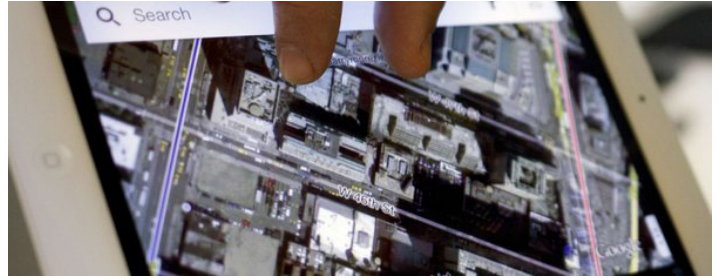


Safely in shallow end of the technology pool

January 3, 2016

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Every now and then, we find ourselves asking questions that prove we're not as hip or as with it as we think we are. And undoubtedly, when our kids read this, they'll tell us that nobody says hip or with it anymore.



We love new apps, gadgets, and conveniences, and we marvel at the things they can do, but we don't fully trust them. We spent decades dialing the phone, putting family photos in albums, and getting up from our chair to change the channel. No wonder swiping, clicking, and streaming can sometimes confuse us.

If we still don't understand how Adele's big new song can travel from England and come out of our tiny clock radio, how can we possibly comprehend how money can fly wirelessly through the air from our bank account into yours?

We're most familiar with the old-fashioned ways of getting stuff done, so even though we use modern technology, we sometimes talk about it in outdated terms. Here are some questions that don't need to be asked anymore, but we just can't help ourselves:

Do you need directions to my house?

That's what we asked the painter when he called to set up a time to meet. We forgot that he's probably been using Google Maps on his phone for years. He can even navigate around a traffic jam, change his route to the one that's "2 minutes faster," or look at a street view of our house before he arrives. We use the Google Maps app, but we still keep that torn, awkwardly folded map of Pennsylvania in the glove compartment. Just in case.

Did you get the message we left on your answering machine?

What we actually did was leave a voice mail on our friend's cellphone. She doesn't even have an answering machine. With her cellphone, our friend can retrieve our message while standing in line at the pet store; she doesn't have to wait until she gets home to her kitchen. One of us still has an answering machine hooked up to her landline phone, and if the light is blinking once a month, it's cause for excitement.

Do you have a deposit slip for that check?

We transfer money between our accounts electronically, and we've used ATMs all over the world, but we still write and deposit the occasional paper check. Handing it to the teller is the only way we can be certain that it will go into our account. When one of our children asked how best to deposit a paycheck, we handed her a deposit slip. She ignored us and Googled "how to put money in the bank," downloaded the bank app, and took a photo of her check.

Our 20-something daughter paid her share of lunch by using Venmo to send \$8.50 to her girlfriend. When we go out to lunch, we each put a \$20 bill on the table and ask the waiter to bring us change in singles so we can leave a tip.

Do you have your train ticket?

We can't help but ask our kids this question before they head off on a journey. Inevitably, their answer is, "I have it in my email on my phone." We trust electronic confirmations, but only so far. When it comes to our own travel, we print out the confirmation and also scrawl "AF383C" on a scrap of paper just to be sure. We also print out our concert tickets and hotel reservations - just in case someone asks to see them.

Did you write down your password?

Our son was alarmed that we keep a small address book filled with screen names and passwords on the desk right next to the computer. There's an app for that, he told us. But what if our phone is dead? How will we get to the app? We keep a spare copy of our passwords in a Word document on the computer, but what if the power is out? That's why we have to write it in the little book.

Sometimes it's not our words but our hand gestures that give us away. Scribbling in the air is the universal sign to tell the waitress to bring the check. But when one of our husbands swirled his index finger in a circle as he said "I'll call you," he dated himself. To him, making a call involved putting his index finger in the corresponding hole on the phone and rotating clockwise - seven times. His childhood phone number started with the letters GR (for Greenwood), but he can't call it anymore.

Our adult children are totally immersed in technology. They grew up with it, so they have no other frame of reference. We had to explain to them how television used to have only three channels, how when you made a typo, it was on the page forever, and that "a quarter to 10" is 9:45.

We like to think of modern technology like a swimming pool. We're all having a great time, but while they're frolicking in the deep end, we're wearing swimmies and hanging on the rope - just in case.