



McLuhan Program
In Culture and Technology

**McLuhan Thinking:
Integral Awareness in the Connected Society**

by

**Mark Federman
Chief Strategist,
McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology
University of Toronto**

Keynote Presentation



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike License.
To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/1.0/>
or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.



McLuhan Thinking — Integral Awareness in the Connected Society

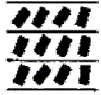
By Mark Federman
Chief Strategist
McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology

Abstract

What haven't you noticed lately? To become aware of the effects of the Internet, Marshall McLuhan's thinking tools, that help us construct a cognitive anti-environment, are particularly useful. By examining society through a McLuhan lens, we can become aware of the cultural effects of our massively interconnected world, and anticipate the implications for our selves, our individual identities and the future of society.

I recently attended a conference whose slogan was “Building the knowledge-powered enterprise.” It was designed as a day and a half of seminars, themed on four different types of power, all, presumably, derived from knowledge. There were to be sessions on integration power, productivity power, people power and learning power. Sounded like a powerful conference. But the theme of the entire conference was summed up in the hallway, when someone I was near said, “Knowledge is Power.” That’s all we need to know. If we have knowledge we have power. If our enterprise has knowledge, it has power. If our customers have knowledge, they have the power; if our competitors or suppliers have the knowledge... they have the power. So in that one phrase, that one cliché — knowledge is power — I had the full effect and message of that conference. Learn how to acquire and manage and use as much knowledge as you can, and, like our evangelical friends say, “YOU WILL HAAAAAVE TH’ POWA!”

Most certainly, having more knowledge than someone else will allow you to exercise control. One of the early theories of business on the internet had to do with “empowering” customers with knowledge of pricing and supply, so that the most efficient price could be obtained in all competitive situations. Businesses could no longer keep prices artificially high simply because of the customer’s lack of knowledge. Customers had the knowledge; they had the power... the control. Customers thought they could always get the best product for the best price from anywhere in the world. What happened? In many cases, businesses that ceded such control to customers were unable to sustain themselves and went out of business. Others simply gave customers the illusion of the knowledge-power control axis, and blithely manipulated prices and supply behind the scenes. If you are still buying airline tickets online, congratulations, you are living proof of this situation.



Another theory says that with the best knowledge, a business can be more efficient, more productive. It can “do more with less.” But in many cases, companies who proudly say they are doing “more with less” also have people who are doing more work with less satisfaction, have more stress but deliver less quality, institute more control or surveillance but engender less trust. These companies have lots of knowledge, in fact, they often spend considerable time and money to collect, store, manage, disseminate and report on, knowledge. They sometimes achieve tremendous efficiencies. But, it is often the case that such efficiency is not sustainable through good times and bad, and, perhaps worse, these companies are not entirely effective — that is, they are not having the effect they want to have on their customers, on their market or on their people.

So it seems that despite creating systems, complex organizations and supporting infrastructure to acquire and manage knowledge, we often miss something. There is always something of which we are unaware. No matter how much knowledge we have of our operations, our customers, our markets, our competitors, there is always more to know. So perhaps we’re going about it all wrong. In trying to capture as much information as we can possibly find, we may be undertaking an exercise in which, like the Red Queen says in *Through the Looking Glass*, “it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place.” Perhaps we should ask a simpler question. Like...

What haven’t you noticed lately? What HAVEN’T you noticed lately?

There’s a cute story about a man who, during wartime, would come to the country’s border with a wheelbarrow full of dirt. The border guard looked at the man’s papers and all was in order for him to cross. But the guard was certain the man was smuggling some sort of contraband in the wheelbarrow. So the guard took a shovel, poked around in the dirt, but found nothing. The man was allowed to cross.

The next week, the man once again comes to the border with a wheelbarrow full of dirt. Again, the border guard found that the papers were in order and dug through the dirt, but still found nothing. And again, the man was allowed to cross. Week after week, it was the same story: Man approaches the border with wheelbarrow full of dirt. Guard finds nothing of interest and the man crosses. At the end of the war, the guard sees the man and asks him: “Look, I know you were smuggling something across the border, but I could never find a thing hidden in the dirt. What were you smuggling all those years?” The man answered: “Wheelbarrows.”

The border guard was unable to perceive what had been right there under his nose for years, simply because it did not match his conception. We collect and manage knowledge. We create elaborate systems to disseminate that knowledge. Many enterprises and institutions have tied aspects of their compensation plan directly to their employees’ participation in this quest for knowledge. And what do we do with it all? We create elaborate mental models of



how things are supposed to work. We create conceptions, and then manage our affairs so that our business attempts to match those preconceived notions.

But we are not necessarily effective, that is, we do not manage for the overall desired effects. Why do I say this? Simply because, what we conceive about our institutions and enterprises is not sufficient to fully understand all the effects that are actually happening in and around our institutions and enterprises. Like the border guard in the story, we are completely unable to perceive all of the dynamics of our environment because our *conception* limits our *perception*. Our accumulation of, and intense focus on, our knowledge, controls what we believe. And, what we believe controls what we are able to see.

What haven't you noticed lately? This is really an odd question, because, how can you notice that which you haven't yet noticed? And if, as I am proposing to you, this is a key question for awareness in our complex interconnected society, even if we answer it once, how can we consistently continue to answer it?

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to achieve the requisite awareness of what we haven't noticed while we are immersed in a comfortable, or at least accustomed, environment. We are all subject to the ground-rules, that is, the rules and unperceived effects that govern our ground or context. It is like asking a fish to suddenly become aware of water. Marshall McLuhan, the visionary who gave us "The Medium is the Message" and the "Global Village," observed, "One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in." It is only when it is pulled from the water that the fish becomes acutely aware of its former environment. The challenge in achieving the awareness to notice the formerly unnoticed — what we call "integral awareness" of our total environment — is to create an appropriate "anti-environment."

We tend to notice many things. In fact, we're very good at noticing what is entirely obvious, to the extent that we often become obsessively focused on it. This is dangerously easy to do because in our world of instantaneous communications, everyone is vying for the most precious and valuable commodity to be sought — our attention. Think about it: Every advertiser, every potential vendor and company desperately wants your attention, and will go to great, and sometimes outrageous, lengths to obtain it. If attention is the most valuable commodity, our most valued asset, it may be said that the most valuable personal skill to be effective these days is ignorance, literally ignore-ance — the ability to selectively and appropriately ignore that which is irrelevant or merely distracting. In this context, ignorance is not bliss — it is the practical manifestation of acute awareness and heightened perception.

The challenge is a tricky one: We must create an anti-environment so that we can ignore what we notice and notice what we ignore. And what is most hidden from our perception, that we ignore the most? Well, whatever it is, we know that it comprises our ground, and is having the greatest unseen effects on us, our enterprises and institutions, costing lots of



attention, potentially draining significant resources, and contributing to the mismanagement of opportunities.

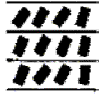
One way to accomplish this awareness is simply to wait. By looking back through the passage of time, we can slowly become aware of the true effects of our environment. These are the people who march backwards into the future.

What would be entirely more useful is a way to reveal those effects that are hidden from us — now. We need to find the questions that we have not asked after we've asked everything we can think of. We need to raise the issues that have not yet occurred to us. And perhaps most important, we must anticipate the effects that have already happened of things that we are about to do. In other words, our objective is nothing less than to achieve the ability to predict the future by foretelling the present.

After such a build-up, I'm almost tempted to say, "to find out more, have your credit card ready and dial the toll-free number on your screen..." But I won't. Instead, I will reveal to you all at least one of the secrets behind Marshall McLuhan's uncanny ability to, indeed, predict the future by foretelling the present. McLuhan was the one who, in 1955, described "television platters" that would allow people to watch pre-recorded television programs and movies on their home television set whenever they wanted. A dozen IBM divisional directors in 1968 literally thought McLuhan was crazy when he described a computer in every home and online grocery shopping. The tool I'm talking about is the Laws of Media.

The Laws of Media: They are precisely four aspects or effects that apply without exception to all creations of humankind — everything we conceive or create. In McLuhan's lexicon, "medium" is not merely limited to our conventional idea of mass-media: radio, television, the press, the internet. Rather, a medium refers to anything from which a change emerges. And since some sort of change in us or society accompanies anything we conceive or create, all of our tools and technologies, policies and plans, a cup of coffee or a coup d'état — they are all McLuhan media. The Laws of Media apply regardless of whether the creation is tangible or intangible, abstract or concrete, and they serve to reveal the nature and effects of our innovations relative to us. As Marshall and his son, Eric, worked on these Media Laws for the decade before Marshall died — and for Eric, an additional 8 years thereafter — they challenged others to find an example to which only three of the laws applied, or a fifth that applies in every case. No one ever could. Now to Marshall McLuhan, the questions were always more important, and indeed, more revealing, than the answers. Thus, the four Laws of Media are framed as four questions or probes.

The first probe is asked like this: What does the thing — the artifact, the medium — extend, enhance, intensify, accelerate or enable? We can ask this question about any product, any service, any initiative, any policy. We can ask this enhance question about any word or phrase in our vocabulary, including, most interestingly, our buzzwords and acronyms. Email,



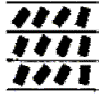
for example, enhances and accelerates our ability to communicate in writing. Its rapidity and characteristic terseness intensifies the sender's meaning.

A second probe: When pushed or extended beyond the limits of its potential, the new thing will tend to reverse what had been its original characteristics. Into what does the new medium reverse? People typically have difficulty thinking through the characteristics of the reversal law, often because we tend to be very focused on what a new idea or creation will obviously do for us. The effect of reversal is really very easy to state; discovering the circumstances under which it emerges might be more tricky. So, continuing with email as an example, it enhances our ability to communicate, but when extended beyond the limit of its potential — with spam, for instance, or dozens of unimportant FYI- or CC-type of corporate emails — email reverses into no communication at all due to an overflowing inbox.

The third Law of Media probe: If some aspect of a situation or a thing is enhanced or enlarged, simultaneously, something else is displaced. What is pushed aside or obsolesced by the new thing; the new medium? Now when I say "obsolescence," I do not mean that the older form is eliminated, never to be heard from again. In fact, it is quite the opposite: One sure sign of a medium in obsolescence is its ubiquity. Does everyone remember what happened right before the dot-com bubble burst? There was a saying then: "You know the end of the market is near when you're getting stock advice from your garbage collector." Another way to think of obsolescence in this context is to picture a supernova. The star glows brightest just before it is about to explode and be annihilated. So what does email obsolesce? In a corporate setting, email obsolesced the interoffice memo, and those large brown envelopes tied with a string that had all those boxes for a chain of recipients. It also obsolesces synchronicity in communications – the ability to respond instantly as in normal conversation – and other socialized skills of responding to aural or physical cues, in other words, body language.

And the final Law of Media probe: What does the new medium retrieve from the past that had been formerly obsolesced? This reflects the aphorism that, "there's nothing new under the sun," and essentially asks, "How did we react as a society the last time we saw a medium with analogous effects?" The law of retrieval brings in precedence and historically-based experience. So what does email retrieve from the past that has long been obsolesced? Thinking way back through the history of communications, email may retrieve Hermes the messenger, scribe and herald of Greek mythology. Interestingly, from the perspective of the retrieval aspect of email, Hermes was also the Greek god of commerce, invention, cunning and theft. So now you know why email is the medium of choice for all those confidential business proposals you have been receiving from Nigeria.

The Laws of Media are simultaneous effects — emergent properties, really — of anything we conceive or create. What does it extend, enhance, amplify or enable? When pushed beyond the limit of its capacity into what does it reverse? What does it obsolesce? And, what does it retrieve from the past that was formerly obsolesced?



The laws of media are an important and powerful tool that help us to create a cognitive anti-environment, from which we can gain new awareness and insight into the complex interactions in our world. But what we'd really like to know is what's coming next? How do we predict the future by foretelling the present? What haven't we noticed lately?

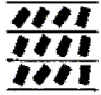
Anyone notice the Internet lately? I'm willing to bet that you aren't noticing the Internet in the same way that you were being asked to notice it a few years ago. I remember then that a favourite question that a CEO would put to his CIO was, "What is your Internet Strategy?" I recently had opportunity to ask an audience of 300 people how many of them had been asked that question in their company recently. Exactly one person raised his hand.

That tells us that the Internet is receding from figure — that which we obviously notice — into ground — that which begins to have unseen and unnoticed effects on us and the way we conduct ourselves in our connected society. Let's see if we can apply McLuhan thinking to discover some useful ground-effects of the Internet.

McLuhan gave us a guide to understanding the nature and effects of instantaneous, multi-way communications when he distinguished between "visual space" and "acoustic space." While these metaphors usefully tie to two of our senses, they do not necessarily relate exclusively to that which is seen or heard. Visual space is linear and bounded. It is ordered and continuous, yet continually fragmented by our eye's (and brain's) automatic process of grouping and classification. In contrast, McLuhan described acoustic space as "a resonant sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose boundaries are nowhere," a world of "simultaneous relationships." Therefore, everywhere in acoustic space is here, and every-when in acoustic space is now. This describes the effect of the Internet perfectly, an ever-present presence, the world of simultaneous relationships.

We can make an additional observation from the interesting metaphor of acoustic space. McLuhan points out that a characteristic of "visual space" is that we can shut it out, in much the same way we can shut off our vision by closing our eyes. We have eyelids, but we have no "earlids." We cannot shut out acoustic space, or the space of relationships and connections that are all around us. This suggests that we cannot shut out the effects of the Internet on our business and society, even if we choose not to use the Internet directly. In other words, we, in our physical reality, are affected by the changes that have their impetus in cyberspace.

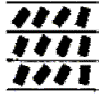
In cyberspace, we literally go "out of our minds," not to insanity, where we lose our sense of reality, but to an extension of reality that offers us many more dimensions of experience. As McLuhan predicted, "having extended ... our central nervous system into the electromagnetic technology, ... [we] transfer our consciousness to the computer world as well." So how can we begin to understand the effects of this profound change in the way we experience, and connect with, our world?



We can begin to understand the true nature of these effects by recognizing the extension of our identity in cyberspace. Our identity has, for many years, existed quite independent of our physical incarnation in government, financial and other institutional databases. We are not real to the bank or other authorities unless we can produce something that links our physical self to our “real identity” in their database. We have many versions of this digital identity or digital persona — or digiSelf, as I like to call it — spread among many databases, each with its unique characteristics, and inferred behaviours. Each one is more real to the institution — and ironically, to the people in that institution — than our physical self, what we consider to be our real self. Additional manifestations of our identity exist on the web, in chat avatars, among weblogs, web page postings and other digital media, and thereby create numerous digiSelves. What was once integral — our self, our person, our identity — is now split among our self in the physical world and our many digiSelves, each having both an autonomous life of its own and an emergent existence in combination with other of our digiSelf incarnations. Thus, we disconnect from the normal experience of physical and corporeal time and space when we live vicariously through our digiSelves on the Internet. This disconnection is significant and profound, as our consciousness becomes disconnected from our sensorium, extends in a real sense into the world’s electronic nervous system and thereby creates the unique experience of separating our identity, or self, from our body.

In this dislocation, we find an interesting reversal that pertains to us, our identity and our sense of self. This is the reversal of individual privacy to *publicity*. Publicity describes the revelation, in digiSpace of that which was individually intimate, but which still remains under our control. It stems from our sensory perception that digiSpace is private space. While digiSpace may be publicly available and accessible, our own experience of digiSpace is primarily private. We access digiSpace through an interface that focuses our vision into a small, visually convergent screen. When we are using the computer to access digiSpace, we are mostly in the privacy of our home, living room, bedroom, or in our office or cubicle. Our actions – the evidence of effect – betray the sensory experience of a private place: Activities such as flirting, cybersex, viewing pornography and so forth, are done quite freely by people who would not indulge in such activities in realSpace. These otherwise intimate actions are conducted in the full (cyber-)view of other participants in chat rooms, for instance, and any revelations made are fully under our control. This is what we would call “publicity of action.” Less socially frowned-on actions are also enabled. The online auction company eBay, for instance, will freely display a potential seller or bidder’s reputation score, which is quite analogous to the realSpace private notion of credit rating. In realSpace, such information is a matter of privacy. In digiSpace, it reverses to publicity of our prior actions.

Publicity of body was perhaps the first clear demonstration of privacy reversal. The now legendary “Jenni-cam” gave cyber-voyeurs a permitted vista into the bedroom, and now the home and entire life, of Jennifer Ringley. While most of the time, there was little occurring that was titillating, Jenni-cam created a storm of controversy, and unleashed a veritable flood of web-cams on which people became cyber-exhibitionists, even with their clothes on.

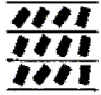


Publicity of mind took a little longer, and required the technology of weblogs to create the type of dynamic that mimicked one's "stream of consciousness." Today, people use their weblogs as an extension of their mind, a memory aid, quickly recording thoughts for later retrieval and use. They use it to talk to themselves to capture their inner dialogue. And, most interestingly, weblogs are used as a means of conversation when several weblogs engage each other in a distributed, loosely coupled, colloquium. Although weblogs have been dismissed as nothing more than a narcissistic exercise — something akin to the revelation of a teenager's diary — even this banal and trivial use is a demonstration of publicity. However, in the same way that minds engaged in conversation can connect so that new ideas emerge, weblogs connected via multi-way linking known as "trackback," and augmented by contributed comments, have resulted in emergent patterns of ideas, insight and the "creation" of knowledge (this last notion, admittedly, being rather controversial in itself.) Nonetheless, it is, as McLuhan quotes James Joyce, the "outering" of private minds via weblog conversations that manifests publicity of the mind.

The reversal of privacy to publicity, that which was – and in many respect remains – intimate, being revealed to all who would care to look, while simultaneously remaining under our control, is an observable effect. What makes publicity particularly important for our consideration is the merging of publicity, that we control, with our digiSelves that may be controlled by others – governmental or commercial organizations, for instance.

But, of course, mutual publicity means that we connect to one another throughout the acoustic space of the Internet. So perhaps we should look at the aspect of relationships and connection — the social or cultural construction of the Internet — in order to better understand its ground. Manuel Castells is a professor of sociology at University of California at Berkeley and senior professor at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute of the Open University of Catalonia in Barcelona, Spain. He wrote an interesting article in a recent edition of *Queen's Quarterly*. In it, he argues that the Internet is indeed a cultural creation, and describes the four founding cultures of the Internet and what effects they brought with them.

The first culture he identifies is the one that essentially founded the Internet. No, it was not the military, although that's how the popular story goes. Two academic scientists, Don Davies in England and Paul Baran at RAND Corporation in the United States, tried to figure out a way for several of the very scarce computers in the world in the mid-1960s to communicate. They suggested to the U.S. Air Force that a robust communications system could be built based on their packet-switching technology — it was to be so robust that it could even survive a nuclear attack. It's a great story, except for one minor detail: The Air Force rejected the proposal. However, the Defense Department funded the research as an academic project with the academic objective of allowing every scientist in the world to be able to connect with one another and exchange their data. They brought their academic culture with them and inculcated the fledgling network with the academic ethos: Provide free communications and a free exchange of data, information and ideas that would be available



to everyone. And, most importantly, provide a way in which participants and contributors would be recognized by their peers. You see, in academia, the currency is peer recognition.

The second cultural layer that Castells identifies is the one that actually built the Internet: The hacker culture. Or, to be a bit more precise, I would say the hacker community, for it is, indeed a community, and to belong to that community as a respected member is key to the hacker ethos. Hackers strive for the simple objective of creating cool and elegant solutions to technical problems. They also care passionately that the results of their cooperative creative efforts are not appropriated or inappropriately co-opted. That which has been achieved by sharing should, in turn, be shared with the rest of the community. Those who would refuse to participate in this simple ethic are ostracized and expelled from the tribe. On the other hand, those whose work is generally accepted as being of particular significance or exemplary of the hacker ethic are respected, and almost revered, as tribal elders. Think of Richard Stallman, the founder of the open source movement, and Linus Torvalds, the originator of Linux.

The third layer of the Internet's culture is comprised of autonomous communities whose members share a common interest, a common worldview, a common need, or a common desire. This layer continues to morph and evolve, with each new aspect of technology creating yet new sets of community relationships based on new modes of collaborating and exchanging a variety of items of interest. Interestingly, it is not the technology itself that attracts these communities, although some of the earlier ones certainly did share a common technological interest. Rather, it is the basic human need to connect and communicate that drives community culture, and ironically, engenders the technologies and tools that enable their existence, such as chat, listservs, usenet, peer-to-peer networks, weblogs and wikis. Community culture values shared support among its members, and mutual assistance. A community's primary objective is continuity, existence and viability.

Finally, we come to the most recent addition to Internet culture: The culture of the entrepreneur. This culture was created as a result of Tim Berners-Lee's work, at CERN in Geneva, in developing the software for the World Wide Web, and in particular, HTML and the original Mosaic browser. Entrepreneurs realized that there was a buck or two to be made out of this new medium, and they provided the impetus for the explosive growth of the Internet's infrastructure, its spread around the world, and the creation of all sorts of weird and wonderful new businesses, without, as Castells takes great pains to note, commercializing the entire Internet.

Which groups have been the most successful relative to their respective currencies? Most certainly the academics, whose community the Internet was originally designed to serve, have realized their ambitions. Those who contributed academically continue to receive recognition, both via the Internet and in the embodiment of the Internet itself. The hacker community has benefited tremendously. The open source movement is stronger than ever, and is considered an archetypal model for software development, even within those companies whose software products are themselves proprietary. Almost two-thirds of all web servers run open-source Apache software. Linux has gone mainstream with the blessing and endorsement



of none other than the likes of IBM, Dell, Hewlett-Packard and Intel, not to mention otherwise staid institutions like major banks and brokerages. This has extended to the public sector as well, with many municipal and regional governments mandating open source software. Munich was the first city in Germany, for instance, to legislate OSS – a political poster there heralded “Mehr Linux. Mehr Freiheit.” “More Linux. More Freedom.” In fact, around the world, almost everything that actually runs the Internet is open source.

It is clear that communities continue to grow and flourish on the ‘net, with new communities that span the globe being created daily. As new capabilities are created, communities seem to spring up to capitalize on them, the latest phenomenon being the weblog community. The entrepreneurs, on the other hand, didn’t seem to do as well, overall. After the metaphoric gold rush to the dot-com Klondike, we experienced the dot-bomb, and now, the relatively quiet dot-calm.

The businesses that are really benefiting from the Internet are those who are making use of it as an enabling environment for radical change in the way their traditional operations are executed. I’m sure we can all recite the anecdotal success stories about how production is streamlined, inventories have been reduced, [customers’ managers are “relation-shipped,]” and so on. But in all of this, what haven’t we noticed? The Internet exists, grows and continues to thrive based on three of the four founding cultures whose ground consists of an ethic of contribution, sharing, openness and recognition. What was created? Through all of this seemingly altruistic, and apparently anti-capitalistic behaviour, an infrastructure was created that significantly enhanced, extended, enabled and accelerated otherwise conventional businesses’ ability to do business and make money. What an interesting reversal! It goes contrary to conventional thinking, but, now that we have noticed it, it’s obvious. Mutual contribution that has real value across several different, but intertwined, cultures has resulted in the creation of an infrastructure that enables long-term structural economic growth among a wide variety of traditional industries and enterprises. It is an obvious result — now that we’ve seen it — but it seemingly defies conventional thinking and economic logic. With very few exceptions, those who attempted to apply conventional capitalistic thinking and spreadsheet economics to commercialize the Internet — the stalwarts of the “New E-comedy” ... “New Economy” — not only failed, they failed spectacularly!

There’s that conventional thinking again. If we have learned anything from our brief trip through McLuhan’s looking glass, it’s that conventional thinking — our preconceived notions — must give way to unconventional integral awareness and perception of what’s actually happening. Consider intellectual property. Our modern notion of what constitutes so-called intellectual property comes from a time when the king granted royal favours — copyrights, patents and trademarks — for the exclusive use of those whom he favoured. As this tradition crept into common law, the exclusivity gave way to a limited monopoly that would eventually revert to the common domain and thereby benefit society as a whole. But the term we have come to use, “intellectual property,” seems to suggest that what emerges from intellectual activity — in other words, ideas — are, in some manner, property, and hence, should be



owned by someone, and be subject to the very different laws concerning tangible property rights.

It is irrelevant to argue that ideas are not subject to copyright. Increasingly draconian copyright protection, coupled with companies' increasingly aggressive litigation and the use of contract law and technological implementations to circumvent copyright law, is effectively limiting the scope and meaning of fair use and restricting the flow of innovation. How can we tell that we have reached the limit of potential with regard to this idea of intellectual property? We look for the reversal. In many cases, companies secure intellectual property rights via patents not to promote innovation, but to suppress innovation and potential competition. Corporations now behave as if they own and control ideas as property. They actively create and promote that conception in the minds of the general public. Many of you may have been asked, or may be asked in the future, to sign a document as a condition of employment that your employer somehow "owns" any ideas you may have while in their employ. Well, if this is truly the case, do you forfeit those ideas when you leave the company? How many of you have participated in an "exit interview" that included brainwashing, hypnosis or liberal injections of mind-altering chemicals? Imagine walking out the door on your last day of work and a big alarm sounds — EHHH EHHH EHHH — and the security guard approaches: "Excuse me sir, I need to inspect your brain. There may be an idea in there..." You see? With the appropriate anti-environment, *perception* doesn't necessarily match *conception*.

The driver of productivity in our world is innovation. Innovation has always been driven by the free flow of ideas within an ethic of openness, cooperative sharing, mutual support and peer recognition. What does this obsolesce? Such enhanced innovation, as exemplified by the capabilities of the Internet, obsolesces nothing less than this notion of proprietary intellectual property rights. A business whose foundation is based on the protection of their proprietary intellectual property is obsolete. A country whose legislators increasingly lock down intellectual property is obsolete. And as an aside, as a Canadian, I am tremendously proud that our courts have had the courage to rule against such lock-downs; I hope our Members of Parliament are listening and paying attention with McLuhan-like awareness.

Businesses that are willing to become integrally aware of what is happening right now will begin to create the "open source" licensing of their intellectual property, along the lines of a GNU General Public License style protocol or under Creative Commons. The businesses that do so will enable not only an explosive growth, but a sustainable growth in the economic infrastructure that will last for decades.

These will result in more choice to customers, the end of industrial age competition as we have known it, and the evolution of an economic infrastructure that is consistent with the 21st century, rather than being mired in the 19th century.



What haven't you noticed lately? We once thought that "knowledge is power" and that knowledge-powered institutions and enterprises were to be praised and emulated. But, of course, we've all noticed the knowledge-powered institutions and enterprises. It's old news; it has all happened in the past. What haven't you noticed that is happening right now? What you had not noticed before coming here this afternoon is that your knowledge-powered institution is obsolete. The new medium, happening now if we do it right, is the truly knowledge powered, "open source," economy. To accomplish this will take considerable courage on the part of business leaders and legislators. It will take integral awareness and perception. And, it will take one more little thing: It will take noticing.

*An unconventional, yet strategic thinker, **Mark Federman** has more than twenty-five years' experience in the high-technology industry as executive, manager and consultant, spanning disciplines including research and development, marketing, sales, operations and strategic leadership. Mark is currently a lecturer and the Chief Strategist at the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto, a visiting professor at the Fachhochschule in Kiel Germany, and guest lectures at Högskölan för Lärande och Kommunikation in Jönköping Sweden. His most recent corporate role was that of President of PersonaMedia, a small company whose focus is on the use of Voice as an object of rich business information, enabled by Internet technologies. He is the co-author, with Derrick de Kerckhove, of a new book, **McLuhan for Managers — New Tools for New Thinking.***

An internationally sought lecturer, speaker, facilitator and playshop leader, Mark coordinates the research of the McLuhan Fellows at the McLuhan Program and consults to businesses and government agencies as a strategy advisor, using McLuhan's thinking tools as an approach to gaining awareness, perception and insight into complex issues in an environment of continual change.

Mark Federman can be contacted by email at federman@sympatico.ca