

Crossing the Digital Divide (v89)

“Basics”

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for the Observer

It's that time of the year. We eat too much, some of us drink too much, some of us are blessed with family visits, some by their distance from family. “The Holidays”, despite all the commercialism, retail moments and the litany of tradition, the last six weeks of the year often include idle time. For many, that means the computer is opened, Facebook posts are generated, emails written, and orders placed online.

This week will be a short read of fundamental Internet do's and don'ts:

- 1) Have you updated your computer? Don't log onto Facebook, open email, or go shopping until you've done so. Let's not make your holiday “surfing” a bonus for someone else. Computers with out-of-date software are easy targets, and you may not even know you've been hacked.
- 2) Avoid any impulse buy – if the price is too good to be true, it's likely not a legit item. If you're going to buy something online, do so from a known vendor, or use PayPal to protect yourself.
- 3) Take a look at your keyboard, there are two keys that are often overlooked: CAPS LOCK and ENTER.
 - a. You should not use CAPITALIZED LETTERS except at the beginning of a sentence or paragraph. This is a sentence.
 - b. This is a new paragraph. It was started after I pressed ENTER after completing the sentence above. This is a sentence.
 - c. We don't use all capital letters because it's the digital equivalent of SHOUTING. You are not making your point any stronger by shouting, more likely, your message will not be read to completion because most people don't like being shouted at. Just press CAPSLOCK to return your keyboard to ee cummings style. If you want to Capitalize a Letter, press the SHIFT key before typing that letter.
- 4) Read twice, maybe once out-loud to yourself, or partner/friend, anything you are inclined to post on Social Media (Facebook, any newspapers' comment section, Twitter, Instagram, Spotify, etc.) before you post it (or hit that ENTER key). For all intents and purposes, once you've posted a comment/remark/whatever, it will be on the Internet FOREVER. I repeat: ANYTHING YOU POST TO THE INTERNET IS FOREVER. Yes, I used all caps for a reason, I was yelling. It's true, digital memory does not suffer the ravages of time like our own brains do. Be really sure what you say can't/won't/couldn't bite you in the backside next week or ten years from now – it really is forever.

- a. Be aware that email isn't private either. It's less likely to become public, but it's much easier to hack. Don't send passwords via email. Don't use all CAPS in email, and most folks appreciate breaks in the flow of words, e.g., paragraph creation, it only takes an "ENTER", and your readers will understand the progression of your message.
- 5) Use a spell-check utility before pressing SEND.

As this year comes to a close, the next will provide more excitement and challenge. Keep your computer software up-to-date. Make sure your passwords are difficult to crack (UPPER/lower/symbol/multi-word-phrase, 8+characters), now might be a good time to update all of them. It's okay to write passwords down and stash them in a safe place at home. Easy to remember passwords will create more inconvenience than sliding open the desk drawer...

Control those things you can, and keep the surprises to a minimum!