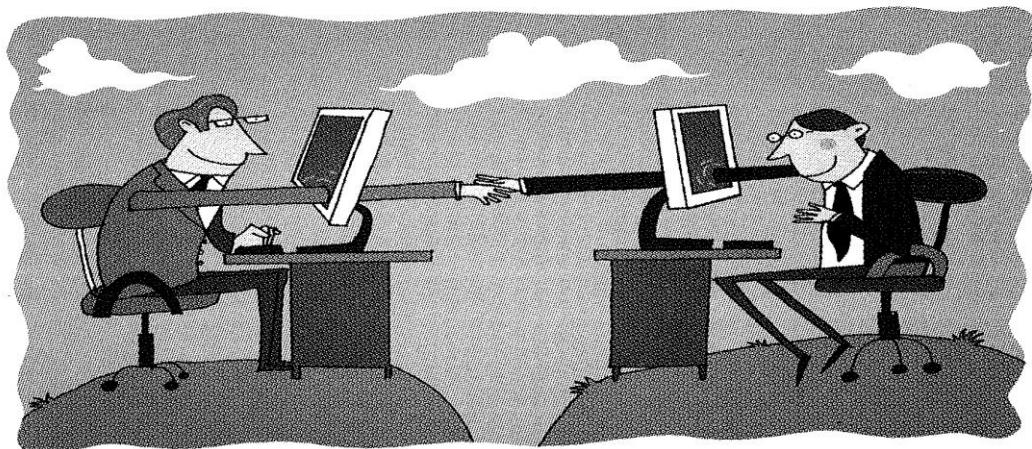


- 1 These days with inexpensive air travel, mobile phones, email and the Internet, teenagers see the world as a smaller place than it appeared to their grandparents. Of these innovations, the Internet appears to be the one with the most potential for global influence, and which will change lives the most.
- 2 For example, up until recently friendships developed over a lifetime but that has now changed. People often made friends locally at school and continued those friendships into adulthood, but many young people today find the majority of their friendships over the Internet. This is not restricted to teenagers. Paula Sen, who has just turned 30, says: 'I've met most of my best friends over the Internet, through common interest forums. I couldn't live without the Internet. It's my lifeline.'
- 3 The Internet has also greatly influenced how people buy and sell goods. International Internet shopping is now common, with people buying all sorts of goods, from sites such as Amazon, the most successful online retail site. The international auction site eBay allows millions of participants to buy from and sell to strangers, setting their own prices. But beware – there are as many unscrupulous salespeople online as on the high street.
- 4 One of the Internet's greatest success stories is Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia, which is compiled and updated by its users. It carries far more content than any other encyclopaedia and is a great starting point for research, but remember to double-check important facts as it does contain errors. If you don't have time to check your facts, consider purchasing a reliable online encyclopaedia such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The other major information resource on the Internet is Google, a search engine which finds and ranks web pages according to the number of links made to them.

5 Probably the biggest impact that the Internet has had is the way in which it has influenced social networking. The most frequently 'googled' word in the world recently was Bebo – the social networking site – followed by MySpace. People can meet new friends through sites like these, they can renew old acquaintances through sites like Friends Reunited and they can also play games with each other in virtual worlds such as Second Life. This Internet-based, three-dimensional virtual world is 'inhabited' by more than 6.6 million residents from around the world, and global companies such as Adidas and Toyota even have outlets there.



6 It's now much easier to share experiences with others too. Sites such as YouTube allow people to upload and share videos, with unlikely clips becoming huge hits and a number of figures becoming Internet phenomena. Many people remember watching 'sabre boy' wielding an imaginary light-sabre, and laughing out loud at his antics.

7 Much of the power of the Internet lies in the fact that people are developing new ways to be creative and innovative, combining ideas and skills without an organisation or hierarchy. No one is in overall control. Collective creativity and collaboration are the key ideas. But even more powerful than this is its power to solve crimes, help change the world through giving to charities on sites like justgiving.com or find missing individuals: one website for a missing child was visited by over 40 million people within days of its being set up.