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How the Internet (Web) can make life a lot easier for health professionals, consumers and sellers, and can offer opportunities for virtually any form of transaction

Maximising organisational efficiency in day-to-day life

Two doctors working at the same institution were invited to speak at a prestigious clinical conference in a far away town within the UK.

Dr Webgadget checked her personal digital assistant and realising her meeting was imminent, decided to go online and book hotel accommodation. Having looked at <http://www.lastminute.com/> she found a great deal in a top class hotel near the conference centre. She emailed colleagues going to the conference to arrange to meet them later for a drink in the bar. Working out the best route, she pointed her browser at <http://www.multimap.com/> and within a few minutes she had a clear idea of how to get there by car and printed out a map.

Dr Technophobe lost his large filofax a while ago, but that did not make much difference to his chaotic organisational skills. He forgot about the meeting until Dr Webgadget mentioned it to him the day before the meeting. He booked in at the same hotel as Dr Webgadget, but had to pay a far higher rate as he just rung them and hastily booked in. Both were delayed by road works. However, Dr Webgadget phoned from her mobile and spoke to her secretary who, using <http://www.multimap.com/>, gave her alternative directions. Dr Technophobe mislaid his mobile phone and so was late for the meeting and missed the first part of the conference.

Okay, so you have worked out this is a completely fictitious case history that I have just made up for the seasonal holidays, though there is a serious point to the above scenario. Using Internet technologies can make life a lot easier and Dr Webgadget is obviously a medic who is interested in modern technologies and wants to use them

to maximise efficiency in her day-to-day life. The sensible use of the Web, mobile phones and hand-held computers have been a revelation over the last few years and have heralded a sea change in both business and leisure. Often this column has looked at how the net can help with the practice of medicine, but the net can also help us organise our daily lives, leisure and other activities.

Organising a campaign

Let's take this fictitious story a little further and assume that Dr Webgadget was unhappy about national policy concerning a 'problem' in her field and realised that other colleagues at the conference felt the same way. They decided to raise the profile of their campaign.

Possible routes

- (1) Build a simple Web site, place it online and email interested news groups and other organisations to visit the site and register their protest.
- (2) Involve MPs by visiting the excellent <http://www.faxyourmp.com/>. (Type in your postal code; your MP will be located; just type a message and it will be faxed to them).
- (3) Involve traditional print media by visiting the Web sites of national newspapers; details from http://directory.google.com/Top/Regional/Europe/United_Kingdom/News_and_Media/Newspapers/.

Dr Technophobe pointed out that not everybody uses email – he still thinks faxes are a good idea and so prefers to use fax only. Dr Webgadget replied that they could use an email-to-fax gateway and this would convert an email into a fax at no cost to the sender or recipient! One fine example of this can be found at http://www.tpc.int/tpc_home.html. Dr Technophobe was indeed impressed by this idea. All these

activities could easily raise the profile of their campaign without costing too much money. Such is the power of the online community.

Buying online and news updates

A few months later, Dr Technophobe decided to dip his toe into the online world and buy some textbooks. He was delighted with the service he received from <http://www.amazon.co.uk> and now buys all his books this way. Feeling proud of himself, before logging off he decided to check out the latest football news at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/>. Being an avid football fan, he was delighted with the variety and spread of information. Dr Technophobe has seen the light and is now a convert to the power of the online world.

So what is the point of this tale?

Well it's the silly season and we are all allowed a little poetic licence, but this story reveals an important point.

The Internet (the Web) is a fantastic medium that offers health professionals tremendous work and personal opportunities. However, it is also an intelligent tool that can make life a lot easier for both a consumer and a seller, regardless of the type of market. When the commercial world realised this, there was the famous dotcom boom with the silly season reigning on the stock market. Now that reality has set in and the hype has disappeared, it is easy to become cynical about the Internet. However, it offers numerous opportunities in all walks of life and in virtually any form of transaction.

Within a few years, people like Dr Technophobe may become a rarity whilst the world will become full of Dr Webgadgets.

The only problem is that it may not necessarily make them better doctors!