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Going ?viral? in a viral world

BROCK'S BANTER

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Do you remember when ?going viral? meant something completely different?

While that phrase is not one to be thrown around lightly these days, it wasn't all that long ago when it was applied with reckless abandon.

Filming yourself and your colleagues trying to pull off an awkwardly choreographed ? and awkwardly executed ? dance solely for the purposes of social media? Best left forgotten.

Going through a McDonalds drive-thru, front seat passenger at the ready, cell phone in hand, camera rolling, ready to capture that oh-so-hilarious moment where you reach for your ice cream cone only to grab it directly by the soft-serve? Inexplicable and wasteful, sure, but another attempt at viral infamy.

Snapped a photo for the ?Gram of yourself holding a garishly and artificially-coloured frozen whipped coffee with a caption along the lines of, ?Sorry, I just had to?? Did you? Well, as they say, an attempt was made.

Then, of course, there was the ice bucket challenge which, although benefiting a good cause, not only saturated clothing but social media as well.

Nowadays, after more than a year of ?viral? taking on an alarming and sad tone, there's a relatively new kid on the block: those who are getting ?likes? depending on the vaccine they get.

As a person with many friends living south of the border, I'm guilty of experiencing more than a few pangs of envy as my peers post photos of themselves getting their second doses. It not only highlights how slow and problematic Ontario's vaccine rollout has been compared to other jurisdictions, but the fact there seems to be a certain degree of social clout depending on what jab you get.

Posts of a Pfizer-loaded needle sticking out of an arm are usually greeted with huge enthusiasm and relief ? along with emojis to underscore this point ? with Moderna doses close behind. Johnson & Johnson, a relatively new kid on the block with the added benefit of being a one-and-done shot, appears to be greeted with just slightly less enthusiasm accompanied by almost an apologetic resignation that something is better than nothing.

And AstraZeneca? As it is not yet fully approved in the United States and some of their doses are just coming our way, I don't yet have anything concrete to compare it to, but rightly or wrongly, enthusiasm for this concoction is taking a backseat to worry and anxiety.

One friend in the GTA posted eloquently about this situation over the weekend. As she is eligible to receive the AstraZeneca jab in an ever-expanding number of Ontario pharmacies, she is weighing her options. The personal conflict she is going through on the principle of ?something is better than nothing? and the social responsibility she felt to get the vaccine not only for her family but the Province as a whole is a face-off she likened to an intense internal tennis match and is reflective of many conversations I have been hearing ? even in my own bubble.

By the end of last week, both of my parents had secured an appointment for their first dose ? my mother's being booked for Easter Monday at York Region's Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital and my father, a resident of Simcoe-Muskoka, an appointment in Barrie next week.

Both have expressed similar concerns about their vaccine options and finalized their metaphorical ranked ballot fairly early on. In fact, in my 35+ years of life, it was one of the few times their views were in perfect alignment.

Since the beginning of the vaccine rollout, there have been a number of opportunities for people in my position to do media walk-throughs of local vaccination centres yet, speaking solely for myself, few chances to see them in action.

Monday helped dispel some of the mystery as I accompanied by mom to get her first shot in Vaughan.

The process itself couldn't have been better organized, nor could it have gone smoother.

Although she wasn't informed until she sat down in her chair, the syringe sitting on the table just to her left waiting to work its magic, which brand it actually contained, I could see the relief pass her face, even with most of it covered by a disposable blue mask, when the nurse said Pfizer was ready to be injected.

And so it was ? as it was with the 40-odd other individuals who were subsequently waiting in the hospital's auditorium ready for their requisite 15 minutes of wait time to be up before being let out into the wider world with an extra layer of protection that so many people in my age bracket ? and those a decade or two on either side of it ? are chomping at the bit to get.

With little else to do for these 15 minutes, it was interesting to observe the others who were waiting for their time. That same look of bemasked relief was clear on faces of those sitting down. As it was with family members and caregivers who were accompanying the lucky ones.

In my immediate vicinity, no less than five people picked up their phones, greeting whoever it was with almost the same refrain: ?I got the Pfizer!? they almost uniformly exclaimed, perhaps exhaling more than they have in 13 months.

Chances are, when they got home, selfies of needles in arms and/or the shiny, new digital certificate they received were flooded out to their circles and justifiably so.

If this is what constitutes going viral these days ? you know, without actually having a virus ? I can live with that and, truth be told, whichever of the Big Four I ultimately get when my time comes, I'm more than eager to get in on the action. And no innocent ice cream cones will be hurt in the process? well, unless it's a prize I give myself at the finish line.