

# *I Can't Believe They Are Still Printing Those Things!*

OPINION By Luke Cella

I arrived at my office and sitting there smack dab in the middle of my desk is a brand new Yellow Pages. I really don't know what to do with it; my kids don't need booster chairs anymore, I've no need for a doorstop, maybe I'll place it under my monitor to make it more ergonomically comfortable.

As I walk downstairs to recycle this thing, it make me wonder if the skill of alphabetizing will be lost with our kids? Did you ever notice the street sign for a park is a seesaw or, as we called them, a "teeter-totter?" When was the last time you saw one of those in a park? I digress, but my kids don't know what that sign means *now*, let alone when they'll start to drive in ten years.

It is hard to imagine the changes that we will see in the future, especially when it comes to communication.

There is no doubt technology is driving the way we communicate. I recently attended a Strategic Communications Committee meeting at GCSAA headquarters a few weeks ago. One of the challenges that GCSAA faces (as well as MAGCS) is making certain that the information they have gets to intended audience.

The committee listened to a talk by Dr. Max Utsler, an associate professor at the University of Kansas in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications. (Dr. Utsler often speaks at the Green Industry Show and I would recommend catching a talk or two of his.) The way we get our information has changed and it is really apparent with our children. Long after speech was invented, maybe 200,000 years ago, but prior to the printing press, someone may have stood in the town square and shouted

announcements. Sometimes he was shot (hence the line, Don't shoot me – I'm just the messenger) – Why do you think Mercury was so fast? It wasn't to get the message delivered; it was to get the hell out of there before he was killed.

Once people were able to afford their own books and later newspapers, they could read the information at their leisure. The radio was invented and eventually took off, same with the king of communications, the TV.

All of these formats and modes of communication have one thing in common – they all control the information sent to you. The providers dictate the time, the content and method of delivery. I know when the traffic will be announced on the radio and often I find myself waiting to hear it so I can flip the station to something I like on my way to and from work. Many of you know exactly when the extended forecast will be played on the nightly news and set your bedtime to it. Some look forward to the daily newspaper (although a quickly winnowing minority) and read it cover to cover.

There is nothing wrong with these methods of getting information. This is how most of us grew up, it was the world we knew and to a great extent, still follow.

The difference between those coming into the industry and us is the way they get their information. We are used to having it delivered to us. We wait patiently for it, sorting through mass marketing blitzes, recipes for eggplant Parmesan, and methods to getting rid of pet dandruff until the news segment we want to see finally is aired.

The up-and-comers don't do this. If they want to know the weather, they log on to a Web site and check it out at that moment. If they want to know a sports score, they don't tune into a radio station and wait for the sports segment, they set up an automatic text message alert on their phone that notifies them of changes each inning. They don't have newspapers delivered to them; they subscribe to RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds that are sent real-time and not printed six

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hours prior. These kids hunt out the information they desire and often have it at their fingertips. It is how they were brought up. They have no notion of our methods.

Some of us are transitioning into this realm of seeking out information. Why do you think TiVos or DVRs are so popular with those members of the older crowd who have them? (TiVo or a DVR is a method of digitally recording TV shows and is way easier than setting up a VCR to do it).

Those who use this method to record and play back their TV shows have gotten a glimpse of what it is like to get information on your terms, not the terms of the media providers. Ask someone in your generation who has one; they'll tell you it has changed their lives.

Some of us have gotten pretty good

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at navigating the Web. How many of you have a weather Web site bookmarked? By now, probably most have. But, how many of you don't think to look at your computer when you need a weather forecast? Maybe you still find yourself heading into the shop just before noon to hear what Skilling has to say about tomorrow or the ten minutes he will take to recap the weather you just lived. It is OK; it is the world you know.

Imagine not using the radio to figure out what the most popular song of the day is or even knowing that songs are played on the radio? (So much for the weekly Top 40 Countdown.) That is what is happening today – kids visit a Web site to see and hear and download songs that they like so they can hear the song when they want to hear it.

Has one of your kids ever asked you where you put the newspaper so they could see what movies are playing at the local cinema?

There is no doubt, methods of

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communicating will continue to change. The question that begs an answer is, "How will the information we seek change us?" One of my favorite places is the public library. Each shelf contains hundreds of places to go, and one really cool thing is they've arranged content by whether or not it is true. If I have grown up always seeking specific information, how will my mind broaden? How will I develop interests? How will I think of new things to invent, how will I

improve the world around me? Maybe my liberal arts background thinks the top ten delivered back by Google is too controlled and narrow.

There is no doubt the associations are in a state of flux with our communications. We want to make sure we are still reaching all of our members. MAGCS has taken the lead in going paperless, and I feel it is a good thing. One day, (I may not be around to see it), we may not print *On Course* and I've got to think that will be OK too. I do know something will take its place because we not only need to share information but we have to challenge our minds as well.

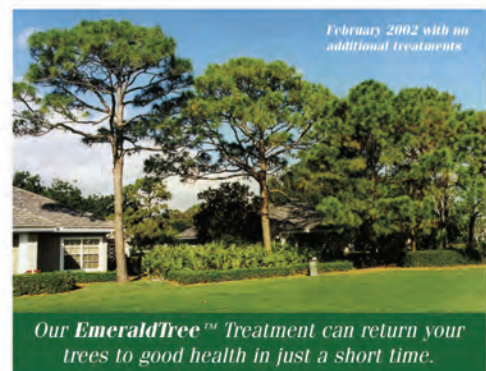
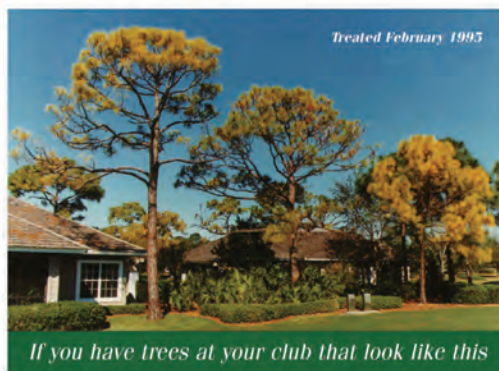
I've got a taste for some eggplant Parmesan and I really don't know why.

*EDITORS NOTE: Luke Cella is Executive Director of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents. This article was reprinted, with permission, from On Course, the association's magazine.*

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