

e-Postcard 19

Web Rage

Margaret and George: I was intrigued to read about your invitation to the *Virtual Luncheon* and MCB University Press' plan to use a global Forum to get Internet Editors sharing and comparing ideas and difficulties with one another. It may seem to be a bit ahead of the menu for the lunch but I do want to share with you a phenomenon that we call Web Rage. The choice of the phrase alludes to Road Rage, of course, where we all offer advice, even hurl abuse at other drivers on the road that we would never do if we were talking to them face to face.

We are all familiar with the phenomenon called 'flaming', coined by the early Internet enthusiasts and it is broadly the same thing with another name I expect. We seem to get drawn into it by genuine misunderstanding or even thoughtlessness, which a face-to-face, body language visible context would normally avoid automatically.

The best example I can give you is of the first Global Doctoral Set I ever ran with members from all sorts of cultures. We were all emergent in our ideas and expectations. Anyway, the patterns of relaxed feedback and constructive criticism familiar to the US educated managers was in no way acceptable to some from the Asia Pacific. And when some Scandinavians weighed in with their serious intent mode, Web Rage momentarily blew up.

What was fascinating was what the other 'motorists' did, so to speak. As the Programme's Set Adviser, I got taken aside at the airport to be briefed in hushed tones by one member when we did meet face to face but, as in all good pub fights, nobody stepped forward to intervene. The two individuals concerned readily accepted they had ruffled feathers and backed off with good grace and even a little humour. But at the time they expressed the views that created the rage, they little thought that was what they were about to do and we all felt there was a danger we might overreact in the aftermath.

It occurred, interestingly enough, at a time when I was in one of the rare face-to-face meetings I am able to have as I travel with just one of the managers. What we did but the others could not, was to have a chat, with the benefit of all the nuances of response that we cannot achieve on the Internet.

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The conclusion we eventually reached, as academics, I must say, rather than as the world's most successful practitioners, was that a goodly amount of behavioural research was truly needed so that the managers in the Sets and the faculty working with them all had to hand a set of workmanlike Dos and Don'ts that could be broken, with permission but, by and large, were the rules of discourse. Most adversarial political parliaments have them, after all. As soon as we started to try and craft them, however, we found that the very essence or heart of question and answer in the global forum was in danger. We were in danger of heading for an LCM not an HCF, simply to avoid Web Rage.

The so-called mature solution we settled on was the Web Rage Hazard Warning. In order to test one another's limits and not to tiptoe through the tulips, which we continue to believe are vital in the learning process, Web Rage is to be seen as an inevitable phenomenon from time to time. It's no different from any field of international business which is increasingly explored by our cross-cultural scholars. We make mistakes but are normally liked better for trying than for not. Even the French give up and speak English, you will recall, if we give it an appalling try ourselves first.

There is an alternative which is tempting. Why not get the Cybnauts together so that they know one another before or shortly after they start their Web Forum relationships? But it's not a real solution if we are talking global. It contradicts the transformed cost structures and the much vaunted opportunity to work cross-culturally. What is required by most of us is a new set of social skills that international businessmen and politicians have already sought to master. It won't be long before some bright experimentalist decides to put a whole Set of managers and faculty in a darkened room and require we all communicate with one another. But even then we will, perhaps, get additional clues from the tone of voice that words here on paper cannot impart.

So in answer to the query about tips on the Virtual Luncheon and indeed for CyberSets working together generally, the answer has to be that it's in the 'difficult basket' on my desk but not going unaddressed because we action learn what works and what does not everyday and live with the consequences of understatement and Web Rage all the while. I hope the Virtual Lunchers, particularly since they are MCB University Press' front-line Cyberscanners, get stuck in but remain always ready to apologise when they tread on some tulips they did not know were there. Throw caution to the winds but be ready to apologise. And if you are on the receiving end of some Web Rage, try very hard to understand the other person's state of mind. Now where have I heard that before?

Donna.

PS. Just to test how different your Virtual Luncheon colleagues are, you might ask them what they fancy for lunch today? They won't all say hamburgers and fries (at least I hope they won't). Now try and agree on which restaurant to all visit together.

e-Postcard 20

The Internet Dividend

Donna, Thanks for your observations on *Web Rage* in Postcard 19. They are truly helpful to us and a great antidote to the dominant argument we get that all conferences need mediation to stop junk e-mail/promotional slugs and folk who go on tediously/lose the point.

We have got an excellent conference running at the moment sponsored by the *Virtual University Journal*. It's been challenging whether or not the construct of a University as we know it has got any future meaning. The suggestion is that we can do away with the vast quantum of the bricks and mortar of Universities, and that tutoring can be contracted out to a virtual faculty drawn from all over the globe. As you will recall we have discussed before the buying in of faculty on the Internet who are most cost/beneficial and not being constrained by geographical proximity.

The second fascinating strand has been the emergence of the notion of an "Internet dividend" – like the "Peace dividend" at the end of the Cold War. All of a sudden, the cost of providing post secondary/tertiary education and learning resources is wholly transformed. We have of course always agreed that was going to be the case but the fascinating question is : will we therefore have a major saving of government expenditure/private fees or will we simply consume more of it to take advantage of the dividend?

Our guess here is that government will take the opportunity (in fact it seems to have been doing so in most advanced societies for the past decade) of holding the absolute budget in real terms, or even making a modest decrease, but expecting higher throughputs thereby forcing educationalists to embrace the new cost saving elements of the Internet.

To listen to most academic-speak of course, you'd scarcely think that. They are continually returning to the themes of yesterday demanding more resources to sustain the old models of university tutition. The cry is always that without it quality will inevitably suffer.

I just heard an obscene tale of a visiting professor in a famous university being required to tutor nearly 1000 students on a basic undergraduate course. He gives lectures in

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three batches. He's not a bad lecturer but hardly good enough to hold 300 plus students enthralled. If only the logic of the new technologies was being followed through what a difference could be made.

One significant breakthrough does seem likely though in Britain with the official launch of the new University for Industry, designed to act as a catalyst for workbased and work focused education and learning. What is being predicted is that unencumbered by past models and likely to attract innovative doers, the new technologies will get embraced. Certainly some of the models we have that our *Internet Research and Development Centre* created look likely runners. They as you know have largely been for face to face educational institutions but have been powerful in keeping tutors who are from afar and occasionally absent students well in touch with colleagues.

It also, interestingly enough, has shown us another important aspect of the Internet dividend. It is the new found ability to enable continuous monitoring of student and programme progress. It can sound a bit like 'Orwell's 1984 where Big Brother is watching you' but in intelligent hands it is no such thing. It's no threat to the competent conscientious faculty member or student.

The downside still remains the loss of social contact face to face amongst students and faculty. Accordingly, some of the savings might logically be seen as going in that direction as well as providing more of the formal resourcing to more students for the same or somewhat less cost.

Following your advice in E-postcard 16, we resolved to require a 3/4 days Intramural Student Workshop for all our Internet Masters students, and to require mandatory attendance at a 3/4 days Intramural Graduation Workshop too. At this latter event we will certainly do more than celebrate success. We will be doing our 'external examination' sessions to ensure the student is the very same individual who is about to graduate as well as ensuring cross fertilisation amongst the Graduates on management and career themes. With Graduates from all over the world, the opportunity for enhancing understanding of cross cultural and multicultural issues is enormous as well as perhaps facilitating future international business.

These two major face to face events we eventually hope to include in the fees already paid using the dividend that way. Currently we make additional charges. And naturally we want the students-cum-graduates to take charge of their own agendas as they meet. This we feel can be done via the Internet before they come together so the face to face workshops are truly a soft landing.

Does any of this make sense to you? Have you got such schemes running already there in Internetica?

By the way ... Margaret says she is going to reply next time to you. She is well aware we academics are getting most of the space on these e-postcards. She's been working closely with an organisation called Best Practice Club, and has a good tale to tell.

Best wishes as ever, George.

e-Postcard 21

Dynamic Searching of Living Resources

Donna, as George mentioned in his last postcard, I am well overdue passing on my most recent experiences outside the academic sphere! So, rather than wait to hear from you, I thought I'd spill the beans here and now.

We have just completed a fascinating development project that allows online access and searching of 'humble' resources. I got the idea from George who had explored using Microsoft's ACCESS to let distance learning students all over the world search Faculty CVs to see who might have some worthwhile experience that could assist in their projects. It rapidly got extended to include the dissertations that have been written in recent years and even the major assignments on a given programme of studies within one of their long running in-company/learning organisations ... all employing the same key words as ANBAR's thesaurus.

My project was to apply this to two quite distinct contexts. The first was for project reports in environmental remediation and the second for areas of interest amongst a group of 500 benchmarking 'best practice' club members. Once you state it, it seems straightforward and obvious. What we are doing is creating an accessible filing system with imaginative search criteria that anyone around the world can access – with or without passwording applied, of course. The benefits already achieved are quite enormous. For the environmental remediation project the incidence of finding good prior instances that assist a new project has gone up 400%, which is the same success rate that George had using the Faculty database to track down good/well matched doctoral supervisors – another surprising use he found!

The best practice benchmarkers use their living resource on two levels ... the first is to explore like areas of interest, general awareness really. They end up chatting and even heading for face-to-face workshops on rotation at one another's premises. That is obviously valued but what is a real winner is when a particular issue arises that needs a focussed answer quickly.

Most clients are afraid of the expense involved in getting the search criteria thought well through and capturing enough of a backlog of data from the old regime to

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demonstrate just how powerful it can be. But once that hurdle is crossed (and it needs a champion with a budget) we find the value is so apparent that the willingness to keep the database up to date is much much greater. It will never be good enough without a formal Living Resource Catalyser, of course, on the payroll and judged for doing the chasing well. We have used the reliable protocols of ISO 9002 for this yet again, with the customary success.

What's new with you in Internetica? How are you staying ahead of all the imitators you seemingly have now or are you resting on your laurels with a handsome market share? I heard that your e-marketing is creating no end of distribution opportunities around the world. Surely that will create problems for maintaining the culture and standards you established under your own direct jurisdiction? I look forward to observations and experience in these areas and all the other news.

All the best from us both, Margaret.



e-Postcard 22

Underwhelmed yet Buoyant

Donna, the *Virtual Luncheon* I told you we were having for Internet Editors came and went, and its face to face companion.

It's left us all just as bemused about the paradox of the opportunities the Internet presents yet the seeming unreadiness of so many to take advantage of them. We seem to have captured all those who are innovators and are now waiting for the arrival of the next wave. It is these folk who are demanding that the technology works better and is more customer friendly before they can be bothered with it all. What surprised us most was that of nearly 100 Internet Editors with MCB University Press, only 20% participated in the Virtual Luncheon. They either had no views on the themes we discussed or they were keeping them a secret. And this last element is most unlikely to be the case.

The themes at the Virtual Luncheon were precisely focussed on their concerns. How can we make sense of the proliferation of sites and the lack of e-sales success expected by so many who initially hoped it would open up major new markets in a rush?

So our verdict has been underwhelming but we are still buoyant. Now why, you might ask, would that be? Well, its because no matter how many doubting Thomases there seem to be out there, the dividend of vastly reduced cost of access and its concomitant access for virtually anyone with a phone or cable connection, is inevitably going to win out.

The challenge is not to be impatient and to hold on in there as the voices of conservatism counsel delay and wait-and-see. All readings of the literature seem to indicate that you cannot stay at home when a revolution is going on. You must be on the streets, helping to shape it if you wish to be there on the other side.

Perhaps the major buoyancy factor we have experienced this month has been the arrival of global enterprises at our doors asking us to design global deliverables for them. They are seeking to reduce the need for face to face and even video conferencing and to up-grade e-written communications as a potentially more reflective way of sharing and comparing around the world.

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The workable model that seems to be emerging therefore is multimedia, not an exclusively Internet-based approach. Face to face is being consciously used with pre and post Internet processes. Its a process analogous to down loading electronically transferred resources and information so it can be read in a different absorption mode.

We have so much still to learn about how the dividend from the Internet can be integrated into our lives both at work and at home. Sometimes it will be able to reinforce what we are already comfortable doing and at other times it will create totally new opportunities we only dreamt of attaining. My favourite example of the first is the power the Internet gives to doctoral students and Faculty by tutors to search deeply at speed and to stay up to date so easily in comparison with the time and energy required only a decade ago. And for the second, our ability via on-line bookshops to track and review almost any title in print – including book reviews of it – and to have it despatched to us in an instant.

The more one contemplates the challenge, however, the more one realises what an opportunity awaits the professional librarian who takes up the challenge of imaginative indexation and classification of the wealth of data for us all because without them we will never be able to cope!

All the best, George

e-Postcard 23

How Hospitable the Net can be

George and Fredrick, what can I say? Three e-postcards from you and no reply. How inhospitable of me but I have a great explanation. We have all been up to our eyeballs here at U of N creating the most hospitable cyberspace yet. We have been asked by a dream consortium from industry and the hospitality profession globally, to address their twin challenges of (a) Professional Current Awareness on a profiled basis and (b) Professional Training and Development via Internet researched and driven programmes of action learning. The vital ingredient is, of course, the on-line Virtual Library of Hospitality and Tourism that MCB University Press has now incorporated within ANBAR's existing virtual library.

We have long talked about getting the several players of the knowledge business together in an industry and/or professional focus. And now we have it.

We have designed the site called an 'e-network', with business models in mind, of course. What are the demand pulls available to make it a success and to prioritise our investment in the myriad areas where we do intend to go but cannot do them all first? To get the show on the road we have landed two of the world's largest hotel and tourism groups who are going to use it as the cyber-engine/resource centre for areas (a) and (b) above. But to achieve that they are committed to taking their top HR team from around the world through a Masters/Doctoral Level programme of action learning, where all the projects are (you guessed) about how to set up and run the Hospitality e-Network! So we have process projects and content projects, and some of the most fascinating fit right into the Enterprise School of Management we have been pioneering since 1993. For instance, their own Training and Development Faculty will become adjunct University Faculty, able to cyber-tutor and undertake the accreditation of prior learning and experience (APEL) of their own managers and staff.

Within the professional groups of hospitality worldwide there is, of course, a desire by individuals to update themselves personally and to gain initial and advanced qualifications often outwith their own employer directly. Here we are using the same central resources for them to follow the routes they want, with the profession itself coming up with a panel of on-line cyber-mentors who we will gladly induct in the necessary skills.

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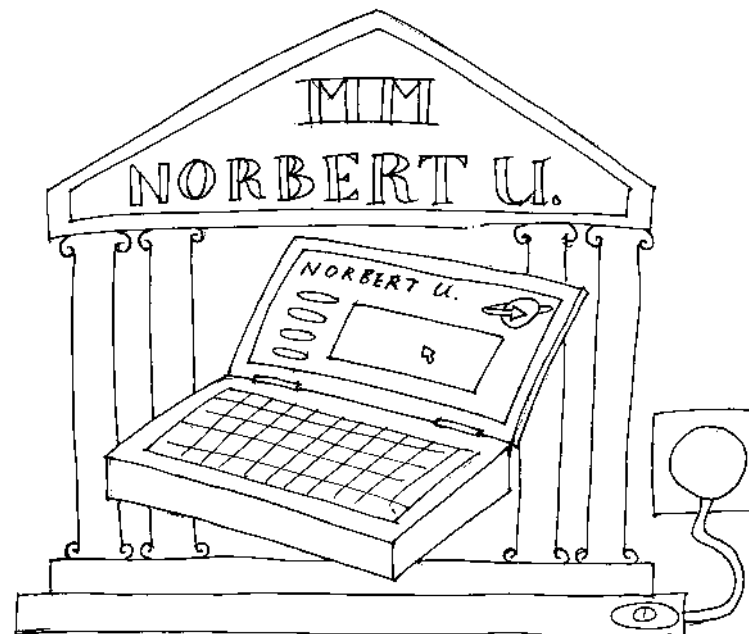
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So, you can see we have been very busy and it starts with three real, not virtual, luncheons in London in two weeks time and with three different groups of hospitality staffs of Global CyberSets from end June. We are bursting with enthusiasm and not really showing the concern we need to make it work. We have an Australian here who keeps walking around mumbling: ‘She’ll be right!’ Undoubtedly an Aboriginal Dreamtime story behind that.

Please forgive me, therefore, for the long silence. It’s time we saw you again over here in Internetica you know. We could do with some of that hard learnt experience here with our Webmasters in the coming 12 months.

All the best, Donna.



e-Postcard 24

Here's Hoping we Lose our Baggage

Donna – It scarcely seems possible that it was only two years ago that we visited with you in Internetica for our sabbatical leave! Frankly, it seems like 10 years, so much has happened at such breakneck speed.

Your description in your last Postcard of the Virtual University you have just launched in hospitality was so inspiring ... you've convinced us that it's time for some more leave with you. We both feel a desperate need to get away from it all and take stock. It's virtually impossible to do that here at Trad U and in the consultancy business because of the sheer weight of the baggage. We can clearly understand why extrapolating from the present to an uncertain future is a painful experience for most. But the drag on, and the monotony of, leading innovations forward in such a conservative, cartelised world is exhausting. To keep any vision alive requires superhuman skills and persistence that are always in strictly limited supply. The temptation to compromise on the readily understood futures simply for a quiet life is too great.

It's not a rest from labour that we are seeking. It's an escape from the eternal need here at Trad U to explain, and re-explain, and then attend to the deliberately engineered delays placed in the way of most of the exciting ideas we know we need to advance.

If we sound pessimistic, we are definitely not! We are exhausted – and in need of the fillip that can only come from working with self-critical believers who are ahead of us, rather than procrastinatory attrition from those who are behind us.

When we proposed to our employers this second sabbatical at your University of Norbert we were, as you would expect, asked why? They were puzzled by the points set down above. They are wholly self-congratulatory at the progress they have made. 'We have achieved in 18 months what would normally take 5 years', was one comment. And they seriously believe that progress can be measured by comparing their response to the Internet innovation with their own normal response to proposals in Trad U – not by the law of the situation concerned which is outwith their control. In any event, they agreed it would be good for us to do as we wish (and, much as before our initial sabbatical, they said they would welcome the relief of not having us around, continually pressing for change!)

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There was one condition. We should summarise where we truly felt that the Internet had established an indisputable lead over traditional approaches. We both had a shot independently and were delighted to find we could agree on six elements as follows:

1. The scope for transparent monitoring of what is afoot within systems of behaviour offers a major facilitation for empowerment models of almost every description.
2. The polyadic as opposed to dyadic nature of discussions/learning/communities of interest offered by Web Forums is an outstanding benefit for distance learners and for any individuals away, temporarily, in the field.
3. The access to the on-line virtual library resources any and everywhere in the world with a telephone connection, whether it be for on-line books or the ordering of hard copy, plus the latest articles in full text pdf, has a massively democratising effect.
4. The profiling of our individual needs and wants for information, sharing and comparing, together with well-engineered continuous publishing/search engines/intelligent agents, has the potential to transform current awareness services.
5. The ability, via a single master file with on-line access, to keep all resources and information up to date and ready for instant/j-i-t downloading, eliminating inventory and postal delays/losses/costs, gives excellent cost benefit gains.
6. Costly face-to-face proactivity remains a highly valued element in the Internet facilitated world we are creating and, although the promise of widespread audio and video connectivities is now with us (synchronised or not), the consensus is that it will live on well as a complementary medium and grow in strength.

So, that's our list of consensual features that seem to be here to stay. What we want to debate, explore and advance when we are back with you in Internetica, is how they all come together. What we are searching for is marketable products and services that are beneficial systems, not technology creations per se. We need client groups who are determined to address that issue, as we are, and to invest, as we are, in making the future happen.

Fredrick, who avidly reads all our e-Postcards here, has urged us both to take up your invitations, with only one caveat. Once we are with you we have to be sure to keep the e-Postcards flowing. He says he is very comfortable thus living vicariously in revolutionary times. He realises only too well that cherry picking elements in 1-6 above and feeling comfortable is not what it's all about; in fact he characterises it as the primrose path!

We shall be with you in precisely four weeks and hope to stay for at least a year. We've realised that we can, of course, continue doing a good 'virtual' job for Trad U and the consultancy over there, as well as over here! Not sure whether the folks here realise they won't truly be shot of us for a year!

All the very best, and see you soon, Margaret and George.

e-Postcard 25

Incipient Respectability and ISO 9002

Donna – The bags are packed and we'll both be with you shortly. One last card from here ... We had an extraordinary experience a couple of weeks ago. As you know, we work with a host of allied institutions from Trad U validating awards and advising on faculty induction and the like. Anyway, we got two requests for action; one in the Lebanon and the other for an International Japanese College. The extraordinary thing about them both was that they assumed we were experts at using the Internet in tertiary/adult education. Furthermore, they simply asked us to tell them what needed to be done.

That had us deeply worried. It would appear that the modest achievements we have had over the past two years have made us look like we know what we are doing, really. And we thought we were very much still an emergent force. It's a pretty responsible role to attempt to play when we have not really institutionalised our activities that much.

But on reflection, we realised it was our ISO 9002 registration that impressed them. The Japanese in particular, you will know, are very keen on the processes of continuous improvement and, of course, we seek to do a lot of that via the ISO 9002 quality systems. We got to thinking, as we indicated in e-Postcard 24, just how much we have now nailed down. And it is, I suppose, impressive.

So, I hesitate to say it to you, as we are about to travel forward in time to Internetica again, but we've become almost a benchmark around this part of the world to outsiders. It's just prophesying in our own Uni. that comes unstuck!

Most of these e-Postcards have really dealt with the benefits of using the Internet rather than the work that the techies get up to behind the pages to make them look elegant, be navigable and deliver great learning support. In e-Postcard 13 and e-Postcard 14 about this time last year, we shared thoughts about some of the issues. You will recall I told you that we had set up a unit called the Internet Research & Development Centre (IRDC) to support us all. It's gone from strength to strength and uses the ISO 9002 protocols not only to monitor

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and improve the effectiveness of the Registry systems but now also for Global Forums and learning groups including the Global Doctoral Set.

ISO 9002 involves identifying the specific of the systems we use and deliver so that their performances against standards can be measured regularly and improvements made to get where we need to be. Sounds tedious to the creator/innovator, but for the type of dynamic/ever-evolving work we do, it's the ideal complement. There are a dozen or more occasions now where the ISO 9002 protocols have demanded of us that we follow through where otherwise it would have been left to itself.

One of the early things I think we will want to do is share the outcomes with you. It seems it might be 'one' area where we are doing something where we can help you improve! Hope so ... Best wishes George



e-Postcard 26

Budget Time

Fredrick – I can hardly believe it, but we walked straight into Donna’s budget cycle. Only a year ago there was no such thing here as a coherent approach to budgets. The incipient responsibility we have just discovered with ISO 9002 at Trad U (e-Postcard 25) seems to have arrived here with a vengeance.

The story is as you would expect! The investors reckon it’s time for return to begin to occur. And if they cannot see it coming, they are saying a new more promising home must be found for their next tranche of funds. It seems incredible that the viable, innovative emergent cycle has reached quasi maturity in no more than five years. But we don’t expect to be home early because Donna’s reputation here is second to none, and she is confident of good funding shortly. But she’s not comfortable with a tied down annual budget with quarterly variance analyses – submitted to distant investors who, she claims, have little sympathy for the long term benefits.

The theme of funding viable ‘business models’ is certainly one we have discussed extensively in our e-Postcards for the past two years (*Quest for Business Models* (17) and *Internet Dividend* (20) but it’s the arrival of the accountant at close quarters that has thrown them here. (I can hear you saying ‘long overdue’, George!)

Derek has been most helpful in the debate. He has agreed, like you would, that if not overdone, it can be readily turned to advantage. Substantial waste inevitably creeps into any new areas and folk are slow to give up on investments in their managerial ego. Derek argues that the recurring solution is to sustain the innovative leading edge momentum on the basis of clients rather than speculative finance. And to operationalize the things we are familiar with by now. Unless the transfer of innovative developments into archived systems is a declared objective and professionally accomplished, any and all investors must inevitably grow weary.

Derek insists on asking Donna how much of her own savings, even her pension fund, she would be willing to invest in some of the initiatives she proposes. At least that type of questioning gives her pause for thought.



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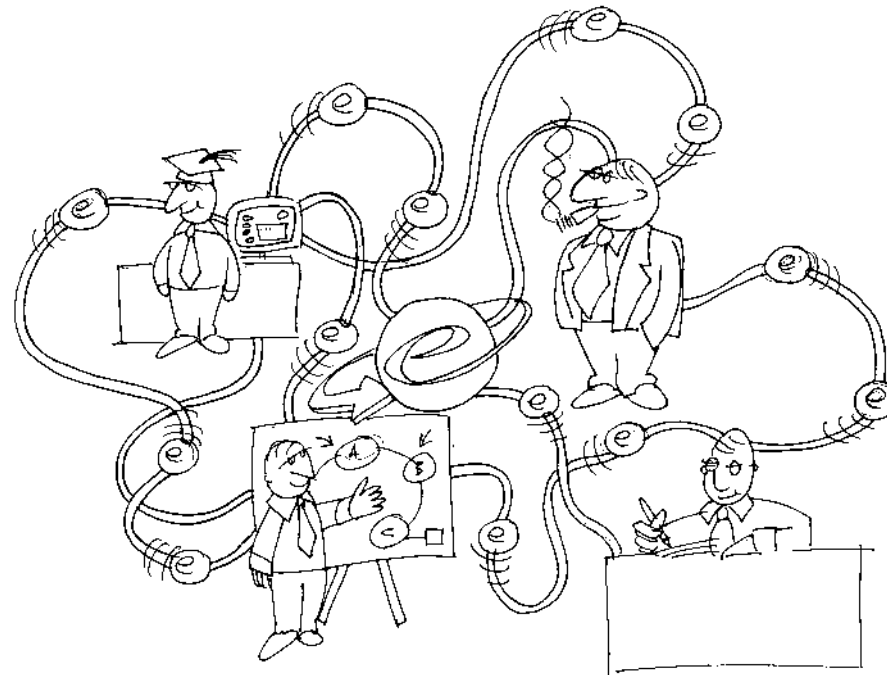
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Sorry to burden you with all this in my first e-Postcard back here in Internetica. I suppose it can never be the same experience second time around but I thought you'd relish the drift of this one. Next time I write, rest assured you'll be hearing all about doing your MBA from the newsagent, by CD and Internet linkage, and AP(E)L routes.

Must rush – George

PS – Just to let you know, by the way, that our earlier selection of e-Postcards has now been published as “*The Knowledge Game*” by Cassell, London (1998)



e-Postcard 27

Better Managers from the News Agent

Fredrick – George has asked me to write with the details of the plans emerging here now to offer MBAs via the News Agents. I have spent endless hours with Donna because she is using me as her consultant on the distribution side of it all.

In essence, we are stepping back from the 100% Internet delivery systems here to offer the MBA by modules, one CD per module, at the News Agents. By that I mean the corner store selling paper based news and paperback books. U of Norbert has agreed to grant credit for anyone who purchases the CD, at no more than \$US 40 each, and stays the course and submits the assignment. So, for the sake of following 12 CDs you can get all the credits you need. Furthermore, if you are an effective practising manager you can gain up to one third credits for prior ‘experience’ so long as you capture it in a worthy audit/explication essay.

I know the CD sounds static, but once loaded on the PC it can fire up the Internet URL to gain access to the ANBAR full text library anyway, and to the Global Forums. The major advantage therefore is getting the MBA by module into a distribution outlet that can sell volume at \$US 40. Which is pretty widespread, not to mention all the paperback outlets around the world as well as newsagents. The proposition runs that if paperback books about management can sell, why not programme modules.

Most importantly though, they will not be sold as modules but rather as briefing. We are not sure how many will ever want to submit for credits/get a certificate. Whilst that would be nice and we believe well worthwhile, its not of course necessary for benefits to be gained by the user.

The other fascinating development is that all four other universities here in Internetica are willing to give credits too for their MBAs. U of Norbert via Donna is getting them involved in joint authorships of course, but also getting the top names around the world to add their own special contribution. It’s a bit like getting one of the greats to commend a book one has written, but goes further with video clips etc.



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So, the discovery that has dawned on George and I is that CDs have got a role to play where, even though they are not what the Internet can truly do on a good day, they can unlock distribution that the Internet cannot. They can through their wrap around packaging alone offer tactile appreciation of the body of knowledge that the Internet still cannot offer. And by firing up Internet connections when needed, the benefits thereof can be accessed as well.

We are also addressing the old chestnut in distance education of how can you be certain that the student who sends in the assignments is the one who gets the certificate! Norbert U's IMC have developed the videoconferencing final examination before anyone gets to MBA. Not the least expensive service available, but getting cheaper all the while.

All in all, quite a surprise for us.

Trust you are enjoying the calm whilst we are away Best wishes, Margaret

E-Postcard 28

Skipping Parade without Jankers?

Margaret – We were intrigued here at Trad U to learn of the step back being taken to CD ROM distribution (e-Postcard 27), but it is clear why. What interested us most, however, was the notion that the four universities in Internetica were all going to work with your own Norbert U to create a ‘common’ resource so to speak.

Our interest was less perhaps what it should have been: Who Next Rules The World? ... but how could four universities hold a consistent view for long enough to agree? And that’s what I hope you can clarify. If you have found the answer there, we can copycat you back here.

Our experience, as George can well recount, has been that the collegiate management model of the university, when taken with the assertion of academic freedom and the guarantee of funding from the state, leads to wilful behaviour that at best can be described as centrifugal rather than centripetal. The only certain uniting force has normally been economic self interest, so we are wondering whether that is somewhere present in the patterns that have emerged?

Why would university staffs go for ‘group think’ when they have the freedom to think what they wish without any dire economic consequences? Anxieties, yes, talk about a different future as we have done here for a long while in our exchanges of postcards, but not a serious enough threat to trigger motivated action to change a way of life. So is it academic chatter or dreamtime, or is something stirring in the undergrowth?

We all hope the answer is that the CDs are about to arrive. Just as we all gladly exploited the massive investment that the British Open University made in the 70s and 80s in world class teaching resources, we can see how we can coat tail along on the back of Norbert U led electronic resources. We will not even have to come to terms with creating our own. We can go straight from chalk and talk to seminar/tutorial activities face to face here on the campus. We can get back to the staff/student ratios we read of in the history of the early 20th century, and truly know and educate our students. What one of our 2nd World War heroes here calls ‘skipping parade without jankers’.

By air mail
Par avion

Mrs Margaret Advent

Internet Management Centre

IQMA

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The cynics here observe that its the sort of approach that will greatly commend itself to the senior management of the university as pressures mount on them to make the state's investment in tertiary education yet more effective judged by cost/student graduated. Why do we need Faculty members with doctorates and advancing research careers if the real task is reflective listening in a tutorial and staying ahead of the CD by one session at a time. And so I am sure it will. The de-skilling of the task has been in progress ever since the textbook was invented and the Open University offered world class audio visual resources. The notion of the tutor/learner processes as medieval craftsmanship in motion has already withered has it not. We are just not clear yet where we go instead.

All in all, though, you and George have our very best wishes ... Fredrick



e-Postcard 29

Learning Osmosis in the Research Led University

Fredrick – How could you? Margaret showed me e-Postcard 28 and I must reassure you that Jankers must be endured. There is no way I have been able to convince Donna that fine institutions of learning can exist without being research led. Mind you, we are not necessarily talking mega-dollar programmes, but the notion of a tutoring elite who are not also into personal enquiry and self-development is not on. Neither, by the way, are we talking about how high up some League Table an institution comes based on published research papers in refereed journals, electronic or otherwise. So, hoping that Trad U can get by using excellent resources created elsewhere is out. What has to be in however with scarce resources is where do we focus to be excellent. We cannot do everything, and we are always, in the University world, in danger of being less than the sum of the Faculty parts.

Donna admits that such assertions are thus far unprovable, and hard to measure. But that's no case for throwing them out; on the contrary it's a challenge to develop convincing metrics that can be deployed to test them. The opening salvo, or should I say hypothesis, is that it occurs by osmosis. Good enquiring minds do indeed publish their thoughts to expand and extend their debate and discourse. We all seek to contribute and in the process become more visible. That means that we are also better known, and on the short list of more minds seeking to learn. If the quality of our debate and discourse is deemed high, then it attracts the better and more enquiring student to our Colleges ... and success breeds more success. Good students challenge their tutors and urge them forward too.

The veracity of the hypothesis would appear to be evidenced by Universities' enthusiasm for buying in going-concern Faculty teams, rather than seeking to build from scratch. If the most talent will not come then the high flying talent must be attracted and nurtured. Students follow the flag so to speak. The conclusion from this is: do not try to build your reputation as a university by a reputation for good teaching; you will get there by having a reputation for inspired thinking and ferment of argument which can only come at the leading edge, not at performing well in known territories. Of course teaching can be so bad it's

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insufferable, but so bad really means uninspired and unprovocative rather than polished artistry on the podium. None of us resist being entertained, but few of us confuse it with learning.

So we have concluded, here in Internetica, following your Skipping Parade without Jankers card, that the more important thing we were saying in *Better Managers from the Newsagent* was that the Virtual university of the future is going to have alliances of terrestrial workshops on many an historic campus. But the real University will be 'faculty in discourse' as at Conferences and as on the Internet in potentially continuous conferential mode. Any one terrestrial workshop for the Virtual University may or may not glisten, but taken within its alliance it surely will.

I trust these comments are helpful in your own discussions. I shall write again in a few weeks with details of the new marketing strategies now emerging for building stronger terrestrial workshop linkages ... including our plans to open a new US campus quite specifically known as Revans' University, after one of the great founding fathers of today's workplace learning movement.

Very best wishes till then ... George

e-Postcard 30

Virtual Uni and Virtual Conferences

Dear Fredrick – A further card as promised last month! I thought I was going to launch into a tale about how we have evolved the marketing strategies here at Internetica for terrestrial workshops, and I will get there, but I wanted to bring you up to date on a couple of points.

Donna's colleague Richard Deddington, was due to give one of the regular terrestrial briefings for the *Virtual Conference Centre* that MCB University Press runs in association with all its *Forums* last week. But he was whisked off to Paris and then Hong Kong. So I was asked to fill in. It was a small group mainly from a Sister University here in Internetica, which had amongst its Faculty the editors of no less than two e-journals publishing with *Internet Free Press*. The two titles are the *Virtual University Journal* and *Continuing Professional Development Journal*. And from another campus was the editor of the new Management Literature in Review e-journal too.

No sooner had we started than the Editors proudly displayed on the tables their first volumes of articles in printed covers! You can imagine my amazement. What a contradiction I thought, but: 'No', they said. The tactile is infinitely superior to the e-images, and it's the only way to get the credibility they need in Trad U's around the globe. And without it, the traditional devices for assuring quality cannot be seen to be accomplished. Heated debate from the rest followed. One character asserted that the likelihood the paper-based articles would be read was far lower now than when they were on the Internet, where incidentally they are of course still available. She defended that proposition by observing that in all fields the body of knowledge was sufficiently dynamic for Working Papers or Pre-prints to be more valuable than delayed final versions of papers.

Furthermore the cut and thrust of comments and debate as pre-prints are explored together is more valuable to an author than the almost total lack of follow up received from a final version. Which of course got us all thinking and on to the theme of why we were gathered anyway i.e. to discuss Virtual Conferences. Sure enough we all soon agreed that



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Conferences were the way we got the cut and thrust and that if the skills of Virtual Conference management were being honed, they were an ideal way to advance the intellectual cause. The outcome was to propose that in future the Internet Free Press should take a much more determined approach to all papers arriving for publication, and place them into a Virtual Conference frame for a few months prior to asking the author to finalise them.

Talking to Donna afterwards she reminded me that was exactly what they were already doing for their in-company action learning programmes at MBA level. The faculty were summarising the key issues raised by all the Associates on programmes for feedback to the sponsoring management teams, but before finalising them they were putting them into Virtual Conference mode with the Associates themselves.

The important finding here was that rather than seeing the Virtual Conference as a way to originate an article, we were seeing it as a way to polish pre-print papers.

Which sort of, if not quite, leads back to the point about terrestrial workshops. What is so exciting is that we are no longer going for virtual versus terrestrial. We are going for a seamless mixture of the two with cost/benefit and feasibility as the test of which to do and when. And that is precisely what Richard Deddington had skiddadled off to Paris and Hong Kong to do – some terrestrial, or f2f as we still call it for face to face, with an enormous global corporate who in 1999 and 2000 will be orchestrating one of the most substantial Virtual Universities afloat, Marriott Hotels.

*So all in all, a good days work on Richard's behalf, and as ever a lot still to learn. Looking forward to hearing from you back home next month,
As ever ... George*