

Sector Connector Convergence



Verne Ivars Krastins
BSc (Hons), Fellow LGPro

The future of decision making

Whether a social media user or not, you've got to admit that the internet has established itself for dialogue, not just information.

Social media tools have significantly influenced society and how people influence each other. Of course, it hasn't changed us as humans, but that may happen one day too.

There's no point to communication if it's not meant to influence, so in principle, this is a good thing. We communicate to impart knowledge, receive knowledge, explain opinions or have others' opinions explained to us.

The more of this going on the better I say.

Local governments are getting a handle on the current internet environment. There's still resistance in some quarters, but many councils have a social media presence, policies to protect the proverbial, and some use online consultation

tools for developing strategies, plans and even budgets.

We're in a brave new world, heading toward a future where virtual governance will be as basic and obligatory as council meetings and elections.

An analogy

We should pinch ourselves though, and remember when all this came to be.

As I write in mid-2013, Twitter is barely nine years old, YouTube and Google Maps eight, Facebook only seven and Gmail recently turned six. In human terms, they are children.

There are some teenagers. Wikipedia turned 12 at the beginning of the year, and Google Search turns 16 in September. On the cusp of adulthood, Yahoo and Hotmail email systems are around 18 years old.

We're hard pressed to find much older. Web browsers are 20 something, blogging is approaching 30, and in terms of the binary coded world that the wheels of society relies on, that's it.

Devices and destiny

The tail end of this analogy is to herald a new generation internet, or at least a new era in how humans interact with it. The internet was waiting for the 21st century to happen, when technology caught up.

The new infants on the block are smartphones and computer tablets of course, both still in kindergarten, but they arguably represent a tipping point.

The internet is already at our fingertips (or wave of the hand) whenever and wherever. Coming soon, mobile enabled eyewear and wrist watches, flexible phones and large amounts of Bitcoins and other virtual money.

You can see where this is going. The evolution of computer technology has one aim – to make the interaction between persons, devices and locations as easy and seamless as possible.

The quick and the nimble

One take on this is that society is becoming evermore agile in how communication and engagement happens. Local government will have to follow suit, especially as decision makers.

Paradoxically, we can be one of the least agile and hamstrung sectors around, while also the closest and most connected to its people. So the potential is there, but by and large we play catch up.

I laboured the youthfulness of the mobile internet to sound a bell. We don't know what's around each innovation corner, but in the case of the internet and its devices, the corners are coming at us ever faster. Convergence, in its many forms, is on the way.

And one of these may be the convergence of constituents and decision makers, a levelling out of the roles, with different forums for different kinds of decisions, and even virtual governments. ■

1977

- PC for the masses - the Commodore PET
- First ever mobile call New York USA

1987

- First mobile call in Australia from the Sydney Opera House, NSW

1993

- First live internet performance by rock band Severe Tire Damage

2004

- Social media arrives - Facebook launched

2013

- Wearable devices Google Glass Sony SmartWatch

2022

- Political convergence - first council to adopt virtual governance

Illustration by Kathryn Steel.