

Through the Years: A Technology Literacy Narrative

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Abstract

Technology has always been around me since I was a very small child. It is hard for me to imagine a world without technology. Through the years, I have changed, adapted and moved with technology. I am not the most technologically literate person, but I try hard to learn the new and different ways to do things. My way of learning has always been by trial and error. Some would consider me a “late adopter,” but most of that has been by choice. I usually know about the latest fad, but rarely jump on the bandwagon right away. I know I have a lot to learn, and I look forward to what new and exciting technology the future brings.

My Life with Technology

Using Technology: The Early Years

My first vivid memory of technology includes waking up on a Saturday morning and running to ask my dad to play “hamburger music” on the record player. Hamburger music was actually a record by the band, BLT (Bruce, Lordan, Trower). The record case had a giant picture of a BLT (the sandwich) that my sister and I confused for a hamburger. (See Figure 1) In any case, there was one song in particular called “Into Money” that had an infectious beat that my sister and I would jump around the living room and dance to. This was such a vivid and fun part of my childhood that I actually went back a few years ago, found that record and did some digging to find out what the name of that song was. I found it on a Robin Trower CD and gave that to my dad as a Christmas present.



Figure 1: B.L.T. Album Cover

Using Technology: What is a Computer?

My first experience with a computer had to have been when I was 6 or 7 years old. The year would have been 1991 or 1992. Computers were still in the early stages of development, and my dad brought one of the early versions of an Apple computer home. He was doing work with AutoCAD and design software, and I remember watching him in the basement drawing green lines on this black computer screen in this weird white box. I sort of remember some kind of game with white squares and dots. It was probably one of the earliest forms of computer games.

As I got older and computers were upgraded, my parents invested in a computer, and lucky for me, they put it in my room! Microsoft built this computer; it operated off Windows 3.1 and still had a DOS operating system. We had that computer for quite a while, probably from when I was 10 to age 14 or 15. My sister and I had many computer programs and games on there (mostly educational) and I remember those being a big part of growing up. We had a *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* computer game, we played *Thinkin Things*, *Oregon Trail*, and many others. My favorite game by far was *Chip's Challenge*. (see Figure 2)



Figure 2: *Chip's Challenge* Screen Shot

Chip's Challenge was a game of skill, where the user had to solve a puzzle, dodge enemies or find a way to get Chip through the maze to advance to the next level. At the end of each level, the player was given a password to clear them through to the next level. Some levels had to be completed within a time limit, while others just involved completing the maze. It was an addicting game, very challenging and very fun. I stopped playing when we got a new computer, and I had been stuck on one level for about a year.

I remember writing papers for middle school on Word Perfect. I remember that it had an eerie weird blue screen and it was hard to navigate. We had an old dot matrix printer, and I can distinctly remember trying to print out my 8th grade report the morning it was due. I was having problems getting it to print, and I think this was probably my first experience in troubleshooting. Of course, my mom was no help so I was in a panic and tried unplugging, reconnecting and everything in between. I do not remember what the magic fix was, but I eventually got it up and running, printed the paper off and still made it to school on time!

Using Technology: Cassette Tapes, CD's and DVD's

Growing up, my sister and I listened to cassette tapes and I remember Rafi, Shel Silverstein and others being some of my favorites. I even tried my hand at tape mixing. I had a blank tape and a boom box with a recording function. I thought it would be cool to record my favorite songs on the radio so that is what I tried to do. I had my small alarm clock radio on the floor next to me; as soon as the song came on; I hit record on the boom box and held the small microphone to the speaker of the radio. That was my first lesson on sound recording, and my tapes were fuzzy and sounded terrible. I think I still used a few of the tapes, but the sound quality was very poor. One can see why I did not going into the music recording field!

As I moved through adolescence, I never was big into CD's and movies. I think most of my interests were in books and reading. My CD collection is sparse; I probably have less than 50. My movie collection is even more pathetic. I think I only own about 15 DVD's. I just was not interested in spending money to buy those things. Most of the CD's and movies I got were as gifts. Now that I have an iPod, I am much more interested in buying and owning music. It is so easy to go on iTunes, look up a song, buy it for \$1.29 and listen to it after it downloads. This new technology with direct billing to my account has made me a consumer of music.

Developing Technology Skills: Computers and the Internet

I really started developing my "technology skills" when I entered high school. By that time, all of my friends were already connected to the internet and had PC's at home. I was still using that dinosaur computer with Windows 3.1 and was very strongly urging my parents to get a new computer so that I could complete homework assignments and have internet access at home. My parents finally caved in and bought a new computer with Windows XP when I was 16 years old. I nagged my dad to hook up the PC, but he would not do it so I was forced to figure out how to set it up on my own. Once I connected the hardware, I had to set up the software on the computer as well. I enabled our internet access (via AOL) and set up accounts for everyone in my family. Once I finished installing the printer my family deemed me the "computer expert!" Everything I learned was done by trial and error. Since I had no one to ask, I became very good at browsing the internet and using the "help" sections of any software or hardware I was trying to set-up. Because I learned technology by trial and error, it is now quite easy for me to pick up new technology. There is always a learning curve, but I think I am able to adapt easily and I know where to go and how to look for information. I still get easily frustrated

with technology, and I know firsthand that when something does not work. It can take hours to figure out if a person does not know what they are doing. I think technology can be a great help; and it does make things go much faster and smoother, but when things are not working, it can be an extreme inconvenience.

Being around an older generation (at my jobs for example) makes me seem much more technologically literate. Even though my knowledge is not that advanced, I am still miles ahead of most people in their 40's and 50's. At my job with Wisconsin Public Radio, I am now considered the resident "IT expert," so whenever someone has a problem, they come to me. This can be frustrating because I have never been trained in computer software or programming. The only reason I know the things I do is due to trial and error. I may not have the best way of solving a problem, and it takes me much longer than a person who has training, but I guess that works for now. The main things that I work on are setting up new computers, mapping network drives, installing printers and other hardware, and running virus scans. I also find myself helping older volunteers and even some staff on using basic Microsoft Office functions. Every time Internet Explorer moves to a different version, I have to show staff and volunteers where the buttons moved to and how they perform the functions they did before. Some of those things are second nature to me, but they seem like hard things for others to pick up.

Developing Technology Skills: Am I a Late Adopter?

College was an interesting experience for me because while I had a good computer sense, I was not up on "gaming" or any new up and coming technologies. I had always been so far advanced for my immediate family that I did not realize how far behind my peer group I was. I had a few "computer nerd" friends in college whose computer skills were so vastly superior to

mine that I felt lost. I worked hard to catch up and learn new things. I still would say I am a “late adapter” in my peer group. I did not get an iPod for a long time, and when I finally moved past my little MP3 player, I moved to an iPod Nano. (See Figure 3) In some ways, I am glad I waited that long because the iPod technology changed so fast and rapidly, it was hard for many of my friends to get replacement batteries or other things for their outdated versions of the iPod. The Nano is still being sold today so I will not have that problem.



Figure 3: iPod Nano

I was also far behind my peer group in cell-phone technology. I finally broke down in the summer of 2009 and added texting to my phone. I have always had a “no frills” cell phone that did the basics. Adding texting was nice, but I only had 250 a month, so I really had to watch how many texts I actually sent. Most of my friends had already been texting for a couple years, and they kept nagging me to get texting. This past summer, we switched companies and plans; I now have unlimited texting and internet access on my Samsung Reality. In addition, my phone has a camera and I can download ring tones if I want to pay for it. I have quick links to Facebook and YouTube as well. It is nice to have those features, and I am considering getting an iPhone for my next phone purchase.

Developing Technology Skills: Why Won't This Work?

The one technology that really angers and frustrates me is Adobe Dreamweaver. I had to start using the software for my Web Design class my first semester of graduate school. I am not skilled with Adobe programs to begin with, and this was very difficult software for me to use. The layout portion was ok, but I found myself very confused with how and where to find things. The program has so many different components and ways to do things that it is easy to forget or accidentally do something wrong. In addition, I am not good with graphic design or layout and the cascading style sheets portion of that software was very hard for me to comprehend and work with. I wanted to do my online portfolio for my program all in Dreamweaver but have since given up to save myself hours of frustration.

Learning New Technology: A Quest for Creativity and New Products

There are some programs that I would like to learn, and work with, to develop my skills. I have often regretted not minoring in graphic design; I think learning and mastering the Adobe suite (or other design software) would be very beneficial to me in my career path. I have always felt like I was not a very visually creative person (not really into crafts or art), so I never explored that area. Now as I move into different careers and explore different areas of marketing, public relations and communications, I am seeing those skills as ones I would like to have. I would like to take a few years off when I finish my Masters but hopefully go back and work on an associates or bachelor's degree in graphic design.

Another skill I would like to develop would be in photography. There are so many "amateur" photographers out there today who take awesome photographs. I do take pictures, but not as many as I would like. When I go on trips, my most recent one was in June to Iceland, I take many pictures, and they go in photo albums. However, general day-to-day pictures just go

on Facebook (and sometimes not even there) or sit on my computer. I'd love to get a really nice camera and work on lighting, effects and design, perhaps working that back in with graphic design. I recently became aware of a program called *Creative Memories*. It is digital scrapbooking type software lets a person create amazing printouts of pictures. In addition, they Creative Memories software helps a designer tag and categorize pictures multiple ways so finding them is a snap. That sounds helpful to me as I had almost 300 pictures from my Iceland trip! Another reason to upgrade to a new camera is so I can get cleaner, clearer pictures. The picture below (See Figure 4) is of a blue whale that we saw on a whale watching tour...I am betting that if I had a better camera, I could have gotten a much better and clearer shot!



Figure 4: Picture of a Blue Whale off the coast of Iceland

The figure below is a photo I took in Hawaii in December 2008. I was working on taking a creative shot; I think I captured that well with the tree in the foreground and the cruise ship in

the background. I have always admired people who have a creative eye for this type of art, and I was happy when my photograph turned out the way I wanted it to! (See Figure 5)



Figure 5: Photo of Tree and Cruise Ship taken on the Big Island of Hawaii

Technology has always been a factor in my life. I grew up during the “technology boom,” so it is hard to imagine my life without computers, CD’s, DVD’s, calculators and more. While I do not always adopt technology right away, I am usually aware of it, and I have a reason (whether good or bad) for not adopting it. I try to inform myself about the new fads and trends and weigh my options for using or not using the technology. For me, I know there are things that could probably make my life faster and easier, but sometimes, I just enjoy an old technology or I just do not see the need for something in my life. I will give a few examples. The new rage right now is the Kindle or Nook-popular electronic readers. For me, I prefer to read from a book. I like the feel of the pages; I like curling up with a book. I get my books from friends, the library

and bookstores. I know that using an e-reader would be much cheaper than buying a book at the bookstore, but I like reading the “old-fashioned” way and I will probably continue to do so.

The Future of my Technology Use

I would say the internet, out of any other technology I have been exposed to in my life, has influenced me the most. I have four e-mail accounts; I am addicted to Facebook and have accounts with MySpace and LinkedIn (although I use them rarely). I do a lot of shopping online, I search and look up everything online, go to school online and search for jobs online. There really is not much you cannot do with the internet these days. This technology has shaped and changed me in ways that I probably don't even realize. It has helped me connect with people, learn quickly and get the things I need for my daily life. I honestly cannot imagine my life without the internet. Sure, I take breaks when I am on vacation and on the weekends I don't go online as much but my days are usually spent online. It is really amazing to think that this technology was just in its infancy only 20 years ago.

I look forward to seeing where technology goes in the future. I believe the web is going to expand in new and exciting ways. I will probably be getting a blue ray player sometime in my life and upgrading to a new state-of-the-art TV. One day we'll probably have cars that drive themselves and robots cleaning up after us will be the norm. Only time will tell where we will be in 30 years, but I can't wait to find out.

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Tree and Cruise Ship, Hawaii. Personal photograph by author. 2008.

Whale, Iceland. Personal photograph by author. 2010.