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Technology and a brighter future for our world

By Jeff Patmore, Cambridge University

Formerly head of university partnerships at BT Innovate & Design, Jeff Patmore is now an advisor and mentor at Pembroke College Cambridge.

In 2007 while leading BT's research in universities I wrote the article '[Living in a world of exponential change](#)' and in 2010 a review, '[Still living in this world of exponential change](#)', in both I reflected on how technology was changing how we connect with one another and how we communicate.

Two years on from the second article I have moved to the University of Cambridge but continue to observe how communication technologies are changing how we connect and share information.

One of my conclusions is that we are experiencing a paradigm shift driven by both technology and ourselves. We have adopted and become comfortable with new communications technologies and they have become an integral part of our lives.

On October 4th last year, The Guardian published an article '[Facebook passes 1bn user mark](#)'. The piece explained that one billion people were using Facebook every month (one seventh of the earth's population). I had forecast in my earlier articles that it would not be long before most of the planet's population would be able to communicate and share information with one another, but even I am surprised by how quickly this is happening.

Let's go back to July 20th 1969, a date which marked a milestone in television history when the Apollo 11 moon landing set a record for the number of people watching an event on TV (an estimated 500 million people).

Gangnam style

And on the 24th of November 2012 the Los Angeles Times [reported another video record had been broken with 800 million people](#) watching the video 'Gangnam Style' over four months.

This made it the most watched video on YouTube. According to YouTube, Gangnam is still being watched between seven and 10 million times every day.

While looking for facts about this I found that on December 13th 2012, interns at NASA's Johnson Space Centre in Houston released a parody of the Gangnam Style video. ([NASA Johnson Style](#)).

After just five days the video had more than a million views on YouTube, illustrating the power of 'viral communications', a concept discussed in research papers by MIT's [Andy Lippman](#) back in 2003.

How we communicate, use technology and share information has really changed over the last few years.

On the 13th of December I read on the BBC news site that the [Hubble telescope had seen further 'back in time' than ever before](#). I read this news on my mobile phone while travelling on a bus to Cambridge, I was of course just one of many on the bus texting, emailing and reading news on their phones.

Coffee and wi-fi

However, after seeing the news, I wrote a short piece about the research on my blog. Of course, something that's not visible on the blog, is where I wrote it, which was in a cafe close to the bus stop. It was a very cold morning and the cafe has good coffee and wi-fi internet access.

So I was able to sit with my laptop and edit my blog adding images and information from the web, something I now take for granted as I have been doing this for many years. But dropping into a cafe, accessing the internet and writing online, has only recently become something that we can do in almost any city or town in the UK, thanks to wi-fi access becoming far more common.

Although in the United States, wi-fi has been available in a number of major cities for quite some time.

User update

For example, in November 2007 I was sitting in a coffee shop in New York typing an update on Facebook.

I wrote: "I am sitting in a Starbucks off 5th Ave, New York, it is cold and wet outside! I have a meeting in Madison Ave in the morning - off to Boston in the evening, so will be there from Thursday."

One of my friends from the UK saw the update and explained he was in the states and arranged to meet me in Boston, neither of us knew prior to my post that the other was in the US.

How am I able to remember this social network update word for word from 2007?

Well because Facebook has a message search facility.

A technology first for me was sending that status update from New York using an 'early \$100 laptop' from the One Laptop Per Child organisation, thanks to [Nicholas Negroponete](#), who kindly let me try out an early production model.

Nicholas had [a vision](#) for the OLPC project and paraphrasing the last part of that vision provides me with a summary and a message.



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 New lab is key
 Fast forward to business success with virtual data centres

Through new communication technologies we are now able to learn, share, create, collaborate and become connected to each other, to the world and to a brighter future.

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