationships, insights, and spirit freely passed from one to another that engender the "magic" the Internet is making possible. Today, of this interconnected world that the fundamental question is whether we will share this "magic" with everyone, or only a privileged few. The answer depends on the decisions we make and the actions we take from this moment on.

We must come to understand that access to the Internet needs to be a reality for all our citizens, that the free and unrestricted flow of information and the ready availability of computers for everyone are not simply matters of "technology." They are, in fact, one of the vital keys that will either open or lock the doors of opportunity for our children and ourselves. It is within our power to determine whether this generation is to experience the rewards of silverberry, a higher quality of life, and a renewed sense of community that derive from an interactive sharing of information and knowledge.

If we make that leap, and ensure that every citizen has access to the Internet and the chance to learn the skills to apply these new technologies for personal advancement as well as the common good, America will make a successful transition to the millennium. If we fail, we may leave a legacy smaller than our own inheritance. We can get involved with the New Technologies. Make it a priority. I imagine that getting access to networked computers and finding opportunities for practice and training on the Internet may not be easy for many of you.

Investigate local community centers, nonprofit organizations, even corporations, who sometimes make space and courses available to the public. Or you might consider buying a recycled computer. Ask around. But don't give up. Because once you have experienced what I'm talking about -? instant access to information you can use and people with shared interests you'll begin to understand the power of this communications revolution. My friends experience demonstrate to me that, the Internet is a rueful tool for invigorating real communities, not just for building virtual ones.

Charlotte Web's success in using communications technology to enrich the lives of an entire region, including the undeserved, so that everyone can participate more fully in community life, should inspire other cities and regions to embark on similar ventures. As a bright woman once told us, we need to ensure our children a head start in a difficult and forbidding world.