

ONLINE SAFETY: Technology has changed our world

By Kristin Judge

Guest Writer

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Chances are you are not a cyber security expert. Well, neither am I. The last computer class I took was DOS programming in 1987.

But my family and I do spend much of our time online, as I'm sure many of you do, and I now work for a computer security organization - the national not-for-profit Center for Internet Security. I spend my days spreading the message about staying safe online, and I'm thrilled to be writing this new column so I can share easy, "non-techy" tips about how to keep you and your family protected.

The Internet has changed the way we live possibly more than any other single invention since electricity. Have you ever thought about the degree of change we are facing in our culture right now? This is bigger than the Industrial Revolution or other cultural shifts you used to read about in the World Book Encyclopedia. Remember encyclopedias? Your kids won't.

From parenting and relationships to the way we work and how we get our information has changed. Our fundamental way of living has forever been altered. Recently, I saw a 2-year-old press the pictures in a magazine expecting them to move like her iPad. Parents are using smartphones and tablets to keep kids entertained in restaurants, the barber chair and the doctor's office waiting room.

Travel has forever changed. When was the last time you booked a vacation on the phone or through an agent without first looking at the hotel and flights online? We communicate with strangers regularly, sharing pictures and opinions on hotel and restaurant choices. Have you used a paper map recently?

Familiar gadgets have been replaced. Do you still use a clock radio, watch or flashlight, or has your phone taken over those responsibilities? I'm the first to admit that I have used my phone to light up the closet or the way to the bathroom while my husband was sleeping.

The Internet has allowed us to become better patient advocates. How many fewer parents have taken the trip to the emergency room in the night after conducting online research and realizing their child's illness could wait until the morning?

The English language has possibly been altered more in the past five years than any other time. I bet you know what "btw," "ttyl," "lol" and "ur" mean. If you don't, there are lists online like www.netlingo.com help parents brush up on text lingo so they can communicate with their kids. We have redefined or invented words like "friend," "Google" and "ping," among others.

The way we get our news has fundamentally changed. How many print media outlets have gone under or gone completely online in the past two years alone? The last copy of the Ann Arbor News is now on display in the [Newseum](#), a Washington, D.C., museum, because Ann Arbor was the first city in America to stop having a daily print newspaper.

People can work from anywhere and are almost always plugged in to something. How many hours a day do we spend answering email? What did we do before then to communicate with our coworkers, friends and family?

Our kids are exposed to pornography, predators, cyber bullies and others wanting to harm them like never before. How is a parent of this new "plugged in" generation to keep track of texts, online friends, video chats, email accounts, and cell phone usage?

So, yes, virtually every aspect of our lives is digital in some way, yet, do we really understand the potential risks of this online, all-the-time connectivity?

Did you know the average unprotected computer, which means that the computer does not have proper security controls in place, connected to the Internet could be attacked in less than a minute? Thousands of infected web pages are being discovered every day. Hundreds of millions of records have been involved in breaches. The need for awareness and action has never been greater.

Twice a month, I will be writing about ways we can together manage this new world and the challenges it has brought. The Internet is not a bad thing, and I don't want readers to be intimidated. You can help you and your family be safer online by following a few simple steps. In this column, I will share tips even the most basic computer user can manage.

Today's quick tip: Think about how much information you share online and make a pledge to yourself to be more careful about what you share and who you give access to online.

To get more great information about staying safe in cyberspace, including access to free monthly newsletters, webcasts and more, [visit the Center for Internet Security online.](#)

As seen here: <http://www.heritage.com/articles/2012/01/22/opinion/doc4f1c634a14ed9165955260.txt?viewmode=1>