

The challenges of down time, up time, no time

by Mark Pavilons

We cannot stop the passage of time.

Our particular position in the universe sees us marking the hours, days, months and years as we circle our sun.

We may think that we have plenty of time during our waking hours. But how much of that time is productive?

Are we wasting time, frittering it away, and spending it needlessly?

It's no surprise that Canadians are frantically searching for 'down time' from their devices and the internet.

While some in rural areas struggle to even secure decent internet sources, others find they're paying way too much.

According to a recent study by Ernst & Young, one-in-five consumers are willing to switch broadband providers in the next year. The main reason is that 55% of respondents believe they pay too much for content they don't watch or need. Others say they have increased concerns about security and privacy.

The pandemic upped the ante and many more Canadians found themselves hooked up and connected.

We've all drank the proverbial Kool-Aid and almost each and every device we own 'phone, computer, tablet and TV??' are connected to the internet.

Sure, it's convenient, really cool, but also really expensive. In our household with three children, our digital bill is the highest monthly expense, next to our mortgage. That's crazy.

But in today's world, it's almost a necessity.

With one child still in high school, access to the internet for homework is vital. Teachers are using Google Classroom and D2L to accept assignments. Kids today not only have to have access to a decent computer and strong internet service, they've had to become proficient at navigating these platforms.

Heaven help us all if the internet went down for a period of time!

As a parent who believes he's somewhat intelligent and articulate, even I have trouble with these uploads, downloads, rubrics and slideshows.

Most of us prefer to get our service from one provider, but that's not always easy or possible.

As our appetite for digital services continues to grow, there's a need for a centralized digital home system.

I've been one of those reluctant sorts, waiting for others in my household to be tech savvy. My wife is a whiz on her iPhone and my kids are pretty smart in their own ways. I only recently started depositing cheques online, and my Petro Points card is now fully digital. I must admit that some of these do make life easy and convenient.

In the pandemic world, I've grown to like Zoom calls and YouTube meetings. I find the King Council meetings tend to run smoothly, with only a few glitches. I watched a Chamber of Commerce debate during the election and listened to a live-streamed

discussion on forests. It's pretty cool that I can watch, even participate, from the comfort of my home or office.

The shape of things to come?

I have yet to master Facetime and Instagram, but I am a quick learner.

But again, does all this time in front of a screen - big or small - take away from our regular lives?

Maybe. But I think some of the benefits - eliminating distance, travel, commuting - are beneficial. Heck, I've heard that the environment actually started to breathe again, and repair itself, during the pandemic.

A time will come when we'll be doing Zoom meetings from the comfort of our own self-driving electric car!

I must say, though, that the last year has made me yearn for the simple things in life. I'm longing to reconnect with nature, venturing into the woods, or finding a quiet sandy beach somewhere.

But that will have to wait until next summer.

My oldest daughter, who's a passionate traveller, is going nuts because we're still grounded. She's itching to go abroad and maybe her volunteer efforts with the Red Cross will bring her some renewed optimism.

The new COVID passport will be something we have to get used to. The world is changing and we have to change with it.

But there's a lot to be said about 'old school' ways. Funny that 'old school' is being embraced by the 'new school'.

I met with someone last week who says he prefers actual paper and hard copy reports, to online versions. My trusty note pad and Bic are still essential tools in my business.

My digital camera has been sidelined, in favour of my smart phone, which takes pretty decent, high resolution photos. These days, almost everyone has a phone and this helps us promote more events that we can't always get to. That's one really good thing about technology - our community is even more connected.

However, being a people person, I've missed the social contact, in-person interviews and fun public events. These make you feel more engaged, more real.

I can't wait for a return to 'normal'.

Like everything in life, the key is moderation. Let's embrace and leverage the best technology has to offer, but not at our personal expense. We are social creatures and we long to express ourselves. We may still have to be at arm's length from one another, but a positive outlook is fuel for our inner tanks.