

Entertaining massive information flow

By Jeff Davidson

The onslaught of information and communication seems to be a contemporary phenomenon in terms of the volume and frequency. Every day, thousands of hours of video are posted on YouTube, Google and the other mega-search engines add untold numbers of references. The sheer number of new websites that are born each day stupefies the imagination, exceeding 100,000.

The time will come when, like on Star Trek, information becomes available on demand.

Soon, the sum total of information available online and on electronic devices globally will exceed one zettabyte: the number 1 followed by 21 zeros.

From many perspectives, this crush of information is wreaking havoc on the populace, however, corollaries from previous times do exist. In 1453, when the Gutenberg printing press, Europe's educated elite faced an explosion of information. Whereas books had previously been painstakingly printed and copied by hand, millions of words and thousands of volumes became available in the span of a few decades.

The printing press represented a technology that could change society and benefit all of humanity. However, intellectuals were soon swamped, as more information became available to any one individual than was ever presumed possible.

The need to house, preserve, categorize, and maintain the growing output of books came quickly. Public as well as private libraries sprang up. More authors followed: in huge numbers, scholars devoted their time and effort to transferring their thoughts and notes to texts that would encapsulate their brilliance forever. A wider and wider range of books became available. Larger and larger compilations on the same topic appeared. Encyclopedias came into being.

Gutenberg's invention impacted society in virtually every way, and thus became transformative. Within three decades, more than 20 major capitals throughout Europe boasted modern

printing presses. As the volume of books published increased, the cost of producing books dropped to less than a fifth of what it had been 30 years earlier.

Soon, volumes of new texts flooded the marketplace, often surpassing in popularity the age old wisdom of Greek and other scholars. Intellectuals began to complain about the flood of information. No less than Voltaire remarked, "The multitude of books is making us ignorant."

New books appeared which discussed how to best employ the knowledge within books. Books emerged on note-taking, on organizing, and on remembering what one had read. At first, no organized system for categorizing and cataloguing these volumes was employed. The typical bookstore would simply feature books – no shelf talkers, no category signage – on a shelf arranged (at best) alphabetically, using the author's last name or the title of the book itself. Out of this morass, sorting techniques and methods of classification emerged.

Early books routinely lacked tables of contents, indexes, and in many cases, separation by chapters. All of these conventions became standard fare, and readers came to appreciate and then expect them. Authors began including a preface, an introduction, and a foreword. Progressive publishers added part or sectional dividers between groups of chapters. All such innovations helped, but still, the volume of information was unprecedented.

Today, we are all impacted by the onslaught of information. Search engines offer us some reliable results, often buried. What we share with those of the Gutenberg era is the stress and anxiety over how much information we are subjected to, coupled with the inability to effectively identify, encapsulate, organize, and capitalize on information that could be vital to us.

The manner in which information is gathered today, mainly via the Internet, coupled with our over-exuberance in gathering it, leads

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Occupy Wall Street, a good idea gone horribly wrong

By Brian Bock

My first impression of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) was that this was a group of people who weren't even sure why they were protesting. However, after filtering out the "noise" I was able to discern a common thread; a frustration with government bailouts. Frustration with spending billions on private companies while executives are still being paid handsomely. I thought to myself, Right on! I and my fellow conservatives have been lamenting these bailouts and subsidies for years.

What I don't understand is why they are protesting the recipients rather than those who chose to give without adequate safeguards. Why some recipients are considered evil while others ignored? Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac come to mind. These agencies contributed heavily to the housing debacle that started the downward economic cycle, yet their executives are still in place and still receiving huge pay and bonus' with no comment from the OWS. That aside, many within OWS were making good points. The degree of overlap between OWS and Tea was astonishing.

Unfortunately, things have gone horribly wrong. The "occupations" have turned dangerous. Assaults, robberies, property destruction, and rapes are commonplace. Murders and suicides are becoming more and more common too.

All protests should have a clear goal in mind. I ask myself what is the goal? Is it to shut down commerce as was done in Oakland by closing the port? Is it to completely shut down all major banks? Shut down Wall Street? Close the businesses that happen to operate in the vicinity? All of these are extremely dangerous to the health of

the United States.

What happens if the big banks are forced out of business? What if the ports are shut down for an extended amount of time? What if all the small businesses surrounding the protest areas shut their doors? Who is hurt by all of this? The one percent or the 99 percent?

First hundreds of thousands of jobs will be lost directly, then hundreds of thousands more will be lost indirectly (suppliers etc.) Who is hurt the most — the CEO or the bank teller?

Stock prices would understandably drop dramatically. That would show the 1 percent, wouldn't it? What about the millions of Americans who count on pension funds that have invested in the stock market? Again, it's the average guy, the policeman, the union worker, the teacher being hurt. I get frustrated when I read articles by national and local journalists praising the movement while at the same time denigrating the Tea party. Compare all you want, but the facts are; all after all the Tea party protests, NOBODY was arrested. NO assaults, NO rapes, NO property damage, and even with all of the talk about gun-toting right-wingers there were no shootings. That can't be said about OWS.

Before anyone supports this movement any longer, please look at the results and consider the ramifications. Most of us agree that the bailouts were poorly handled by all involved, but these occupations are not the answer. Let's hit the "reset" button and start a peaceful debate. Too many innocent 99 percenters are being hurt.

Brian Bock is Chair of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners.

Local government viability

By Don Lein

Harrisburg, PA filed for bankruptcy last month, followed by Jefferson County, AL. On November 17, Mayor Dave Bing of Detroit indicated that Detroit would lay off 1,000 workers by early next year, which will result in \$12 million in savings. That represents about a quarter of what is needed to balance the budget. Mayor Bing is asking unions for concessions on pensions and work rules, otherwise

Detroit will go into default. How did these cities and counties get themselves into this financial state? Their situation occurred primarily as a result of collective bargaining at the local level and having to pay for an unmanageable, overreaching government.

We have seen instances of governments trying to limit collective bargaining and having to fight well-funded and aggressive unions. In Ohio, the attempt to limit collective bargaining was defeated at the polls, because unions wrongly characterized it as de-funding police and fire departments, whereas most voters indicated they favored proposals to require public workers to make greater contributions toward their benefits. In Ohio proponents of limiting collective bargaining pointed to the vast gap in state benefits versus local benefits and tried to get local benefits to be more in line with state benefits by limiting local collective bargaining. Local governments are simply no match in negotiating contracts with very wealthy unions, such as the teachers union. In Cleveland, as a case in point, teachers pay \$75 per month for family health coverage whereas state employees pay \$205, state employees have a maximum of \$3,000 per family for in-network coverage, while a teacher has no maximum. If we have more election results as we had in Ohio, many local governments will follow Harrisburg.

In addition to sweetheart deals on benefits the unions also insist upon work rules that make managing these employees an impossibility. "I've never seen anyone terminated for incompetence," a New York City official observed. Indeed to terminate a teacher in New York requires administrators to follow the steps outlined in six pages of flow charts. It is less expensive of time and effort to keep teachers on the payroll with full benefits, in a "rubber room" where they are isolated from school children and administrators until they retire. Even at retirement the taxpayer is subject to being ripped off. Seven Long Island Rail Road workers were recently indicted for disability fraud. Ninety percent of LIRR workers, including those with desk jobs, have retired with disability benefits, adding about \$36,000 to their annual pension and costing the taxpayers of New York \$300 million over the last decade. Eighty-two percent of senior California state troopers become "disabled" in their last year before retirement. Pension abuses such as "spiking" pensions with excessive overtime in the last year of employment are common.

In Morristown, NJ, a story was played out that epitomized the overreach of government and the additional costs that the community has to absorb both of the action itself, but even more incredulously they have to pay for the salaries and benefits for people who committed these absurdities. Morristown Community Soup Kitchen and Outreach Center has for the last 26 years provided Thanksgiving meals to approximately 300 people who are generally either homeless, mentally ill, old, or simply people down on their luck. It was a truly community project linking restaurants, corporate sponsors and community groups with volunteers from nearly three dozen churches. In this idyllic setting comes the Morristown Division of Health and classifies the soup kitchen a "retail" food establishment. That results in the cost of the process being increased by about \$150,000, largely because food prepared in homes is no longer allowed. One wonders if the Division of Health prohibits homemade cookies in their offices? Also prohibited are aprons brought from home. In the 26 years the Soup Kitchen has been providing Thanksgiving meals there has been no instance of food poisoning or other threat to health, yet, in one fell swoop the Division of Health has decimated a project that has benefited many and brought a community together. Why? The executive responsible for this decision would not return phone calls.

Alas, this is not an isolated situation. In 1995 when Hillary Clinton visited one of Mother Theresa's orphanages in India, she indicated that the establishment "would not have passed inspection in the U. S." It is another example of the perfect being the enemy of the good. In Morristown, as in New Delhi, life situations were bettered, but that is not enough for bureaucrats who wish to regulate even the good that man does. Having bureaucrats watch our every move is terribly expensive for taxpayers, but it is even more a damnation of our ethical code if we allow them to prohibit us from helping our fellow man.

Clearly, we have too much government and it is costing us too much. Morristown, NJ, is an excellent example of government overreach. Every local government should review what it offers and ask, in the first instance "Is it necessary?" and secondarily, if it is necessary, can/should it be contracted out to help mitigate the costs of benefits and retirement? Also, benefits for existing workers need to be scrutinized to determine if, in fact, the governmental entity can afford the benefit package. If it can't, then Dave Bing's approach of layoffs and negotiated cutbacks can be tried. If not, the entire package can be restructured under court direction by going bankrupt as has Harrisburg, Vallejo, CA, Jefferson County, with others coming in the future.

If you are wondering whether deficits are all that bad, consider these words by former Colorado Governor, Democrat Richard Lamm, which are very appropriate during this holiday season. "Christmas is a time when kids tell Santa what they want and adults pay for it. Deficits are when adults tell the government what they want and their kids pay for it."

Happy Holidays.

Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is involved in a number of civic associations.

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