



THE TRUE COST OF TECHNOLOGY

ALEX JAMES investigates the impact of technology on our sense of self

The last few days have presented me with lots of anxiety mostly because our bereavement UK website was offline and a mass of articles and information disappeared into the ether. I was thrown onto an emotional rollercoaster feeling totally out of control. I experienced anger, frustration and more importantly the sense of loss, not only of the material but a very real sense of loss of self. I had become so used to simply logging on and finding the world at my fingertips. It hadn't crossed my mind that something I took for granted could one day be simply gone. It brought me to tears. Being non-technical, I was pleading with the web designer to act quickly – because I simply can't function.

In the past I've witnessed this in others; the devastation when the world wide web hasn't been accessible or a mishap that means they just can't access their internet lives. I've offered platitudes of 'oh dear' and 'I'm sure it'll be okay'. On the receiving end of such statements I felt even more frustrated.

Things are back on track now thanks to my web designer and his knowhow but the whole episode has caused me to reassess just

how much I've come to rely on technology and the consequences to me when this is no longer possible.

Where would we be without mobile phones for example? I was thinking about when I was younger and how some people didn't even have a phone at home. External communications required the use of a public phone box. The only stress then was created by having to queue!

There was a time when we could leave work and not be contacted if out for a day with our loved ones until we returned home. There's quite a few YouTube videos about mobile phones at the moment and how isolated we are becoming and how dependent, that even in the company of family and friends we use them texting, working, chatting and game playing. Being human and keeping our communication skills are so very important. I do believe that being a community makes our lives safer.

My website goes down, my pc gets a virus my phone drops into water and my world is temporarily thrown into turmoil. My life goes on hold. How can I possibly use the space whilst waiting for the situation to right itself without the crutch of phone or pc? What did I do? This is worrying in our industry. We expect to be on call 24 hours a day. If families are suddenly unable to contact us where will they go? What will they do?

We seem to live in such a quick fix

materialistic society where instead of engaging with others we indulge in reality TV or the fly on the wall docusoap which we observe from the safety of our armchairs. Our curiosity need not be fed by real life encounters, but by the touch of a button on any one of your three or four remote controls. I am concerned for our society, it is a human need to connect and when we do we feel needed and a part of something, we find in ourselves a great sense of validation. When a disaster strikes we hear the stories of communities pulling together in order to help each other, the energy created by those connecting for one purpose the sense of belonging is very apparent. In fact it's often when adversity strikes that we are forced to get back to basics and communicate. In times of grief families and friends turn to one another for comfort, making these support networks integral following a loss.

A day without distraction of technology makes us talk, affords us time to indulge in simpler things and experience our world in a way that sadly these days we aren't usually able to. I don't want my world in turmoil, I want and expect it to run smoothly aided by as much technology as I require and need, but without it I am forced to be more resourceful to engage with others. Technology is very necessary in today's world, it is our paramount method of communication, but let's not let the true cost be that we lose something of ourselves as a result.