

## The Techne Mentor: Pushing Digital Media Forward

Digital media is becoming more of a necessity and less of an option in today's time. Some theorists and analysts dismissed it as a trendy communication method with websites such as MySpace and the early stages of Facebook. Back then, the most we knew about digital media was that it was a quick way to communicate with our friends, family and associates. It also gave the user a sense of pride to obtain large numbers on their friend lists. There's much more to it now. Even at my job, Frito Lay, the company recently created a department specifically geared towards digital media. The manager of the Digital Media department there even displays his twitter handle on his email signature. As explained in *A Networked Self* (p.232), "Findings indicate that Twitter serves multiple purposes for practitioners, such as information sharing, networking, and establishing professional expertise." Frito Lay, like many other companies and people in general, sees the benefit of savvy digital media techniques to gain more business. With the explosion of Twitter, Instagram and YouTube over recent years, information is more accessible now more than ever. Mobile applications and even interactions with touch screen and 3D technology further complicate the space of digital media. With all of these new facets of digital media, someone has to know how to use it in order for it to continually evolve. The use of techne mentors is one of the most promising aspects of digital media, because they help to continually keep it thriving and relevant.

Digital media is only as innovative and advanced as the people who use it. I can remember getting my first cell phone right before I started my undergraduate degree at UTD. I was about 17 years old at the time and was later than some of my peers getting a cell phone. My 13 year old cousin received her first cell phone when she was 11. This is the new normal now and even in my relatively small age gap between her and me, it displays the sign of the times. People are learning digital media at faster speeds and therefore teaching the most recent findings to each other more quickly as well. *In Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* (p. 59, Horst, Herr-Stephenson and Robinson), a techne mentor is defined as role someone plays in aiding a person or group with adopting or supporting an aspect of technology use in a specific context. However, the role of the techne mentor is not intended to be a permanent one. For instance, one of my cousin's peers could have acted as a techne mentor to help her learn how to use her new phone. However, she could have also been one of the techne mentors within her peer group.

A techne mentor has no age requirement. Parents often find themselves learning about digital media through their children, who serve as their own techne mentors. This can be an awkward place for a parent to be in when they are trying to set guidelines for the children on digital media use. In the case of 12 year old Michelle Vargas, she is definitely the techne mentor of her household. Her mother Rose has the computer in the family living room, so that she can monitor Michelle's MySpace interactions. However, she needs Michelle to show her how to send emails to her 26 year old son in El Salvador. Rose credits everything that she knows how to do on the computer with Michelle's teachings (*Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out*, p.45). Over time, Rose will learn to do many of the tasks she needs

Michelle's help for on her own. Although some mobile apps and social media tools are pretty self-explanatory, there will always be a piece of digital media that someone needs help with.

I can definitely identify with Michelle's situation of helping her mom become more familiar with digital media. Although my Internet usage is no longer monitored, I still help out my parents with digital media at times. My dad recently set up a Facebook and Twitter page, which I helped him create. I explained the digital media language for each platform as well, which is also an important part of techne mentoring. The application itself has to be learned and the language definitely aids in using it properly. I told him what posts, status messages, likes and tags all meant for Facebook. For Twitter, I had to review a different language that is only specific to that particular platform. I explained how tweeting was similar to a Facebook status post, but how it is limited to only 140 characters and other users can be mentioned with the @ sign. Sites such as Twitter and Facebook thrive on the number of users it has and their interactions with each other. The more people that learn and use these sites only enhance their future capabilities and staying power.

Techne mentoring is not only used for teaching aspects of social media platforms. The concept can also be used in the workplace as well. One of my coworkers showed me how to use One Note in Outlook. Now I frequently use it to take notes from conference calls and move large file emails into categorized folders. However, I didn't use One Note as soon as I learned about it. I had no particular reason, but neglected to apply the knowledge I had learned about the tool until 3 months or so after I had learned. I quickly realized that the person that showed me how to use it was a very effective techne mentor. This is an important detail about techne mentoring that should not go without mention. Teaching someone how to use a platform or section of digital media does not mean that they will use it right away. Techne mentoring that is relayed effectively can be still relevant in the techne mentee's (if there is such a term) mind for days, weeks or even months to come.

With the onset of online bill pay, there are now incentives for those people who may be stuck in their ways to use digital media. I have a few accounts set up for automatic bill pay, which I created online. I wasn't a fan of electronic bill pay, because I thought, "What if someone hacks into my account online and steals my identity?" Although that's a very real possibility, it's also possible to happen regardless of digital media usage. Many companies are training their employees to be on the spot techne mentors. For instance, a Wells Fargo representative at the bank I frequent by apartment was the person who set me up for automatic online bill pay. Within a matter of minutes, I went from a skeptic to a believer to an informed user. The person that assisted me even threw in a personal story of how she even was reluctant to sign up for online bill pay, despite its perks. She could have just been using a great sales pitch on me, but her in depth knowledge of the tool made me a believer. I'm sure there is some kind of incentive for the employees to sign up users with programs such as online bill pay, but the reward is only half the battle. The person persuading the customer has to be savvy enough to convince the eager customer as well as the skeptical ones too. There has to be a buy in for the consumer or customer. This is why techne mentoring is so crucial, because it could make or break business models and digital media platforms.

No one wants to be left behind. This is another reason why techne mentoring is needed for the progression of digital media. Most people don't want to be the last person in their circle of friends or peers that lack the knowledge of how to effectively use digital media. In *A Networked Self*, the theory of virtual communities supports that, "people are more likely to adopt a new interactive medium when others they know have also adopted it. This implies that new users will become active, committed users of SNS only when they find a sizeable number of their existing contacts are already using it. (p.119)" There are so many people using SNS and digital media programs that whoever is not using them is truly the odd man (or woman) out. Think about the latest and greatest HDTV's that are available today. The person who has a thorough knowledge of digital media has a much better advantage of learning how to operate it than a person with little to no experience with digital media.

Digital media will only continue to get more innovative and consequently complicated to some respects for the end user. Although the technologies and specifics involved may change, there will always be a savvy techne mentor that stays ahead of the learning curve and passes their knowledge on. In the midst of the ongoing evolution of digital media, we must remember that the people who create it determine just how far it will go. While some may argue that a computer can be programmed to serve as an automated techne mentor, a person still has to input the information to make it work. Plus, the human to human interaction really fosters the lasting knowledge of the individual that is learning. Without techne mentors, digital media is at best at a standstill and not progressing in a forward direction.

## Works Cited

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