

BLOGGED DOWN

THE CANADIAN IT MANAGER'S BLOG

"Surely one of the top issues has been the same for more than 20 years: the production of reliable software. The solution to this problem has to be shared by business as well as by academic programs . . . Business shares part of the blame for the problem by using developers who are not well qualified, by encouraging procedures that emphasize fast production at the expense of quality, and by releasing software that has not been adequately validated."

— Dr. A. Joseph Turner
Professor Emeritus
Clemson University

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Web has opened new avenues

Maclean's article claiming 'the Internet sucks' overlooks the new ways in which the Web has allowed businesses and individuals to communicate with each other

The last time our company Internet and e-mail went down, many of our editors and reporters fled for home where they could once again be connected.

For most of us, there was no point in staying at our desks — without access to e-mail and the Internet, it was virtually impossible for us to do our jobs. We couldn't look up information for our stories or receive or send pertinent e-mails.

In a few years, the tools which journalists and many other workers rely on to do their jobs have been completely transformed, all thanks to the Internet. By going home and back online, we could not only connect to the outside world, but we could remain connected to each other and continue to collaborate. Without the Internet, we were seriously hindered.

But as far as Steve Maich is concerned, "the Internet sucks." In the cover story of the Oct. 30 issue of *Maclean's*, the author writes that the Internet is little better than a refuge for "cranks, liars and perverts"



Poonam Khanna

and that it is far from being the revolutionary technology that luminaries once claimed it would be.

His article, "Pornography, gambling, lies, theft and terrorism: The Internet sucks," goes on to say the Web is the place "where the masses indulge their darkest vices (and) pirates of all kinds troll for victims."

Other than encouraging people to explore their sinister side, the Internet doesn't really have much to offer, according to Maich, who draws on the works of Robert Gordon, an economics professor at Northwestern University: "It has produced precious little that is really new." It was the

telegraph that shortened distances, and e-mails only replace faxes and phone calls, Maich argues.

No doubt there are people for whom the Internet is an avenue for crime and indulgence — but it is so much more than that.

The Internet does more than replace old means of communications — it creates new avenues. The telegraph may have shortened distances, but it wasn't an every day occurrence for most people — it was an event that typically signified something significant such as a birth or death. The Internet shortens distances on a daily basis and for more people than ever before. I can talk to friends and family overseas in a way that I couldn't before given high long-distance charges.

Maich also charges that the Internet isn't the great repository of knowledge or vehicle for exchanging ideas that everyone hoped it would be. Instead, it's a hotbed of "conspiracy theories, conjectures and outright fabrications" and

that blogs "tend to devolve into vitriolic screeds or sophomoric insults."

But if some Internet sites contain misinformation and some blogs are biased, this is a result of human nature and not a unique function of the Internet. There's no shortage of news organizations in the traditional media that are prone to misleading their audience. A great many Fox News watchers, for instance, still believe that weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. And the mainstream media is also full of personalities who aren't interested in engaging in real dialogue, only spouting hate. Fox New's Bill O'Reilly, for instance, recently said if he could get away with it, he'd go after the blogosphere "with a hand grenade." And *Maclean's* is no better — rather than engaging in a serious discussion about the Internet, it attacks it with statements such as "the Internet sucks."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SPECIAL TREATMENT NOT NECESSARY

Re: "Ontario invests in IT training for women," (*CC*, Oct. 6, pg. 28).

So now that the situation of the IT job market is such that there is a shortage of skills while many experienced professionals are still unemployed, and colleges see their enrollment in IT programs in free fall, the Ontario government brings low-income women to the rescue.

I hoped that your article would shed some light into what areas of training this initiative is targeting. Will the women be taught MS Office or Oracle? Java or Cobol? Web design, maybe? Security? Network

administration? Instead, the author writes about the "three areas of women" (!!) and how the politicians of the day congratulate each other over the initiative. If this program does not tie in some sponsored employment, it is difficult to see how the graduates will find employment in IT. Sending these women out in the wild with a piece of paper and still without that all-important Canadian experience will do little to improve their professional fate.

Also, is the curriculum going to teach them how to defeat psychological and cultural barriers — their own and those of their potential employers and colleagues? And

why is it necessary to teach technical skills for women in a specialized way? Since when do women need special treatment in the area of learning? Will they get special treatment on the job too? Many questions not even raised — hopefully *CC* will follow up on them.

Last but not least, it's ITC, not ICT. But better stick with IT when in doubt . . .

Tatiana Andronache
Toronto

CD LEVY IS OUTRAGEOUS

Re: "Actions of Access Copyright amount to virtual protection racket," (*CC*, Oct. 6, pg. 19).

Many readers will be surprised by the reminder that we still pay a tax on blank media. In fact, the so-called tax is a 21 cent "levy" on every blank

CD because a pressure group called Canadian Private Copying Collective (CPCC) demands it. This is an outrageous grab, especially for users of CDs like myself who never copy music.

Do I understand this levy correctly? For example, I've calculated that the deliberate extortion of 21 cents per CD from the purchase of a commonly advertised brand of 100 CDs amounts to 36 per cent of the retail price. And we also pay the PST and GST.

We should demand that the Copyright Board of Canada act immediately to cancel this unfair tax.

George Dunbar
Toronto

