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A change for good

7. April 2010 16:44

Our planet is about to embark on one of the most radical changes it has ever seen. Not climate change, but communication change.

Human beings have been adapting to new environments for a very long time, but over the last decade we have adopted new technologies at a rate not seen since the industrial revolution and we are making that look very slow.

One of the key factors driving recent adoption is usability.

Really successful new technological devices are designed to be easy to use.

The handbook, for example, for a good new communications device, whether a new computer or just a phone will only be a few pages, mostly composed of pictures.

How is this possible? Low cost computing power now available allows the best devices to guide the new user through set-up on a user interface that is designed to be intuitive. However a key enabler of these new computing and communications devices is Internet access at faster and faster speeds.

The internet and the ease with which people can access information means people are far better informed than they used to be and they have access to technology that just a few years ago would have seemed quite impossible. For example file storage - who would have thought people would shop at their local electrical store for a low cost terrabyte drive?

I downloaded a film last night, it did not take long and the cost was low but what was amazing was that this was a 1.5GB file, something that would have been inconceivable just a couple of years ago.

I carry my favourite photographs, music, family videos and details of all my friends and family on a small wi-fi device which fits in my pocket and so do tens of millions of others around the world and no one gives it a second thought. We have adapted and adopted this new way of living our lives.

Before travelling this morning I scanned Facebook to see how my friends and family around the world were, left a brief message for all so they would know where I was and answered a couple of enquiries, all in a few minutes, while waiting for my train to arrive.

Giving us more

Why have we adopted these new communications systems, because they empower us in a way in which no development in our history has ever done before.

In the UK we are able to access more than a million wi-fi points, and at home broadband speeds are increasing rapidly.

I am often asked: "What will people use super-fast broadband for?"

The answer has three parts. The same as they have used ordinary broadband for, but faster. Doing things they wanted to do in the past but found just far too

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laborious or time consuming and lastly new things that have yet to be invented, but will be.

This constant interaction between people and technology, where both evolve as a result, is quietly changing how we live our lives and is empowering us.

With excellent usability the reach of this extends from the few to the many.

For more on BT's work on usability and accessibility see:

<http://www.btplc.com/inclusion/Gettingonline/Accessible/index.htm>

<http://www.inclusivedesign toolkit.com/>

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4/8/2010 3:05:29 PM <#>

Great article! You're right about things like setup getting more intuitive. If anything this technology is finally leading the change towards products that are intuitive to use. With so much information available, it is necessary to make that information easy to access.

Tanya

4/12/2010 11:45:04 AM <#>

I totally agree - what we need to have more especially when dealing with technologies that affect our lives is more interactions between the users and the different

"layers" of research - in fact "humanizing" the research and at the same time allowing innovation to change lives and hopefully to also do it in a green way.

A heavy challenge but one that I find kind of interesting as it destroys silos and ivory towers.

Marie-Jose Montpetit

5/10/2010 4:50:40 PM <#>

Great work, inclusion is about everyone doing their bit. Using free tools like the Inclusive Design Toolkit people can get a real understanding of what exclusion is like. Adam

Adam Oliver

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