Crossing the Digital Divide -- Rules of the Road (Volume 4)

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Editor's Note: Following is the first in a series of articles on Web use and computers, graciously provided by Joe Feigon, courtesy of the Mendocino County Observer. Thanks, Joe!

I hear this all too often: "I only watch Netflix a couple times a week, why do I use up my monthly quota so quickly?" The satellite vendors aren't out to punish us, they have expensive equipment with limited capacity floating in space. Our use of technology has changed, "rich media" is everywhere. Quotas are established to ensure quality of service for all subscribers.

Let's examine the typical satellite home deployment. Our local satellite providers deliver two pieces of equipment with each installation: a radio and modem. The radio is attached to the dish in your yard, the modem sits on a desk or floor in your home. The modem provides you access to the web via one RJ-45 port, into which a cable is connected to your computer. Many of you may have a wireless router, which is connected to the modem via a single Ethernet cable. We'll assume you've got wifi.

* To reduce bandwidth usage on your PC, while watching Netflix, YouTube or Hulu, explore the options menu within each application, and choose SD (standard definition), or Low Quality. A 45 minute show, in SD, consumes roughly 650MB, the same show, in HD (high definition), 1.5GB. Review your current usage levels before binging on "Orange is the New Black" or "Star Trek the Next Generation."

* To reduce bandwidth usage with Smartphones/iPhones, review your social media settings, e.g., Facebook. Disable auto play any video. Set your Twitter feeds for once an hour, set your email for ½ hour or more. Disable weather apps. Disable anything real time that runs in the background. These are all great features when you aren't paying monthly for utilization (versus unlimited access options).

* Protect your wifi network. Don't give everyone who visits your wifi password. Control your resources, it's easier than instructing all your guests "please, no YouTube, Spotify, or Netflix..."

Netiquette basics: if you're on the web, you've become part of a global community. Westport has its cultural nuances, but it fair to say, we're more alike in our thinking than not. This isn't true beyond our borders; county, state or country. Safe travels require a high degree of sensitivity, in other words, what may make you smile might make another cringe.

When you're holding a conversation online, whether it's an email exchange or a response to a discussion group posting, it's all too easy to unknowingly offend someone. With a false sense of computer use privacy, it becomes frighteningly easy to forget that your correspondent is a person with feelings of their own. We all know how easily words can be misinterpreted by the media. It safe to say, words without "in person" facial expression and body language and a cultural common ground are often "misread." You've probably read this before: READING ALL CAPS LIKE HEARING SOMEONE YELLING. Don't yell, and don't assume your audience knows R. Crumb from L. Ron.

Remember, if you post anything to the web, it's there forever (even your email). Measure twice, cut once. Keep your digital footprint as clean as possible. Don't put anything on the web (or in email) that you wouldn't want completely public. There is no privacy, and there's no taking it back.

Does your computer have an anti-virus program running? Do you have an anti-malware solution in place? Netiquette also means simple housekeeping – control what you do with your digital identity. Infected PC's are often the source of spam, malware relaying, or email scams, without the owners' knowledge.

More articles by Joe can be found on at: http://www.mendocinobroadband.org/crossing-the-digital-divide-by-joseph-feigon/