

Social change is a topic I hadn't given much thought too as in my everyday life I portray my little corner of the world to the best of my ability and attempt to "fit in". I personally find the Family a major role in my social knowledge and growth. Within my family we attempt to get together monthly or bi-monthly if not for the sake of being a family. I love having my dad (pa to the kids) play baseball with my son Evan as socially as a child my father didn't have much time to "play" with me. He often goes out of his way to make sure my son has an incredible time in everything they do. My mother tends to work in a similar manner with my 3 year old daughter as they enjoy each others company tremendously. We recently spent the weekend in Rapid City on a family vacation which included my brother, parents and my family as well as my mothers sister and husband in which we spent much of the time letting the kids play and experience the world while we monitored and socialized.

Outside of my direct family I personally find very little time to interact in a virtual community. I will admit that our masters program is like a VC, however it has specific goals and structure that many virtual communities lack. In the early years of my Internet utilization I did join in several chats, but my interest was more related to what others were discussing and I wasn't that absorbed in my own involvement. My family has occasionally made use of Yahoo chat to hold a family meeting to discuss a vacation or Christmas, however currently this use is small. I can see that in the future as technology changes and the use of high speed Internet and web phones could easily change that. In my opinion video still has many benefits over text only conferences.

From a business standpoint I can see a large benefit in cost savings as technology and virtual communities grow and mature. The ability to be able to distribute work

among a collective of peers and instantly cover the details of the work has untold powers. Currently with our DDN system, schools have a similar ability, however it is under utilized as in any new technology training is always a must. Basic use and knowledge is vital to having any technology succeed.

Socially in our world (the US in my view) is already experiencing an ever-increasing digital divide. Many communities stricken with poverty, political struggles, educational enrollment declination, among other issues all have uphill battles as we try to ensure that all people who wish to partake in the world of technology has that opportunity. However I don't see Apple or Gateway giving away their products anytime soon as they have a family to feed as well. I am unsure of a solution to helping the poor become more computer literate.

Another social aspect that comes with virtual communities is misuse. As recently discovered by our state's employees, being fired for misusing internet access is a high possibility and many companies are rolling out new and better tracing software to ensure their employees are doing what they are getting paid for. Along with abuse comes addiction of which I have a personal experience with. A neighbor left her husband and family to travel to Texas to meet her dreamboat. She met him in a virtual community. Her internet addiction (chat specifically) led her to think she had found gold when in fact it was fools gold and was back within the month. Socially she was black balled for nearly 6 months as the little town of Ethan learned to reaccept her as they too learned again that we are all human and need continual guidance.

Other online communities that will continue to grow are gaming communities. I personally purchased high speed DSL service in my hometown and have discovered that

my connection entitles me to many more advanced games via the web. Unreal, Quake, Golf, Football and many other sports are ever enticing and will continue to draw crowds of virtual users.

I personally was aware of the amount of virtual communities that are on the net, however I wasn't aware of the ease at which they are being created and managed currently. I look forward to reading more studies about what our lives will entail as the web grows and grows....