

# Joys and pitfalls of the internet

How did we manage without the internet?

I've just interviewed a businessman who reckons his global operation could never even have begun without the web's inter-connectedness. He said we can now be everywhere and anywhere.

But surely I'm not the first person to wonder if we'd be better off without it. Look at the poor old New Plymouth District Council being blackmailed for a second time by someone first to understand the potential of owning a domain name that includes "New Plymouth".

I've had my own battle with the 'net lately, but I need to set the scene before I tell you why I'm now at war with the sub-continent of India.

Picture this: It's granddad and seven-year-old grandson and we're going shopping for a book. He's missing a Roald Dahl from his collection and we're off to the local bookshop to set that right for Christmas.

It's a tiny shop, so the walls are all bookshelves, packed to the ceiling in every direction. Even more in little rooms that open off the back.

Grandson is all eyes. He's slightly overwhelmed to the point of not being able to remember which Dahl we're after (silly granddad forgot to take a note). But we get there after a bit of trial and error.

I'm too old now to recall the author of my first book, but the title's still there - 'Bear, Goat and Ostrich' it was called, and it was about that unlikely trio's journey to a mountain or something.

My mother's encouragement to read my first story led to a lifetime whose central interest has been books.

Which may account for failing eyesight, and my conversion about six years ago to reading everything on an iPad. The advantage is you can vary the type size, font and backlighting, which must add years to a reader's book consumption.

But it also adds to the potential for frustration with...you guessed it...the internet.

My current saga began innocently enough. I'd read a marvellous memoir by David Cornwell, (aka spy writer John Le Carré) and decided to revisit his 30-odd novels, especially the classic series on fictional spymaster George Smiley.

I buy my ebooks on Amazon, and as I ploughed through the adventures of George I came across a minor frustration - only some of the Smiley series were numbered on the Le Carré pages of Amazon's website.

JT column for Dec 17 - web adventures

A small omission. I'll let them know, politely. But then a problem - how exactly could I impart my helpful advice?

The further I searched the behemoth's website, the more confusing it became. I was looking for the word "feedback" or something similar, a button to click on.

Surely there had been one there before. I've been buying from Amazon for six years. I review many (I've ranked as "high" as 116,000<sup>th</sup> reviewer). But there seems no easy way to talk back. In the end, I stumbled on a link on one of the emailed receipts you get when you buy a book.

After a bit of searching on that, I discovered a panel in which I could make a plea for the missing numbers (4 and 7) to be added.

But now there's a second complaint: how come you people seem so determined to keep your customers at arm's length, apart from encouraging them in every conceivable way to spend more money?

I send. I might as well have pushed the button to set off the bomb, the one everyone wants to keep away from Donald Trump.

Within minutes my email box fills with anguished and unctuous apologies from a stream of different people, whose first names-only suggest they might be based somewhere other than where I had long and naively imagined Amazon to be.

My dialogue with Arun, Aaqil, Dipesh, Sumit, Tayyab, Nandhini, Rakesh, Vishal, Mary Joy, et al, has now been going - on and off via email and chat - for nearly a month. I haven't been able to take up an offer to phone, because the box in which you write your number is short of a space.

Promises to look into it all have been made, although there's been something of a silence since I mentioned I'm a journalist and would probably write about our exchange.

I note on one page all the numbers have disappeared from the Smiley series. On another, 4 and 7 are still absent.

On the question of accessibility, I haven't noticed any improvement. I can't even find my reviews.