

Church Office Automation

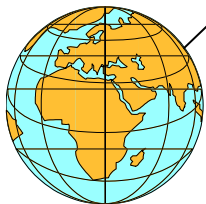
The Internet: Another Renaissance

Repeating History

In the 15th century,¹ Johann Guttenberg brought together a number of currently known technologies to assemble the first movable-type printing press.² More and more, people learned to read and the world grew smaller. The printing press turned out to be the single most important invention of the Middle Ages because it was largely responsible for the European educational, literary, scientific and artistic Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation.

Today, there is another cultural renaissance underway brought about by the Internet. This new technology has brought the world of people and information right into our homes and church office.

- Within five minutes of putting down this article, you could go to Paris and take view art from the Louvre museum web page at (<http://www.smartweb.fr/louvre>) or that of our own National Art gallery in Washington (<http://www.nga.gov>).
- You could have an interesting live conversation with people from all of the country on, say, how to make good relationships better or ideas on more creatively gathering your church youth groups.

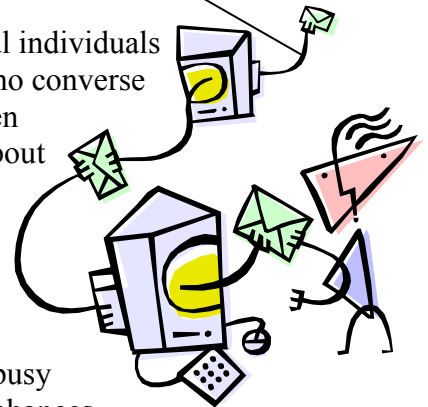


- You could regularly receive John McClester's essays or obtain a copy of the new catechism from our denomination headquarters.

¹ 1452

² These technological improvements actually stretched across five centuries and didn't fully culminate in Guttenberg's life. See "Manuscripts, Books, and Maps: The Printing Press and a Changing World." This information can be obtained by setting your web browser to the following address:
<http://communication.ucsd.edu/bjones/Books/booktext.html>.

- There are several individuals in our church who converse in private, written conversations about personal issues. In this case, electronic mail is the preferred medium as it nimbly bridges busy schedules and enhances communication of inner-world-oriented people who prefer to think things through before expressing them verbally or in writing. For them, this beats having to schedule a trip to the church office and a sit-down face-to-face conference.
- Because of our Internet connections and the wealth of available information, we can be in our doctor's office and say to our physician: "Your lab tests and your diagnosis have spotlighted these facts. According to the usual three protocols I've found in the medical libraries, this second one seems to be more frequently used. What do you think about trying this procedure in hopes of a remedy?"



Less Reliance on the Professionals

With the vast amount of information now available, some have predicted a diminishing need for the so-called "professionals" in our lives. To be sure, we will always rely on some individuals who have devoted their careers in order to intensify their focus on certain fields of expertise. More and more, though, you and I will be researching and discovering information (for our purposes) with less dependence on the "specialists." Similar to how the printing press enabled the culture to obtain Biblical information without total dependence on the 15th century clergy, the Internet has now placed almost any information in our hands that we are capable of understanding. This is true in medicine, law, education and certainly religion.

It used to be that you had to go to a seminary or purchase expensive commentaries to obtain Biblical, historical, archeological, theological and interpretative information on the Bible. No longer. Add to that the fact that we're already in a religious tradition where members are encouraged to consider our church tradition but ultimately decide for themselves the best course on new and emerging issues — even if one might disagree with tradition on some matters.

Who's On Line?

Some consider the Internet to be the cause for a general breakdown of marriage and the family, the rise of demonic cults seeking to abduct their children and hackers pillaging their personal checking, savings, credit and investment accounts. Along with everything else, people fear feeling “stupid” because the rapidly changing technology allows no one to truly master anything for long.

Have no fear. The only information you receive is what you seek. The only folks you'll meet will be those whom you've sought. Because billions in corporate commerce has been at stake, the technology finally and utterly eliminated any possibility of Internet thievery of your money about two years ago. You can safely buy and sell online. Your only surprises will be in how much you can do and discover in the world to enhance your ministry to others.

“Who are the people in your (network) neighborhood?” Fred Rogers might sing today. Educators, business people, bankers, vendors of goods and services, you and I and other highly intelligent, motivated, caring people with Christian values. You'll meet people with positive outlooks on life and insight into many of life's issues and challenges. There are a few too many people overly fond of using anagrams instead of common words which, more effectively, describe technology parts and functions. They mean well.

You will also run across some boring, needy people with little willingness or ability to contribute to others. There are even a few unscrupulous individuals whom you'll likely



never meet. The Internet is a gathering place of the same kinds of folks you'd meet anywhere.

What Good Is It?

Things Change. Used to be that software was distributed on diskettes — one to 30 of them, depending on the level of sophistication of the software. Now, even software updates may be so large that they come on compact disks — able to contain as much as 600 megabytes (millions of characters). Software is constantly improved. Computer technology is one of the few areas in life (besides us humans) that improves through time. Every software program is upgraded at least once a year — sometimes more often. When you operate with the rule of thumb of trying to work with the best technology available, the only practical way to keep your software tools current is by having direct access to the software corporations. After all, when you buy their products, you essentially are engaging with them in a business partnership. Your church's Internet connection with Microsoft, for example, is the easiest and most efficient way to **get your software updated**. Also, software virus definitions must be updated monthly if you want to guarantee virus-free computing work.

Through the Internet we also receive much needed **technical support**. Those who know how to work your software tools best are, obviously, the ones who make it. The programmers are always improving their code and want you to keep using their product happily. This is because their careers depend on keeping you satisfied and productive.

With your Internet access, you'll enjoy searching for and **ordering books for your personal or church group study**. You'll have direct and immediate access to the Presbyterian Distribution Center or PCUSA Eccunet login location (<http://www.pcusa.org/pcusa/pcusa.html>) our denomination's web site (<http://www.pcusa.org/pcusa/pcusa.html>), Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>) or Barnes & Noble (<http://www.barnesandnoble.com>) and any source for research and resource acquisition.



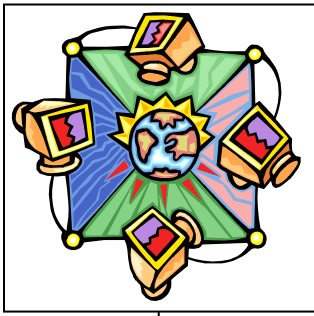
Live chats, discussions and support are available on any issue imaginable. Your Presbyterian colleagues gather in the PresbyNet, GA , Ecunet, Youth Connection and the UCC “Meeting Rooms” (<http://www.pcusa.org/chat/pcusa.html>).

Using the live “chat” mediums quickly enables us to expand our communication with not only members of our congregation but also those with common values and commitments from around the world. You and I can participate in live discussions with anyone in the world on any issue or concern in private or public locations on the Internet.

We can also benefit from sharing our thoughts and experiences (and reading that of others) on **electronic “bulletin boards” or “news groups”** created around specific topics or needs. Our joys and concerns, our feelings and thoughts and common Spirit bind us together in a world community.

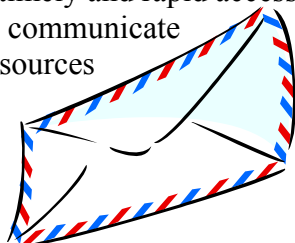
E-mail. How else can you immediately pass a note, an entire book, a picture, a relevant sermon transcript or the location of a greatly needed resource to someone in need?

There are some, more inner-world-oriented members in our church, who prefer to think things through prior to expressing themselves in the arena of written or verbal conversation. Rather than having to schedule an appointment and come into the church or ask for a pastoral visit, they discuss personal matters through the convenience of electronic mail. This has proven to be a welcome medium for these people as well as a timesaver — completely eliminating busy phones, voice mail, calendar scheduling and travel. As in the largest corporations which have everyone’s workstation **connected for collaborative working**, you can use this convenient form of communication with others in your church and in the Church universal. (Most Elders on our church have an electronic email address.) We have timely and rapid access to one another in order to communicate our caring and provide resources in ministry.



A few places to go on the Internet

- Want to create **eye-catching ads** for church function? Visit Microsoft’s free clipart library at: <http://www.microsoft.com/clipgallerylive/eula.asp>
- There are thousands of locations for **retrieving medical information** and connecting parishioners to **timely support** in health related issues. For instance, see the National Cancer Institute’s excellent resources, for example, at: (http://rex.nci.nih.gov/NCI_PUB_INDEX/PUB_INDEX_DOC.html)
- **Maps and directions** for YG trips can be found at: (<http://www.expdiamaps.com>)
- **Zip codes** are found at: (<http://www.usps.gov/ncsc>)
- **Church database management solutions:** (<http://www.winfiles.com/apps/98/infobases-church.html>)
- Church **computer cable lock systems** to prevent theft of computer equipment: (<http://www.computersecurity.com>)
- To research or **order a computer** for you or your church, try: Dell Corporation at: (<http://www.dell.com>) or Gateway Corporation at: (<http://www.gateway.com>)
- To **help parishioners in their search for jobs**, try these several sites: (<http://www.hoovers.com/index.html>) (<http://www.careerpath.com>) (<http://fe.freedgar.com/companies/index.html>) (<http://www.gsonline.com/websites.htm>) (<http://www.corptech.com>) (<http://www.hoovers.com/browsetop/top1.html>) (<http://www.webplaces.com/naics>) (<http://members.tripod.com>) (<http://link-o-mania.com/busempl.html>) (<http://www.corporateinformation.com/uspriv.html>) (<http://biz.yahoo.com/news>) (<http://www.monster.com>) (<http://www.labor.state.ny.us>)



What You Will Need To Access the Internet

See last Summer's article of this newsletter entitled "What computer should we buy?" This list will get you the needed computer **hardware**. At this point in time, most of us have switched to using a cable modem (or an ISDN modem) to access the internet.

I would passionately recommend using the *Internet Explorer* browser program and accompanying *Outlook Express* email program by Microsoft and a provider like Adelphia (cable access) rather than using America On Line and their klutzy *Netscape Navigator* program.

This article was written on a Compaq Presario computer using Microsoft *Word*. Pictures for article layout were obtained from Microsoft's free online clipart library at



<http://www.microsoft.com/clipgallerylive/default.asp>.

Before photocopying for distribution, the original article was printed on a Hewlett Packard LaserJet 4000 printer (1200 dpi, 17 pages per minute).

If you would like to contribute an article or lead a "how-to" demonstration of an aspect of using computers for church office automation, drop an email to:

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