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At Brunning: People and Technology

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The Last of the Blackberry

“History, like love, is so apt to surround her heroes with an atmosphere of imaginary brightness.” — James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans

Many people like their Blackberry phones. Crackberry addiction is hard to overcome. If you’ve ever typed on a Blackberry keyboard, the ones with real keys and an extremely smart and learning spell checker, well, a virtual one will never feel right. Kinetic memory fades slowly like riding a bike.

The lesson of Blackberry is that technology and love and lust of technology do not endure. Our own behavior should confirm this. Right now we fit from one instance of an iPhone to the next. Momentarily we may be excited by the new car feel of version six and we have that fleeting sense we are ahead of the curve. Yet suddenly, the curve is in our rear window.

The new Blackberry smartphones can do everything an iPhone or Android phone can. They have the touch screen and cover the important apps found in any other operating system. And one model has the real keyboard.

In my office drawer I have my collection of Blackberries. There is the huge 7250 that resembled a Star Trek communicator. The first people around our university to have these were male administrators. They loved this technology that gave them a phone and email in stride. At times they may want to have beamed themselves out of meetings, elsewhere. Why else may want to have beamed themselves and email in stride. At times they wanted to watch, but who wouldn’t want to slip your phone into a front pocket or hidden purse sleeve? Simply smooth.

My last and best Blackberry, the Curve (8330 series), included the pearl — now black — and enlarged and widened the earlier Pearl series to provide more screen and better web features. Throughout the decade RIM aka Blackberry reduced its size while reaching out to “do everything” the computing world of smartphones were heading to.

We’ve known for some time this didn’t work and Blackberry has spent the last five years in decline. They changed their name, they developed new operating system, they’ve innovated a surprisingly smart and versatile tethered tablet. And just as the market was telling Blackberry to quit — they released two new handsets, the Q10 for real keyboard lovers and the Z10.

If everyone had a free day with these new Blackberries, other factors (data plans, providers, discounts aside) it’s a good bet Blackberry would be less in the dumpster than it is. Both are great telephones for talking and each keeps Blackberry’s expertise at enterprise secure email (and increasingly Web data, social media security) with smartphones that swipe and type with ease.

Blackberry’s history is likely that of any in information technology. It’s entwined with success, fear of ruining a good thing with change, and the inevitable end of a good thing. The amazing thing it still is good but our minds are elsewhere.

Disclosure, I own an iPhone 5, iPad 3rd Generation, and an old 4GB Nano iPod. I would like a larger Mac Pro with a big display but frankly I can’t afford it. Equally frank, I would really know what to do with it after many years plunging and mousing on Windows. My iTunes on the Windows computer doesn’t really work and, although I like iCloud, it zaps battery life from all my iProducts connected to the cloud. So most of the time my devices are being charged — to power outlets and my Amex. I don’t use social media as much as I probably should: if FB could be implanted in my brain and I could friend you just by thinking of you, I’d consider it if Medicare would pay for it when I’ve passed from .edu to .gonefishing. For this last piece I genuinely regret not saving all my cell phones from 1994, by thinking of you, I’d consider it if Medicare would pay for it when I’ve passed from .edu to .gonefishing. For this last piece I genuinely regret not saving all my cell phones from 1994, and the Z10.

Your Links:
http://tinyurl.com/q25pcs m
ZDNET review looks beyond defeat to what’s ahead…
http://tinyurl.com/mp4jk c
Mobilemedia welcomes QWERTY back to the phone. Show your kids if they haven’t found an app to easy key their texts…

Annals of Search: Search by Wire

We high enough for landing? — Questions you want your pilots to know.

“five years ago we passed the point where automation was there to back up pilots...today the pilot is there to backup the automation...what you die from is not understanding what configuration will keep the aircraft in the air...” — Bill Voss, Flight Safety Foundation

My Pilates instructor, a bright divorced mother of three kids, put it simply. We were talking about research on the Web and she commented that no matter how she searched she felt lead by someone other than herself. I explained that her own search history was working against her. Google prides itself on tracking your click history and giving you what they believe you want.

We agreed — a new invisible hand was at work and it wasn’t free market. And in some ways, the practice was dishonest.

Perhaps honesty is too severe a demand to place on a search engine. It is, after all, not human. Still it is making human-like decisions, or how does that driveless car amble around the sunshine state?

I’ll admit I use Wikipedia as much as any other Google user. Good or bad, it has consolidated knowledge posted on the Web into a convenient, if bland and tone-deaf description, of stuff you want to know. Google now even launches a word (tally the score and, like magic, will do it because the wheels will turn and the money. Our analogue: follow the wire.

Out spills results Google wants for you especially information that sells you something. Perhaps honesty is too severe a demand to place on a search engine. It is, after all, not human. Still it is making human-like decisions, or how does that driveless car amble around the sunshine state?

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Too many words, the student will get nothing. Exactly why is anybody’s guess. A few of us attended a Google education class conducted by young Googlers at Colorado State last January. They urged us not to use sentences, as Google, contrary to popular belief, didn’t work well with natural language searches.

We were also told to go easy on quotation marks, the favorite trick of the advanced librarian searcher. It seems Google works with tiered indexes; the more-often-searched terms and clicked results are searched first. Using quotation marks forces the search engine to dig deep into that part of the black box that is seldom helpful for popular results. You’ve entered Google’s junk drawer.

Search by wire, just like fly-by-wire, works when it works. Decision making becomes cloudy when you can’t show sky and horizon.

Your Links:
http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2013/05/nsa-manual-on-hacking-internet/

Wired article on NSA’s in-house Google search tips manual. There is a link to the pdf and Amazon sells it at the Kindle store.
http://guides.library.colostate-pueblo.edu/googlesearch

Webinar recordings from the Colorado State University Google Seminars on search and all things Google...
http://www.amazon.com/Fly-Wire-William-Langewiesche/dp/B0055X5XZO

Amazon link to William Langewiesche’s book on how commercial aviation gets you from place to place usually safely but with huge missteps of errors in the human machine agreement...

Back Talk
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Now at New York University’s Shanghai Campus, about 99.9% of the materials immediately accessible by our students and teachers are digital. Certainly the first trend, new technologies expand and limit who has access to information is correct in our case. Our students can enjoy the opportunity to access nearly a million volumes of eBooks, tens and tens of thousands of academic journal titles, have excerpts of millions of other books scanned for them from NYC, and can electronically place requests for other books to be delivered from the home campus using a courier service. Because of this, we are cognizant of our need to make sure our students are trained to take full advantage of all these information riches. I am still not so sure about the second trend about online education bringing about an end to traditional forms of education. In China, at least, there is an enormous amount of online education (my 2001 dissertation focused on the library and information needs of the hundreds of thousands of Television University students in China), but they clearly want flesh-and-blood teachers and are willing to pay premium fees to get them.

With all the news about Edward Snowden and NSA snooping into databases, and the amount of time and effort spent in some countries of the world to control access to information, I don’t think I need to say much about the boundaries of privacy and data protection, the