

What happened to living in the real 'offline' world?

by MARK PAVILONS

While Eliot wasn't referring to the Internet, he had it spot-on when it comes to human behaviour.

On the other hand, Bill Gates believes 'the Internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow.'

The jury's out on just how the Internet is shaping humankind. But make no mistake, it's likely the most dynamic event in our history.

There's no question information technology is transforming every aspect of our lives, for better and worse.

There are many, many benefits to the Internet, from remote medicine and digital imaging, to lightning-fast news, and of course, e-commerce. In some ways, it has brought our species together 'every culture from across the globe.

And, it has also had a reclusive effect on some.

'The Internet is so big, so powerful and pointless that for some people it is a complete substitute for life,' Andrew Brown observed.

Will we evolve into a society where our lives are 'virtual' and not real at all? It's the stuff for science fiction stories to be sure.

I recently came across a new definition for the term 'offline' that I found a bit upsetting.

I had come to know and embrace the term 'online,' which refers to a state of connectivity. And being 'offline' was troublesome, indicating my computer was 'disconnected' and unable to access the Internet.

A TV commercial, promoting pre-holiday sales, pointed out people can shop 'online' or 'offline.' In this case, that means shopping in person, or real life. Wow. I never thought that reality would become secondary to our online world.

Instead of reserving the Internet for certain activities like commerce, we humans, given our shortcomings, have tried to duplicate the real world in every way. Give humans a tool and they will find a way to use it for evil, as well as good.

But I have to wonder, why duplicate reality? What's wrong with the reality we have? All you have to do is open your front door and step outside!

Sure, I have taken advantage of online shopping and yes, I find it convenient and it opens a whole new world of products. I am an eBay junkie and I've been impressed with Amazon's speedy delivery. I tend to shop online for things I can't get easily. I reserve my cyber shopping for hard-to-find items and collectibles.

I can see where a person's online shopping can get out of hand, though. It's so easy to push buttons and be visually enticed to buy, buy, buy. There's no hesitation and no filters.

In person, as we search the racks or shelves, we tend to take time to think about our purchases. Even when standing in the check-out line, we sometimes change our minds. But the virtual world takes no prisoners!

Today, it's so damn easy to pay for things, transfer money, send virtual cheques. With PayPal, Alipay, WeChat Pay, and a ton of payment platforms, commerce has skyrocketed to new heights.

Again, it seems that the further removed we are from reality, the more reckless we become.

And that has added to people's debt loads and burdens.

This holiday season, many of us average folk will 'debt the halls' as we spread the cheer with our online shopping.

A study by Manulife Bank says 60% of us don't have the budget and will overspend during the holidays. And most of us agree that the holiday season has become too focused on spending and material goods.

This can't be further removed from the true meaning of the holidays. While predominantly a Christian holiday, it has become the biggest consumer spending spree known to man. I really doubt Jesus and his disciples would give us a thumbs-up.

The survey also revealed that regardless of people's purchases, 30% say they end up regretting the amount of money they have spent during the holiday season.

For some, this will lead to a 'financial hangover' well into the new year.

Here again, I think the ease of e-commerce is to blame.

The bottom line for humanity is this 'make it easier and we humans will do it to the max. We will go further than ever before. That's simply our nature.

Being removed from reality is like being out of touch. Out of sight, out of mind is truer today than ever before.

I still enjoy going to the bank and chatting with the tellers. I like going to the post office and shooting the breeze with the staff.

I like grocery shopping, so I can see what I'm buying and I can pick the best apples or tomatoes.

I will admit that I have used those self-serve kiosks at fast food places, again because it's so damn convenient. I'm not a big drive-thru kind of guy, and my drive-thru days are now over, thanks to a busted electric window in my car.

Our online world is becoming all-consuming. We can venture into our online realm where we work, conduct business, shop, play, travel and curse without remorse.

How are our young people supposed to get a handle on the real world when they don't experience it??How will they learn to carry on an 'offline' conversation??Will they ever learn how to sign a cheque?

Mimicking the real world can sure come in handy. But let's not make it the new normal!