

Internet habits reveal humankind's weaknesses

by MARK PAVILONS

It's been said for generations that you are what you eat.

Unfortunately, our North American diet is sadly lacking in nutrition and is laden with chemicals and substances not found on the periodic table.

We've known about this for some time and in the last decade, there's been a bit of a revolt, or resurgence in a more balanced diet and lifestyle.

But, of course, that comes with a cost and since most of us are keenly aware of the rising costs of food, our perfect choices may have to be curtailed.

Data released by the Salvation Army indicate that parents are actually skipping meals so their kids can have more to eat. I've done it, and I really feel for these families. I'm not sure how we let this happen in our society but here we are, in 2024, with food prices pegged to rise yet again and record numbers going to food banks.

Our appetite for goodies aside, let's examine our online hunger for knowledge and entertainment.

The Internet was created in Research at CERN in Switzerland by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1989-90. It resulted in the World Wide Web, linking hypertext documents into an information system, accessible from any node on the network. The dramatic expansion of the capacity of the Internet, enabled by the advent of wave division multiplexing (WDM) and the rollout of fiber optic cables in the mid-1990s, has had a revolutionary impact on culture, commerce, and technology.

This made possible the rise of near-instant communication by email, instant messaging, voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone calls, video chat, and the World Wide Web with its discussion forums, blogs, social networking services, and online shopping sites.

Youngins weren't around when the world changed but Boomers will remember going from fax, to flip phones and from dial-up to amazing connectivity.

I will admit that most of our holiday shopping this year was done online, with only a few jaunts to stores and one trip to the mall.

Yes, we've embraced the ease and convenience of having our parcels delivered to our door in a day or two.

Through my work, I am also on the computer a lot, communicating and searching for information.

OntarioBets.com sifted through Google Trends and released the list of top searches of 2023. The results paint a rather interesting picture of our species.

The number one search was for ChatGPT, which I had to Google. ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is a chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched on November 30, 2022. Based on a large language model, it enables users to refine and steer a conversation towards a desired length, format, style, level of detail, and language.

So, that's what I'm exposed to every time I call a customer service hotline?

This seems to be a bane to our existence.

The 2023 Indian Premier League of cricket teams was also widely searched, likely for results of matches. The Saudi Arabian football club Al Nassr was next. Sports fans of the world unite!

The movie John Wick 4 was 4th on the list. Yes, I did see it and I admit that my son and I are staunch Wick (Keanu Reeves) fans.

Israel came in next, for obvious reasons given the current conflict in Gaza.

Taylor Swift was 6th on the list.

Sure, I understand fandom and the music industry, but come on.

Being a Boomer, I've seen all of the entertainment greats Elvis, Elton John, Queen, Michael Jackson and Prince. You can't put our modern day, candy-coated singers in the same league, not even close.

Imagine sifting through the wasteland of a post-apocalyptic ruins and finding a Taylor Swift on the cover of some scorched magazine. Oh, the humanity! And yes, only Boomers will get that quote.

Conestoga, the online learning platform for Conestoga College, was next. But that's a very good thing, indicating young people were looking at learning options.

Unfortunately, MyBenefits Ontario was next. This is a web portal for Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program. It's an indication of the plight of our citizens and the state of our economy. Sad, but true.

QuillBot rounded out the list. Here is the magic. It's a free tool that helps you rephrase text for writing assignments, papers and essays. Really it's a way to cheat and make something sound like it's your own work.

Ingenious, sure, but is this what we've come to?

Okay, students have been prone to finding shortcuts since pencil and paper were invented. We resorted to some pretty clever ways to bend the rules when the teacher wasn't looking.

It may very well be a commentary on the current state of the education system, at all levels.

Being a journalist and editor, I have helped all my kids with their papers throughout high school and beyond. One would think that together, we'd produce some Grade-A work and yet, the marks did not reflect that. Even comments about bad grammar and plagiarism were noted. What? You're kidding me, right? Clearly there's more subjective marking than technical prowess at work here. And that's not fair to the students.

Having all three of our kids go through the same high school I also discovered the exact same assignments, study sheets, topics and preferred readings. That indicates the board hasn't changed its curriculum in at least 10-15 years. That, my friends, is ridiculous. Shame on them. So maybe it isn't surprising that kids have to find new ways to analyze Hamlet or Motorcycles & Sweetgrass.

Long live QuillBot!

So, my friends, what have we learned? From this list I can only surmise that many of our fellow citizens are out of work sports fans who like pop music and don't have time for homework.

That's reassuring!