Technology Continues to Impact How We Talk to Our Teens

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By Ken Leebow

(AXcess News) Minneapolis, MN - When I was a teenager, I can remember everyone passing notes to each other and making promises to "call you tonight." I can certainly still remember my parents yelling at me for spending too much time on the phone.

This was a time when people also still mailed letters and cards to each other just to say "hello and I've been thinking of you." It was easier for my parents to follow what I was doing because - albeit a bit differently since every generation is different - it was not all that different from what they had done when they were teenagers. Times have definitely changed.

Today's teenagers use cell phones, text messaging, instant messaging (IM) and chat rooms to catch up with each other. They have long buddy lists filled with their friends' screen names. They participate in blogs – millions of teens are using sites such as facebook.com and myspace.com. And, they use emoticons instead of words. Pew Internet (www.pewinternet.org Teens and Technology) reports that 84 percent of all teenagers report owning at least one media device: a computer, cell phone or personal digital assistant. Teenagers today communicate almost solely through technology, and this has a lot of parents feeling out of the loop.

But parents don't have to feel like this is a lost cause or that they will never understand their teenager. With a little effort, parents can understand the "wired" world that their children live in and use this technology to improve their own lines of communication. For starters, visit www.IncredibleInternet.com as your guide to the wonders of the web.

Talk the Talk – Understanding What Your Teen is Saying

In fact, most parents find it mind-boggling when faced with such advancements as Instant Messaging, text messaging and so on. It's very similar to learning a foreign language. But in the spirit of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," many parents are realizing that these same technologies are making communication with their teens more fun and easier than ever.

Teenagers have always had their own language, but today's teenagers actually have a whole new way of communicating. It's quick, it's simple and it's like nothing that generations before them had. So, by adopting their children's methods and communicating in a way that they enjoy, parents will discover that their teen is likely to be more receptive and more responsive.

For example, if you take the time to learn what text messaging is all about, with a quick text message to your teen, you can quickly learn where they are, who they are with and what time they will be home. Parents can gain peace of mind all without placing the dreaded phone call in front of their friends, helping teens feel more independent. You can even send a text message to a cell phone from your computer. To learn your child's cell phone address, just ask him to send a text message to your e-mail address.

Here is an abbreviated list of words, with definitions, that you might want to make yourself familiar with:

* Instant Messaging (www.netlingo.com/)

* Chat Room (www.netlingo.com/)

* Buddy List (www.netlingo.com/)

* Blogs (www.netlingo.com)

* Text Messaging (also known as SMS – Short Message Service) (www.netlingo.com)

For a more complete online glossary of common technology words, please visit www.netlingo.com or try this fun site that acts as an interpreter for your teen's online slang: www.noslang.com.

The Connected Family

Whether you like it or not, technology is a growing part of our lives and is helping define an entire generation. Today's technology is as exciting as it can be frightening. Instead of being intimidated by it, I suggest you grasp it and make it even more a part of your family's everyday life. Technology is actually helping parents spend more time with their families and manage their households more efficiently. In fact, many teachers encourage the use of e-mail as an efficient method of communication with parents and students.

Today, your teen can stay connected with friends and family via e-mail, chat rooms and instant messaging. And it's not all about fun. It's been reported by Netday.org that students are using these communication tools to discuss school projects, upcoming tests and quizzes, homework shortcuts and school assignment Web sites. But when it's time for your teen to head off to college, there are even more ways to stay in touch, even being hundreds of miles apart.

Technology has also made it easier than ever to maximize time with your family. New advancements have made it possible to use the Internet for such things as finding recipes, meal planning, online shopping and even grocery shopping. Check out these Web sites and keep up to speed with the latest technologies that can help keep your family connected:

* www.picasa.net

* www.webshots.com

* www.aim.com

* www.teleflip.com

* www.phonescoop.com

Be a Smart User

While technology has made communication easier, as a parent there are also dangers that you should be aware of. It's important to learn how to protect yourself, your family and your personal information while you are online. The following is not an all-inclusive list, but I hope it will provide you with some basic tips about using the Internet wisely and safely. For more information, visit www.IncredibleInternet.com. Additional sites for safe Internet use include www.netsmartz.org and http://kids.getnetwise.org.

1. Even though the Net is incredible, maintaining a well-balanced life offline is very important.

2. Use discretion when giving information online because it can easily be distributed to others.

3. Protect your online privacy: Never provide your personal information to strangers.

4. Do not allow your children to arrange meetings with someone they've met on the Internet.

5. In your home, place the computer in a visible location to monitor your family's Internet activity and appropriate uses.

6. Be open for discussions about the Internet and its appropriate uses with family members, classmates and co-workers.

7. Use common sense. Don't go to sites or do things on the Internet that could create problems.

8. If something inappropriate happens online, report the interaction immediately to www.cybertipline.com. Make sure your children know that they should always immediately report to an adult anything that happens online that makes them uncomfortable.

9. What you don't know about your child's online behavior could hurt them. Find out what you should know by taking the Parent Safety-Net Test on www.IncredibleInternet.com and discover real solutions you can use to protect your child on the Internet.

For more information, go to www.IncredibleInternet.com.

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