

Transparency to come with digital age?

By Sarah Sobanski

While helping me move to Bancroft last weekend, my mother and I had the most blink-worthy conversation I've had in a long time. We were commuting up Hwy. 115 when she pointed at a plane-shaped shadow in the sky. It was disorienting. It was close enough that it couldn't have been larger than a shoebox ? we later assumed it was a drone. Next, my mother told me to slow down because the drone could be a speed radar.

I looked at my mother and gaped. I asked, "What century are we even living in that there are drones, let alone ones that catch you for speeding?"

Now, I'm not that old. I'm comparatively young, though my mother loves to sing Pursuit of Happiness's I'm an Adult Now at me more and more every day. I can, however, already use old-timer sayings.

Back in my day, or when I was a kid, we had flip cellphones, or better, we had cord phones that were fixed to the wall. When I was a kid we had box TVs.

Technology has progressed so quickly in my lifetime that major milestones are already forgotten. I was around for the invention of the Internet, which Generation Z will never know life without. I'll be able to tell my grandchildren I was born in a different century by date, a different age by technological standards.

I wonder how we got along before technological advancements, which are second nature today. I would never be on time if I didn't have a GPS on my phone ? that's just a fact.

The Government of Ontario recently announced it'll be seeking its first chief digital officer (CDO). The position was first mentioned in Ontario's 2016 budget. The CDO will be a senior level civil servant, a deputy minister ? yes, that means there is going to be a Minister Responsible for Digital Government. The province said the CDO will lead the Government of Ontario to become the most open, transparent and digitally connected government in Canada.

I like to think that as someone in the media I am on the up-and-up when it comes to technological advancements. It hasn't been that hard really, especially when there are people in the generations before me ? many that I know personally ? who don't know how to access email. With the government jumping on the bandwagon, however, I'm going to have to up my game.

Almost 90 per cent of people in Ontario use the Internet. We use it to shop, discover, define, connect and for a plethora of other things. It only makes sense that a more transparent government starts with becoming fluent in digital linguistics ? I just can't believe it.

I believe that the government is seeking new avenues to identify with the public. There is a beautiful resurgence of hope in our political climate. Watching Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and President Barack Obama shake hands and hug at the North American Leaders' summit last week was uplifting in a fleeting way ? but a CDO? What's the next headline? "Trudeau lands in Turkey via turbo jetpack"?

It isn't going to be just one person either. The CDO will be chair of the province's first digital government board.

The province is designating a digital ministry because of the continual upwards trend of public interaction with information technology. Only 13 per cent of people who contacted a government agency in 2014 did so by letter.

If you called a journalist a public servant in information technology, this could almost be a step to having a journalistic accountability board at the highest level of government. No? Well, think about it and get back to me ? I'll be over here dreaming. Among others, the government will also have a Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to investigate affordable education and the success of skilled workers, a Ministry of Economic Development and Growth to focus on creating jobs, a Ministry of Housing to look after increasing the availability of affordable housing, a Ministry of Research, Innovation and Science where there will be a new chief science officer, a Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration to look after cultural diversity and economic growth, a Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to build better partnerships with Indigenous peoples and a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide initiatives for our aging population.

I hoped it was all coming ? I'm still taking all these announcements with a grain of salt ? but suddenly Canada looks like a much brighter place. A place we had almost given up hoping for. I'm excited to watch this play out.

For the record, there are no such things as speed radar drones ? yet.