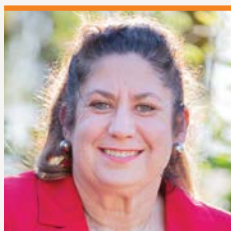


# Has technology changed the way we communicate?



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**During the past 30 years, technology has changed dramatically to make communication extremely easy and fast. Your phone, for example, has gone from a 'brick' to a pocket-sized phone, camera and computer all in one.**

Back in 1990, we could not have coped with COVID-19 as well as we have today – social media and technology have enabled us to remain connected in so many ways. Technological advancements in communications have changed how we do business, and businesses need to transform to this new way of life.

In 1989, I was an exchange student travelling to Brazil. All I had to communicate with loved ones back home was expensive phone calls from a landline, or letters and the occasional recorded cassette tapes sent by, what we refer to now, as 'snail mail'. What an experience it would be now with Facetime, Messenger and/or social media to stay up-to-date. The world is a smaller, connected place!

Let's explore the different ways technology has changed communication and impacted our lives and how business is done:

## THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA – THE BIGGEST CHANGE

Since the mid-1990s, the Internet has had a revolutionary impact on communication: it has allowed us to stay in contact with people regardless of time and location. It's accelerated the pace of business, widened the possibilities and has enabled the rise of near-instant communication! Email was introduced to the world in 1991 (although it had been operating years before) and the first recognisable social media platform, Six Degrees, was introduced in 1997. In the early 2000s, social media exploded in popularity with LinkedIn (2002), MySpace (2003), YouTube (2005), and in 2006 Facebook and Twitter became available to users across the world. I can remember handling the Equine Influenza crisis in 2007 with the reliance on Discussion Boards (remember those?) to communicate on mass.

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It has been predicted that within five years, we will be using emails for official correspondence only and most of our communication will be done via messaging apps like Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber etc. or even work production/collaboration Apps like Slack, Wrike, Workplaces etc.

## REPLACEMENT OF TRADITIONAL MARKETING AND MEDIA

We have seen a huge increase in digital marketing with more and more people using SEO, Google Ads and social media marketing to increase brand awareness and communication with target audiences in a more affordable way than some traditional marketing methods. We are using data that has enabled re-targeting, and customisation, as well as stronger analytics (reach, impressions, conversion rates etc) to assess the success of campaigns. These tools are improving the accountability of marketing and advertising.



And let's not forget, instant publishing of the news has been made possible and accessible to all. It's certainly altering journalism and the news industry, with many news outlets having to transform their business models.

### EVERYONE HAS A VOICE

As technology has allowed people to voice their opinions openly, coupled with a stronger reliance on reviews and recommendations the result is that one bad review or complaint can go viral in minutes. Monitoring sentiment and discussions on social media is now something that businesses need to do daily. Social media has also seen the rise in cyberbullying – some say it's at crisis point. That's definitely part of the ugly side of technological advancements.

### COMMUNICATION IS EASIER

Communicating with friends and family living in any part of the world can now be done instantly through smartphones, email, social media, instant messaging and the list goes on. People now spend more time on social media and instant messaging sharing their status, photos, videos and more, and potentially less time talking face-to-face. It is said that the greatest fear is to have face-to-face conversations, overtaking public speaking!

### HAS TECHNOLOGY RUINED OUR RELATIONSHIPS?

People have become addicted to smartphones! It's not uncommon at restaurants or even at the family dinner table to have everyone looking at their phones rather than having conversations. Mobile phones distract us, and we are used to looking at multiple devices at once – our attention spans have decreased (some say our attention spans are only eight seconds long!). Technology has also been blamed for our increasing inability to maintain work-life balance – especially now that more people are working from home/remotely. Although being able to work from anywhere can increase employee's satisfaction and productivity, it can also increase issues around privacy and cyber security.



## Technologies to watch out for

### 1. WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY

The first example of wearable technology was a handsfree mobile headset launched in 1999, giving people the ability to answer calls on-the-go. Now, we have smartwatches, audio sunglasses, and other emerging wearable technology that will become part of our daily lives – monitoring everything we do!

### 2. VIRTUAL REALITY (VR)

The next generation of VR has only been around since 2016, but it is shaking up communications. The beauty of VR is presence: this means you can connect to someone in the same space at the same time, helping to facilitate better communication. MeetinVR claims that there is a 25 per cent increase in attention span when meeting in virtual reality compared to video conferencing.

### 3. 5G – THE 5TH GENERATION OF MOBILE NETWORK

5G, the 5th generation of mobile network, promises much faster data download and upload speeds, wider coverage and more stable connections, bringing about significant improvements in communication. Although 6G is still in basic research and around two decades away, it is already promising untold improvements in the speed and consistency.

We are in the Digital Era and the communication technologies may turn out to be both a curse and a blessing for any business and person, but we all need to keep updated and adapt to this 'new way of life'. If nothing else, the recent lockdowns have shown us that we want connection and we want more positivity in our lives! I, for one, am going to celebrate the advances that have led us to communicate faster and easier, as well as achieve an increased productivity rate and leisure time. Businesses need to adapt and, in many instances, will require a shift in workplace culture to accept this new way of doing business. Are you ready for it?



*I have asked some amazing Communication and Technology Experts what they think the biggest communication technology changes have been over the last 30 years and here is what they had to say:*

**Amelia Loye**

**Managing Director, Engage 2**

The greatest technology communication change over the last 30 years as I see it, has been the rise of Digital Democracy! When most people think of technology and democracy, they think of voting, politics and elections and the Cambridge Analytica case in the U.S. – but there's a lot more to it, especially for government organisations. As a society, we need to decide how and when we should use these technologies for democracy and governance.

**Dr Edwina Luck**

**School of Advertising, Marketing and PR, Queensland University of Technology**

The biggest technological changes have been with the use of data, algorithms, the growth of AI (artificial intelligence), online chat bots plus the growth of online social media. No longer are 'Likes' enough. Engagement and customer experience are more important. Influencers' power, reach and engagement levels have fallen off and come under scrutiny during 2020 due to people not being able to travel, and a reduction in marketing budgets.

**Amanda Newbery**

**Managing Director, Articulous Communications**

The biggest revolution in technology for the communication sector is that we've gone from using tech to push messages, based on our instinct. Today, we can use technology to listen, to understand what the public wants, and to provide an evidence base. A lot of the guess work has gone. And because so much can be automated now, there's an even greater demand for creative brilliance.

**Shara Evans**

**Technology Futurist**

In 1990 data networking bandwidth was not measured in megabits per second. It was measured in bits per second! And, from my recollection, the modems I was using at that time had a max speed of about 2400 bits per second. Today, we're talking about NBN household bandwidth in Australia of up to 100 megabits per second (Mbps) — and even higher in other parts of the globe. That's millions of bits per second, rather than thousands of bits per second. That's a massive change that has enabled all kinds of things!

**Joanne Jacobs**

**Co-CEO, Disruptors Co / TheAir.Works**

Clearly the most significant event in communications technology over the last 30 years has been the rise of the internet. It's been a challenge to traditional media organisations and to the public relations sector, and it's been a boon to individuals and organisations who have wanted to reach across the world and to create new networks of understanding.



Perhaps the worst aspect of communications to arise from this era has been the notion of "influence". The word is a misnomer. Companies and individuals do not seek to influence people. They seek to dominate and direct them down specific paths of thinking and acting.

**Prof Raechel Johns**

**Head of the Canberra Business School, University of Canberra**

I remember sitting with my cousin in about 1994 or 1995, going through the features of my brick of a phone. I turned to her and said "it says you can send text messages. I wonder why anyone would want to send a text message, and how someone would even read it?" Of course, we've since discovered that many people (myself included!) prefer text to picking up the phone and making a call.

I also remember my first Blackberry, and excitedly emailing people from it, and saying "I'm emailing – from my phone!" Technology communication has changed so much, and society has adapted rapidly. I simply can't imagine facing the COVID19 pandemic, and working from home, without all the technology communication changes over the past few decades. Now we're juggling Zoom, Teams, Facetime, Skype, email, and everything else, all at once, and all fairly seamlessly, then turning to update our Instagram, Facebook, Tweeting something out quickly, and so on.

We're constantly connected, and for the most part, it can be a wonderful thing... but every so often, we need to disconnect, and take some time out. Stop the notifications from distracting us, and focus, away from interruptions. ■