



Transcript for S10 E1 Sustainability with Gerry McGovern

Cat Barnard (00:02)

Hello and welcome to a new episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard, joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Walters, and this episode's special guest, Gerry McGovern. So Gerry is an accomplished author on the topics of digital content and data - and I first came across his name and his work, I think probably two and a half years ago, I was reading a newsletter by an outfit called Post Shift, and they talked about Gerry's book called Worldwide Waste. I don't know whether anyone can see that, but I'm holding up the subtitle "How Digital Is Killing Our Planet and What We Can Do About It", and immediately my interest was piqued because having come from the technology sector, I've known for quite some time just how resource consumptive the tech sector is and has been - and so I started following Jerry on social media - on LinkedIn in particular - and was always very intrigued by how he's a regular poster on LinkedIn and he always has something very interesting to say about the impact of the technology sector, on resource depletion and the escalating climate crisis. And because we on this podcast are very interested in the opportunity that sustainable internal comms has for the profession, we wanted to invite Gerry on to come and talk to us about what he's learned, what he continues to discover, and to share with you guys what you can and should be - in my view - doing to encourage your organisations to become more sustainable. So without further ado, welcome, Gerry. Thank you for joining us today.

Gerry (02:03)

Thank you, Cat, and thanks for the invitation.

Cat Barnard (02:06)

No, lovely to have you. I think it's probably easier if you give us a quick overview of your professional background - so if I can ask you to do that, and also to ask the question when you first became concerned about the carbon cost of digital technology.

Gerry (02:28)

Okay, so I started on the web quite early. I used the NCSA Mosaic browser, which was back around 1993 or so - one of the very first browsers. So, I thought the web was going to change the world - I thought here's an opportunity to get involved in something that's really going to have a huge impact on society, and I started my first newsletter about 1995, 1996, so I've basically been publishing a weekly newsletter since then.

It's been quite a while, and I did basic blogging back around then as well and got involved in web companies and all sorts of, even designing search engines, software and content management - stuff like that. And the first book I published in 1999, and then in 2001 I published a book called The Web Content Style Guide - so a lot of the stuff I did over the years was on content and the value of



content. The book called Content Critical has lots about, you know, how to manage content, how to organise it and how to identify quality over quantity. And then, a couple of years ago, maybe around 2017, I was thinking, well, I've had a pretty successful career overall - I've travelled a lot, I've worked for a lot of organisations and maybe there's something I can do to give back to some degree.

I was very inspired by the young people and what they were doing in relation to the environmental movements, and I thought maybe there's something I can do over here in digital - but I didn't expect there to be a lot because I, like the vast majority of people I knew in the industry, was kind of educated on the fact that digital is inherently green and that it's a transition to a better and a cleaner society than using all that paper and all that other stuff in the process. But the more I began to dig, the more I began to research, the more I began to realise that digital has a very serious impact on the environment - that the internet is essentially the largest machine that humans have ever created, and all machines have to be built, and they're built using materials - and digital devices tend to be built with particular types of materials such as rare earth materials that have a massively negative impact on the environment to manufacture.

So, I went on a journey about digital and its impact on the environment. And so, I looked at all those things around the environmental and the manufacturing and e-waste - e-waste is the fastest growing waste stream in the world and by far the most toxic waste stream. But that's the tip of the melting iceberg of what digital does, because what is far bigger, is digital's impact on our behaviours.

So digital basically allows us to create and publish crap faster - and it allows us to buy and consume crap faster. It's an accelerant of so many of our worst behaviours, whether in buying from Amazon or, I used to look at the content management systems that will come into intranets. And, you know, I used to use the analogy that you used to have a shovel, now you've got a little digger, so you can dig and transport crap around the organisation in greater quantities, even faster. And, intranets are still - we were talking in preamble here - I was thinking that is this 1997 or 1998? We're having the same conversations, but with different technologies - it's the same problems of quality over quantity, of not being able to find what you're looking for, of nobody being interested in reading what you're writing because what you're writing is no way interesting to them in the first place, and you writing it with AI isn't going to make it remotely more interesting.

If you shovel crap down people's throat, they don't thank you for that - they don't wake up the next morning saying "wow, I should send them a little postcard of thank you for all that crap they've shovelled at me". And it's the same issues of our cult of technology, I mean, we used to believe in God, now we believe in AI.

Cat Barnard (07:27)

Yeah, God, that's so interesting. That has just triggered so many thoughts for me. So, one thought - when you were talking about the length of time that you've been involved in the internet as an industry, which - to call the internet an industry now just seems far-fetched because it's not is it? It's as urbane as you know, flicking a light switch on or turning on a tap - certainly in the Western developed world - to get clean water. But you talking about that, there was something that you said,



and I just have to share this with you guys because it is mind blowing. I remember when the Indian cellular industry opened up, and there was a race on to deploy mobile phone networks across India and I was good friends at one point with a CTO of one of the mobile network operators, and he shared openly with me that their organisation was investing in India and using diesel generators to power all the mobile base stations, because there wasn't any electrical grid from which to pull energy. So the solution was that every cellular base station would be powered by diesel, which is hardly clean when you think about it.

Gerry (08:57)

A lot of these data centres have diesel generators, and they use them a lot more than you might think. I mean, as backups to the grid - a lot of them install massive diesel generators. So, you know, it hasn't changed all that much.

Cat Barnard (09:15)

And this is it, isn't it? It's like the underbelly - it's what we don't see. We just, we become hooked and addicted to the privilege of being able to take photos whenever we feel like it, or publish or so on. Interestingly, earlier today, I was on a call with a lady who has been very involved in knowledge management - probably not quite the length of time that you have, Gerry - but she was saying there was like a golden age in perhaps the late noughties, where social media emerged and it was a golden age to publish your blog, to find like-minded others who shared interests, and a real kind of freedom of connection and ability to communicate online, which seems to have been ruined by just a deluge of crap, as you say - and I am not going to be ashamed of using that word today. I know I've stood away from it in the past, but it just also reminded me of some research that we did when we were preparing to write the Institute's paper on artificial intelligence and the future of internal communication - and we tuned into a seminar that was given by Professor Michael Waldrich from Oxford University. And he was talking about the way in which OpenAI had scraped the internet to provide the kind of back-end of data upon which then ChatGPT was built. And he said, you know, be under no illusion, that is every single tweet, every single Facebook post, opinion post and every single subreddit that has ever been published - it is more opinion than fact and you have to go into the usage of ChatGPT knowing fully what your repository of knowledge is built on.

And the final thing that I wanted to say before I come off my soapbox was - I don't know whether you guys do this, but do you ever go to live gigs and events? I'm always astounded by how many people watch live music through their mobile phones, filming video. Where does that video go? Do they send it to people? Like, what do they actually do with that video...? Ever since I started to follow your work - every time I go to a live music event and I watch all these people mindlessly stick their devices in the air to start filming, I just find myself wondering what happens to that data?

Jen (12:15)



Definitely drives me insane, Cat. I can't bear it. I want to look at the artist on the stage, but I have to look through all the phones to see the person. Going back to what Jerry talked about, technology has created these, I guess, new addictions - these new "addictional" habits where we feel, because we've been empowered as content creators - we feel like we need to create more capture, and that's just on a personal level - and going back to your statement as well with organisations, I think we need to have some kind of headline "Thank You for the Crap"? I don't know whether that needs to be - but we feel this desire to create quantity and to show that. And obviously, you know, it was fascinating to hear about your career, which started out in that content generation aspect of it. And for Internal Communicators tuning in now, our toolbox, our channels, if you like, is exponentially bigger than it was back in the mid 90s. I remember the dial up, and I remember all those exciting things and the creation of internet and intranets. And so we're now trying to look at all these channels that we have - then as we go back to consumers and our personal habits, we now have our personal preferences - I don't like WhatsApp, I prefer an email, or I want this message over here - or I want it as a blog, but I want it as a video ,or I want it as a podcast. So we're trying to create this broader need of channels and then this broader church of preferences, if you like.

And now so effectively ,we're sticking more stuff in more places as well. Because if we send that piece of content just by email - what about the people over there that might not get the email? So let's stick it over there as well. So now we're creating more quantity, but also more places, I think, of distribution. From our intranets, our Slack channels, our ESN systems, our WhatsApps, our podcast, hybrid events as well. Well, let's, you know, let's make it hybrid. That's greener, surely? If we have a hybrid event versus a physical event. And it may well be, but we're just creating this machine. And I guess one question I had when we're thinking about all that from the work that you've done, Gerry, is there for you one communication technology that produces more waste in your view? Are they all equally wasteful if we don't know what the purpose is effectively?

Gerry (14:43)

There's a kind of a scale of impact, and it's essentially based on the quantity of data that a technology uses. So the most environmentally friendly, so to speak, though can never be fully friendly in any sense way to communicate - would be a text message. So that structurally and impactfully can move communication in the most efficient manner. And at the other extreme is the 8K video. So as you move up the scale, and the formats then have impacts as well. So if you have text on a HTML page, that's going to be significantly less impactful than if the same text is in a PDF. PDF would be maybe - four to five times the impact for the same quantity.

So there are formats and types - text is the most environmentally friendly way to communicate. Next, you know, images are at a different scale - a thousand words of text could be six or seven KB in its, basic format. Whereas any sort of image, depending if you've compressed it or not, could be hundreds or four or 500 KB or more. And then you've got audio, which as an average you're into megabytes. But when you're into 2 or 4K video, you could be talking about a gigabyte a minute or several gigabytes a minute. And the funny thing is a lot of these things, you can't even see the difference - on a small screen, it's irrelevant whether it's 4 or 2K, or standard definition.



But video is definitely much more impactful – at least 80% of the traffic on the internet now is video. And, in a huge number of situations, it's not it's not better - It's actually worse than text in helping people actually understand things. So when you look at societies today, and you think has technology helped us mature - or has technology made humans more immature? It feels like we've become much more immature, politically and everything - it's like crazy land out there. And that's driven by speed of communication and of course, misinformation etc. in the process. But our tools are not making for better societies, and I don't think ultimately, they'll make for better economies. I think they're creating these short-term explosive economies that are going to create long-term ruin for societies and for the environment.

Cat Barnard (17:15)

We started didn't we I think by saying, quality versus quantity. And presumably, when you're drowning in information, your brain can't consume. So you are compromising, quantity creates a compromise in quality, doesn't it, Dom? You're far more educated than me.

Gerry (17:46)

There's two brief things just there - It's also speed, It's not just quantity. It's the speed that you're getting. There's two psychological impacts - It's quantity and speed.

Cat Barnard (17:54)

So presumably what you're saying there is, if information was like a slap to the side of the head, you're just constantly, you can't adapt - you can't process.

Gerry (18:08)

Yeah, you can't deal with it - it's coming at you too fast to process.

Dom (18:12)

It's interesting that one of the questions that most communicators would ask of anybody issuing communication is what are you trying to achieve? What's the impact on the audience? Just listen to what you said, Cat and obviously what Gerry, what you've been saying. It sounds like we've lost sight of that almost because we now pump out stuff because that's the thing to do or because we want to use the technology or if we don't do it, someone else will - or we want to look at things like LinkedIn and Facebook. Sometimes you think people post things because they feel if they don't, they're going to get forgotten.



And we've neglected to think about what audiences are going to do with it, what they think of all this stuff. So I think it's very interesting that this is a good reminder that we need to go back to those basic principles.

But I think also, Gerry, you've made me stop in my tracks for a number of reasons. I mean, firstly, for my own personal behaviour, notwithstanding the fact I will never record a gig again in my life in case Cat's behind me. But more importantly, I hadn't really thought about, for example, if I send a GIF, or if I send a video to people rather than a text, which I might do as a variation - that actually has an impact. I've never really considered that, to be brutally honest. So I think that's a really helpful thing just from a personal point of view.

But more broadly, you came up with this great phrase earlier about we thought that digital was inherently green and a good thing. And I think that's right - I mean, we've talked, as you've been saying already, that digital is going to help us commute less, travel less, do all the obviously environmentally damaging things like travel. It's going to help us collaborate better so we can access brain power more, we can get to better decisions and better ideas. We thought naturally it was just simply going to help us reduce paper as we've already said. So the fact that actually it's not the panacea at all, in fact it could be doing the opposite - it is a real startling revelation I think and something I guess a lot of us will need to think about in terms of our behaviours and what we do.

So to help us do that and perhaps to some degree restore our confidence in the digital future that no doubt we're heading into (we already are), what can it do in terms of good things? What can digital be used for as a force for good, if you like, particularly around things such as environmental awareness and so on?

Gerry (20:18)

Well, it can be used for all those things you mentioned about travel, etc. about communication, etc. about sending something in print. But what happens always is that - somebody did a study of sending a letter and somewhere in the region of 30 grams of CO2 was the total impact of the paper and the postage, the transport. And that sending an email is somewhere, it depends how you calculate it, somewhere in the region of four grams, let's say, somewhere in that territory. So it's clearly better to send an email than it is to send a letter, except that every year we send 400 billion letters, but every day we send 400 billion emails.

So, you know, what we get is this explosion of activity. That's the nature of digital because it's so easy to actually copy and create and transfer and send. It makes all these mechanisms that are connected with speed often faster. So we get vastly more activity in the environment. And what happens - I've seen studies of people who are working from home are driving just as much as they ever drove, but now they're driving to yoga classes and bringing their kids out more, and you know so what we're always doing is adding more on top, so we see solar now and wind and etc which have huge impacts from environmentally a material point of view and as well where they're located as



mega things - but they're not reducing oil and they're not reducing gas, and they're not reducing coal because we've got this growth driven thing - and so we're getting more and more and more.

So, what we need is something that doesn't seem to exist in human society anymore. Maturity or wisdom or the ability not to send 20 emails - the ability just to send one - but we seem to not have that capacity anymore. And I think, unfortunately, digital feeds these very bad behaviours that occur within human societies. But if we could constrain ourselves and show some degree of maturity, and unfortunately, the higher you go up in organisations, the more immature they become. In my experience it seems to be a condition of becoming a senior manager that you achieve a certain level of stupidity, and arrogance and ego and vanity and narcissism in the process - and that your whole impulse as a manager is to tell everyone what you're doing so that you can use it to jump to the next organisation to push your career forward.

So, Internal Communicators are unfortunately often stuck with these masters above them who are demanding that their egos be stroked, which they feel will be achieved by the pumping out of tons and tons of content.

So now we have the pathetic embrace of AI, which has been feeding on the garbage tip that is the internet. And people will wonder why is there garbage coming out of this thing that has been fed on garbage? And in another two or three years, they'll be saying AI didn't work. What's the next magical? we're always looking for a magical technology that actually stops us having to think or actually do things that require some degree of deep intelligence. Everything seems to be a race to the superficiality of behaviour.

Dom (22:26)

Just listening to what you're saying, there are three things that strike me immediately about this. One is you've reiterated to us that the value of personal responsibility, there's no easy fix - and we may sometimes think that these technologies look like they are, but actually they all carry consequences. And your statistics about digital communication versus letters is just astounding, I think. And that's something that we need to reflect upon. I think the second thing - and we talk about this a lot - the value of professional communicators challenging the behaviours of senior people. And that's not just about the way they want to communicate or what they want to say, but it's about the channels and the frequency. And I think you've given grist to the mill about helping us to do that, I think. And the third thing I think about it is, is just bearing in mind that technology doesn't always improve stuff. And that sounds obvious as I'm saying it, but I think we have that as a tenet of faith that technology is always going to improve stuff. And I think it's very helpful just to remind us that that's not the case, and we've still got to consider how we apply it and use it.

Cat Barnard (25:20)

Absolutely - I think that's a really important point, is that we're told that technology is designed to improve stuff. But, you have to look at the money that is flowing into Silicon Valley. It's in the



trillions and I can't remember the data points, but I know that we cited some data points in the AI report that was published last year. And I think we cannot underestimate the extent to which lobbying of new technology takes place in exactly the same way that the tobacco industry lobbied for tobacco as a safe product, ditto sugar, ditto the fossil fuel industry. And so what we need to remember about technology, is that the creators of these technologies need us as guinea pigs to prototype their technology. If we don't use chat GPT, there is no product.

And I also think, and this is a reflection in the moment - most internal communicators are being pressured into using ChatGPT because they are under the illusion because certain people in the industry last year spent the entirety of last year saying "if you don't get on board with this technology it might not replace you but somebody who knows how to use it will replace you" - but in respective, ChatGPT and generative AI right now in early 2024 - the proof of concept, if you will, I think has been, yes, it works, but whether or not it raises the bar on communication for the majority remains to be seen. And actually, the technology has been created by people who aren't natural born communicators. So they would have an aptitude for perceiving communication as just something we all can do because we've all got a mouth and two ears, right? Whereas there is a craft and a skillset around world-class communication, which you, Dom, if you spent your career working on, in and honing, etc. So I guess what I'm saying in a very, very long-winded, non-efficient communication way - is I don't think we should underestimate the extent to which we are being sold the idea that technology is a panacea for all our societal and environmental woes. It isn't, and actually the most important thing that we can do for ourselves, to your point Dom, is to take responsibility, and hold ourselves accountable - but also to educate ourselves. Because we're being told all of these things that we must do, why? Why must we do them? What's going to happen if we don't do them?

And to that point, I've got a question for Gerry, which is probably a bit of a conundrum. But most organisations right now are being told that digital technology is going to create competitive advantage - and if they don't embrace the latest and greatest technologies, they will naturally fall behind and presumably eventually just become obsolete. How do we balance that one narrative with the opposing narrative - which is that there is a rising cohort of very, very concerned citizens who want and expect their organisations to behave responsibly and ethically when it comes to at an appropriate level of resource consumption?

Gerry (29:30)

It's a challenge, and I was just reading an article today about these self-service kiosks in supermarkets and I don't know about the UK, but certainly in the United States they're beginning to pull them out again and scale back on them because they just didn't work. All the promises that were made, they just didn't work. Technology isn't necessarily progress by any sense of the thinking. And in many ways, you could look at it and you could say since 75% of all the CO2 damage humans have done occurred since 1970, which is to me one of the most scary things I've ever heard. In 50 years we've done 75% of the damage - we've been around for 200,000 years, but in 50 years we have done 75% of the damage that we have done to the planet. We've pumped half of the oil that we've ever pumped between 1998 and 2020. So everything has gone crazy and why has it gone



crazy? It's because of technology. It's not just this idea that technology is the solution to our wars. Maybe technology is the cause of our wars.

You know, maybe technology has been the accelerant of the oil industry, the accelerant of all these negative behaviours and negative areas that are occurring. I mean, can you say that social media has been good for society - has been good for children? Can you say that technology in schools is helping children become better?

We used to like albums, then it went to songs. Kids now aren't even into songs, they're into snippets of songs. They're into 10 seconds from a song because their short-term memory is being shot to death by this constant "barragement" of exciting stuff. So who anywhere could say that's good for children, let alone good for adults? I think it's long overdue. We should look at technology and say, well, what good is it actually? How has it actually made success? You want better societies? You don't need electric vehicles. You need bicycles - you need walking.

The solutions to our core problems, they're not technological. They're talking to each other again. We have epidemics of loneliness. We've never been more connected to devices and never been less connected to nature and to people. So, maybe before it's too late, we might begin to question, how did we get here? What was the car that brought us here? The car that is overall global crisis was a technological car in the process. And you know data in organisations, most organisations don't even know how many servers they have, let alone how much data they have. How on earth are you going to manage a company's data environment when you don't even know what data you have? I mean most organisations 50, 60, 70 percent of their data isn't even - none of it is audited, but the vast majority don't even know it exists, so you're going put these AI systems and you say go in there and sort all that out for us? I mean, this is just insanity, packed on top of more insanity.

Cat Barnard (33:00)

When you put it that way, actually, it leaves me feeling like I'm wincing right now. It leaves me feeling really, really uncomfortable because everything that we've learned about the fossil fuel industry is right there in front of us right now. You know, it's all starting to come out. The lost decade of climate denialism, the fact that the University of East Anglia's servers were hacked into and information stolen in the noughties, and then misappropriated or misconstrued as data that could be, you know, that was manipulated, that was misconstrued - and so on and so forth. And when I then think about that adage that we have been fed, which is that data is the new oil - that kind of gives me the ick because there's the oil industry, there's the data industry - and you're absolutely right. Most organisations have clambered towards big data, but they don't know what is held on their servers to your absolute point. Since everything went into the cloud, they don't even know how many servers they've got.

Gerry (34:11)

They didn't even know before, hardly. The best definition of big data I've heard is when the cost of storing data is less than the cost of thinking what to do with it. And the growth of data - we've no



concept of the way that data is growing in zettabytes of data, one zettabyte of data, I calculated that to print out one zettabyte of data would take two trillion trees, something like that - trillions of trees to actually print out just one zettabyte of data and we're producing hundreds of zettabytes of data. Data beyond any comprehension to be able to actually control or manage. So, data is out of control in 99 percent of organisations I've dealt with. And in most intranets or websites, whenever we deleted 80 percent of the intranet, or deleted 80 percent of the website - everything worked better. So we're losing more and more control of our lives to technology, and at a certain point you wonder where will it actually lead?

Jen (35:22)

There's so many, stark, but needed questions that so much you've just said there, that you sort of sit there for a moment and pause and think because I think this speed issue is just, it's like forever being pushed from behind to go somewhere, but we don't quite know where we're trying to get to? But if you stop and pause, then you might get kicked off and you'll be left out. And that fear of it is really in every aspect of life. I mean, that personally, I mean that professionally, and that's a really hard sort of, race to do that. And as I sit and listen to this, there's so much to take away. And there's so many big questions we need to ask ourselves, just as human beings - irrelevant perhaps to what we do professionally.

But going back to that a little bit and sort of internal communication, I guess. There's sort of things for me, I think about, well, there's content creation, right? We need to ask many questions about why we create it. I feel like there needs to be a new formula for it. What's the point of it? What's the impact of it? Why do we need it so speedy? And we need to pull that back. Then where do we distribute it and all the things that we've talked about, but there's also the big thing as well around what can we do around changing it?

But the big issue comes to behaviours - because we can all say, look, you know what, we'll come up with a thing and we'll say no more often and whatever. But the fundamental things that you've talked about, Gerry, take huge behavioural change, huge mindset shifts. Because, I don't think we're necessarily as aware of what this industry or technology industry is doing - versus what the oil industry or the fossil fuel industry is doing. So changing that behaviour amongst ourselves, amongst our leaders, amongst society is huge, but the dialogue - or the openness, or the awareness of this particular topic is - I just don't see it anywhere. So there's a real challenge there.

And then the other thing I was going to ask before we close up is - but this all comes down to accountability as well, right? So how do we keep accountable and do that? And, you know, there's big drives in sustainability, right? Every organisation is bringing in sustainability people, looking at that thing - thinking we need to report on it. Are you seeing this reported on as part of the carbon footprint or the issues? Or is this, I don't know, maybe I need to go away and look at some sustainability reports, but why isn't that dialogue there in the whole carbon neutral zero emission footprint that we're all on?

Gerry (37:51)



Because the tech industry is so good at propaganda. Back in the 40s and 50s when they were building out Silicon Valley, they said, we're going to create a different industry from the old smokestack industries. And even though back then they were building chips and stuff like that, it was very chemically intense, Silicon Valley, back then. In fact, there are more poisonous dumps in California than anywhere else in the United States. Most of them are connected with the technology industry. But one of the things they did back in the 40s and 50s is they said we're going to put all the chemical tanks underground, and we're going to call these places parks.

So they had this whole idea of positioning digital as clean and green. So the cloud is a concept that has come from 60 years of propaganda - 70 years of propaganda, about technology being this nice beneficial thing. Whereas there's nothing more poisonous than technology. There's nothing remotely green about a smartphone - it's got 70 materials in it - it's got 16 out of 17 rare arts in it.

These things, when they decay they will damage the environment for thousands of years. Five percent of smartphones are recycled because they're not designed to be recycled. So the technology industry is a really filthy industry. We send most of our e-waste to poor countries. That's why we don't see it in the UK or in Ireland. We send it off to India or to Africa - we dump cargo ships full of computers in poorer countries that will poison the water and the air of poor people because they don't matter in the whole process but you put your finger on it, it's a cultural thing - We need a cultural shift.

I think one of the things maybe somebody could consider in the communication industry is a slow communication movement. We've got slow food, we've got slow this - if we could slow down, we could actually achieve far more. And this sense of if you think this sucks, it probably does - and actually began to trust our own sense of wisdom and ask questions for once instead of, can we do this - Is it wise to do this? Where is the wisdom gone in society? It seems that the more intelligent we become, the less wise we become, in the process.

We've all these smart people but where have the wise people gone? We really need to look to ourselves to develop our sense of wisdom, because that's much more important than intelligence - and what we have is artificially intelligent machines - intelligence got us into the mess - it's intelligence that is racing ahead, etc. So all of this intelligence won't get us out of the mess, but with a sense of cultural wisdom, we might have some chance. But we need to slow down - you can see movements of getting cars out of cities, making it so our children can actually cycle to school. Why can't our children cycle to school? Because they're getting run over by two-tonne SUVs that you can't see the people out of.

Cat Barnard (41:06)

But that's been disproven as well though, Gerry, hasn't it? This whole kind of fallacy of stranger danger and the world being far more dangerous for children.

Gerry (41:17)

But we've been trained, we've been trained to do that.



Cat Barnard (41:20)

Exactly that. I mean, I can't speak for the traffic stats - that's way out of my field of knowledge. But I read some stuff saying about the whole stranger danger, you've got to keep your kids indoors - you can't let them go out to play because there's a paedophile on every street corner. That was disproven and discredited. And yet, these pervasive messages still manage to propagate. And back to your point, I do remain optimistic because there are some very wise people out there and I make it our work to tap into them. I would consider you to be a wise person, Gerry. I think the challenge is that many of the wise people get shouted over by frothy, pop, talking heads – all fur coat, no knickers, kind of experts. And the very people that have probably got a vested interest in lording this technology are not the people that we need right now to think about these issues.

And I was just looking at Dom, you were kind of holding your head. It's thoughtfulness. Systemic complex issues don't have straightforward solutions - if they have any solutions at all, but wise people will at least take time to contemplate. And I am all for building networks of wise people so that we can sustain and uphold one another when it starts to get very, very difficult, as I suspect it will. But, yeah, I don't know where I was going with that - I was just thinking.

Dom (43:04)

Well, Cat, you said I was probably right. I was just thinking about my own behaviour, actually, because I think you said something, Gerry, earlier about electric cars aren't the only solution - sorry, I'm paraphrasing – and you're right, because I know people like myself, where you get electric car, you think, that's it, I've solved that problem - and you haven't, because electric cars use loads of other energy and all the stuff you've been saying. It's really down to me changing my behaviour. I should drive less, put it bluntly. I should do other things. And I think we're all guilty of not doing that and that's where that wisdom comes in I think.

And Cat I think you're right - It's about challenging ourselves and as communicators, challenging other people. So I was just thinking how could you do that? and when we do a communication plan, I just wondered the feasibility - and maybe some people do this – of having an extra column which is what's the damages is going to do in terms of the environment, or the climate or aspects of resources. So, a bit like when you get a train ticket, it tells you how much you've saved in terms of emissions over driving that same distance – I wonder if we could do the same sort of thing simply with communication. A very small tactical point, but one way in which we can start to shift that behaviour change.

Gerry (44:07)

And maybe connected with that, we start measuring different things. We measure production, whereas if we measure outcomes, understanding knowledge, I mean, nobody wants to measure



that. It's harder, but it's more essential. So, if we're always measuring how many newsletters have we produced, how many channels are we on, etc. how many visits did it get? We're driving all the negative behaviours of volume and production. And if we shift more towards understanding - did people understand it? Did it change the behaviour? More difficult things to measure, but much more important because the metrics of volume will drive volume – that's always been the case.

And you were saying earlier, Cat, about the stranger danger as well - but companies make more money off of us inside - when was the last time you saw a bicycle being advertised? Because there isn't enough money - you can make a lot more money out of a car than a bicycle. So everything is driven, unfortunately, by the desire to maximise short-term profits and that's why the environment is collapsing, because in about 20 years' time we will be mining every year, a Mount Everest. Now every year we can't survive that. Certainly our children won't survive on a planet where we're actually destroying a Mount Everest of material every year. You may forget about CO2, forget about all the other stuff. The damage to the groundwater systems, to all other systems of that sort of behaviour. We might get another 20, 30, 40, 50 years, but we aren't going to survive with the behaviours we have today.

Dom (46:06)

And Gerry, it's even worse, because not only do you not see bicycles advertised - you do see artificial bicycles advertised for people to replicate cycling in their living rooms, or wherever.

Jen (46:16)

There's just so much for us to go away and you know - and Gerry, thank you so much - there's just so much in it. It's one of those, I love doing these podcasts, but this is certainly one episode where I am going to switch off and have a real contemplation on that thought around wisdom. I think there's so much there that you've talked about the we can action. And I think there's certainly things for me around - we need to go from propaganda to realism, that's the switch we need to have.

We need to ask ourselves harder questions. We need to work harder at changing behaviours and mindsets. We need to measure what matters to make decisions that matter, to make things that change. But I think the thing that I would say - and that there's lots to take away - and perhaps there is one thing you want to highlight, but I thought slow down as well, would that be the - just to close this off - from all of that, is this the one thing that you would say “do this - take this from the episode”?

Gerry (47:07)

Slow down - slower is better. Actually, we weren't designed for this speed. Humans were not designed to move this fast. And we're not making good decisions - certainly not for our children, not for our futures. The way we're living is not sustainable, on multiple levels. And if we slow down in all



sorts of ways - walking, thinking, four-day weeks etc., we could have some chance in the process. And technology is not the God we thought it was.

Jen (47:43)

Love it – that's a brilliant way to end, and you know what, I think for everyone listening - slow down. I think we all want to slow down. And that's actually a behaviour I think we crave as a society. And I think that's something we can connect with.

So, Gerry, thank you again so much for your time - so much to think about. Wonderful episode. And we hope you enjoy going away and thinking about how you can slow down.