

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Technological revolution

Everyone knows we've had a technological revolution in recent decades, but you've probably had to live through it to fully appreciate it.

When I started as a reporter at The Mercury in 1971, we were still using manual typewriters. We would paste each page we wrote together with rubber cement in a scroll and send it upstairs to the composing room on a little dumbwaiter.

Keyboard specialists in the composing room would then retype every word using enormous machines called linotypes, which turned out blocks of type in lead.

Our only research resource was old newspaper clippings filed away in envelopes.

If you wanted information, you called people on the phone and asked them questions. If you wanted a document, you asked someone to mail it to you, or you got it in person.

By the end of the 1970s, staffers were using computers which had only keyboards and attached screens with green letters and numbers. No mouse. The mainframe was in the composing room, where whatever you wrote would come out in film. You could not use the computer to receive information except for news provided by the Associated Press.

In 1988, I bought my first personal home computer. It was agonizingly slow by today's standards and could only hold a small amount of information. Still no mouse.

We installed equipment at The Mercury that allowed me to transmit an article written on my home computer to the composing room using a dedicated phone line. Wow!

Meanwhile, if I needed to research something, I would drive to the library at West Chester University. I could spend all afternoon looking for specific information and not find it.

The rise of the Internet was truly transformative. By the end of the 1990s, an enormous amount of information could be found on the web, facili-

tated by powerful search engines like Google.

Email allowed anyone with a computer to send and receive messages to people all over the globe — practically free.

Cell phones allowed people to talk to others anywhere, any time, and these evolved into smart phones that enabled users to also send text messages or emails, or to look up information on the web just as they could on a computer.

Meanwhile, Google Earth began offering seamless color satellite imagery of the entire planet, and today Street View shows ground-level images along streets and roads in almost all developed countries.

From its beginnings in 2005, YouTube, the video sharing site, has grown to 100 million video views per day. Tutorial programs like Khan Academy, lectures, and documentaries cover every conceivable topic.

With the proliferation of easily accessible information, it is remarkable how similar the public school classrooms of today function in comparison to 1971, when I was plugging away on my manual typewriter.

At all grade levels, there might be a lot less lecturing and a lot more coaching. Kids can now get information on their own, but the need for guidance is greater than ever.

Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.



Commentary by
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TECHNOLOGY has revolutionized our ability to obtain and transmit enormous quantities of information, anywhere, anytime.