

Tech tinkers with daily routines

October 7 2009, By Etan Horowitz

High-school classmates from 30 years ago connect daily on Facebook. Cable customers report outages on Twitter. A father text messages his daughter to gently tell her it's time for her boyfriend to go home.

None of this was common just a few years ago, before computerlike phones and online social networks exploded on the scene. The technology has fundamentally changed our daily lives and the way many of us relate to one another.

Before Gavin Ford has had his morning coffee or even gotten out of bed, the restaurant owner reaches for his smart phone and reviews e-mails, the previous day's sales reports and comments his customers have submitted online.

"It used to be that from the time I woke up at 6 a.m. until the time I got to the office at about 9 a.m., I didn't know what was going on," said Ford, 55, of Winter Park, Fla., whose family owns Panera Bread franchises in Central Florida. "Now I don't have to wait."

The morning routine once consisted of walking to the curb for the paper, reading while sipping coffee and eating breakfast with the family. Now, for many families, it's a supercharged romp through e-mail, [social-networking](#) sites and online news sources. As a result, BlackBerrys, iPhones and laptops are becoming as common as orange juice on some breakfast tables.

Although some will bemoan the blurring of work and downtime, Ford

said he appreciates the head start on the day.

When Winter Park mom Marilyn Nelson was a college student, she was expected to call her parents every Sunday with updates about her life on campus.

In the seven weeks since her son, Kurt, left for his freshman year at Georgia Tech, they've spoken on the phone twice -- and both times, she made the call. But thanks to her son's frequent updates on Twitter and Facebook, she knows a lot more about his life than her parents ever knew about hers.

"Because there is an electronic footprint, I know that he is OK," said Nelson, 47. "I can find what he is interested in and what he cares about."

Nelson restricts most of her communication to private messages so as not to embarrass him in front of his Facebook friends. But every so often, her motherly instincts cause her to respond publicly.

Like the time her son posted that his shoes were soaked from walking up hills on campus in heavy rain. His mother chimed in: "Two words -- duck shoes!" Or when he wrote that he was falling asleep during calculus class because he already knew the material, mom said he should be happy to pad his grade-point average.

"I am generally OK with it," said Kurt, 18, who is happy to avoid "having to explain every detail of life over the phone to her."

The dating ritual used to go something like this: Guy meets girl. Guy asks girl for phone number. Guy calls girl to ask her out. Couple goes on date in which they discuss jobs, families and other getting-to-know-you topics. These days, those dating norms have been thrown out the window.

Melissa Clarady, 29, said she met a man at a dance club, who later asked her out through an instant message on Facebook. As the date approached, he asked for her phone number but then sent a text message instead of calling. During the date, the guy didn't ask many personal questions because he said he had already gleaned all of that from her Facebook profile.

Clarady said it felt creepy.

"You used to have to talk to somebody and get to know them," said Clarady of Lake Mary, Fla. "He already knew I danced, he already knew what school I went to and he already knew where I worked."

But the changes aren't all bad, she said.

"When I meet people, a lot of times I will give them my Facebook (profile information) instead of my phone number," Clarady said. "I use it as a screening method; it prevents someone from calling me in the middle of the night, and I can choose to ignore or delete them."

At restaurants, Orlando couple Andrea Swallows and Daniel Dennis often check [e-mail](#), post Twitter updates and surf the Web on their iPhones while waiting for their food to arrive.

They're used to judgmental onlookers. Once, while they were eating out in Winter Park, a woman leaned over and said, "Don't you guys want to talk to each other?"

But Swallows said the phones don't replace their dinner conversations -- they enhance them.

"I'll read some breaking news on my phone, like about the Yale student that was killed, and then we'll talk about it," said the 25-year-old sales

manager. "That will start the conversation, so we'll put the phones down and talk about it."

The couple also use Twitter on their phones to solicit restaurant recommendations and to ask their online friends what they should order. It's like having a panel of restaurant critics.

If they're happy with their meal, they'll snap a picture of their food and post it with a message thanking the person who suggested it.

"We've found a lot of great restaurants from people on Twitter," Swallows said.

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