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Crossing the Digital Divide (v158)
"Green Side"
by Joseph Feigon
for the Observer

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Having just returned from a trip to the East Coast, a landscape known to have the greatest population density in the USA, I was struck with two glaring realities, access and excess.

On the access side of things, with minor exception, high speed, high quality Internet access is fairly ubiquitous, from central New Jersey to the bellows of Brooklyn. Traveling without the need for physical maps one of the big bonuses of having a smartphone and cellular data plan. For those readers who've never visited Metro New York, but have experienced Los Angeles as big, and busy, but it's tiny in comparison to New York City. Interstate 5 just north of Metro LA becomes "The 405", and spans six or so some odd lanes across each way. There are SEVERAL freeways headig into New York City, many of which are 8+ lanes per side. It's crazy how many people there are out there, in cars, trains and buses. It's fascinating that email still came in, Internet browsing was still possible, and videoconferencing works almost halfway through the Lincoln Tunnel! Millions of users, yet very little contention for access.

Where mobile data was lacking, the typical home Internet connection (including that of my 95 year old Mother-in-law) is vastly superior to most of the options in rural America. Triple-digit download speeds common, and two-digit upload speeds frequent. Truly usable Internet.

The excess: wherever I was, in subway or on the Garden State, folks were heads-down with their phones, or basking in the glow of a media center in their car, with voice activated chat and email creation. Really, it was the exception to see someone without their focusing on an electronic screen.

Access: The Cloud, when high speed data is available on the train, in a bus, on the road, or walking down Avenue of the Americas, files, folders and projects are merely a few finger swipes away. I was able to manage client needs while riding the train into Manhattan.

Excess: Having access to work and working.

Rural America is challenged to "keep up", albeit most here would argue our quality of life (or at least posture) is better than the connected reality of a more urban landscape. In the typical, access challenged, "under-served" communities, using the Cloud to our advantage isn't possible. One of the key reasons I stress, when setting up a new PC or Mac, **always** create a local administrative login/account. You can always access Cloud files from within your local login, but starting out with a "One Drive/365" login, or iTunes/Apple ID login tied to Cloud verification is recipe for frustration, lost time, and potentially lost work.

Security weaknesses in Office 365 (Microsoft's Cloud Service Suite) have recently been exposed, most of which deals with 2-factor authentication and 3rd Party access. Always maintain copies of any data you save to the Cloud. Backup often, and verify your backups once in awhile.

Control the things you can and keep the surprises to a minimum.