I.C.T In Our Society

This report is about how ICT has affected us as a society. For example, for entertainment purposes like games consoles, communication purposes such as mobile phones, storage purposes such as storing music on a CD or for social purposes such as email.

E-mail

The first thing I will look at will be email. With email you can quickly talk to friends, work colleagues, basically anyone who has an email address. I have two email accounts, one at home provided by hotmail, which is useful because I can log-on to it anywhere via the Internet. I also have one at school provided by Solihull L.E.A, which I can only access at school; both have a unique log-on I.D and password.

With my personal account (hotmail) I can choose a unique login I.D and password when I register, providing it ends with @hotmail.com. With my school account I can only choose the password. As a student my school account is free and I get absolutely no junk mail thanks to the junk-mail filter and I can receive emails from anyone. The L.E.A also scans every email for anything suspicious such as files containing viruses; if one of these are found then the L.E.A will not let the email through.

Email is useful and easy and is an efficient way to contact my friends and relatives. If I want to get in touch with several people in one email I simply put a semi-colon in between each persons email address. If I want to get in touch with several people, email is one of the easiest ways to do so.

I can set up an address book which means I could email everyone in that address book at once, also by setting up an address book I don't have to remember everyone's email address and it helps me stop making mistakes. Workers in offices usually have email accounts open all day, which means if they receive an email the response time is very quick.

The problem with email is that if the inbox becomes full I couldn't receive any more emails until I had deleted some of my old ones. Pictures take up a lot of space and some pictures can be too big to send in the first place. Say for instance I had done a word document in history on Hitler and the Nazis, I may want to carry on with it at home but when I come to send it, I can't because I have too many pictures on there that take up space. Also if someone doesn't have broadband than it could take a long time to attach a document or presentation to an email and even with broadband it could take a long time depending on the size of the file.

A good thing about most email accounts is that they are free but then I get a lot of adverts and pop-ups.

If email companies are going to give people free email then they need to get the money from somewhere to make sure they can afford the payment of the site, this is where the adverts and pop-ups come in, other companies pay

companies such as ‘hotmail’ to put their adverts and pop-ups on their websites hence ‘hotmail’ can pay for the upkeep of the site.

I can set up a filter on my email account so that I only receive emails from people in my address book. The problem is though that before I can receive emails from someone I need to add them to my address book and if someone changes their email I need to edit my address book.

The alternatives to email are fax, which can be quick but can cost a lot of money, or text that is quick so long as the other person has their phone on; you also need signal and credit, which can be a problem. Both can be useful if email is not available, but when compared to the quickness and the fact that email is basically free, email is the best thing to use.

To conclude, email is useful to communicate with people no matter where they are in the world mostly free of cost, which means it can be better than a mobile phone or fax but due to the time difference between countries, there is no guarantee that they will receive the email in the time you need them to see it.

Entertainment

The next thing I will look at will be the entertainment side of ICT and for this I will look at games consoles. There is a lot of competition at the moment between the PS2 made by Sony, the Gamecube made by Nintendo and the Xbox made by Microsoft.

People use games consoles for 3 main purposes; the first is single player use where the player simply plays the game on their own trying to complete the game. The second is multiplayer use where two or more people can play on one console and either try to complete the game cooperatively or go against each other in different game types. The third is online play, which has only recently taken off since broadband became so popular. At the moment there is no prospect for online play on the Gamecube but Xbox and PS2 have successful online play. Players who want to play online need broadband to play because dial-up can’t handle the speed that is required. The Xbox online play is called Xbox Live and players make an account for £40 a year and can make a list of friends and whenever their friends are online they can join them and play with them. The problem is that if two friends want to play together they both need the same game and both need to be online. Also, if broadband is not available then people can’t play online.

I use an Xbox and play Xbox Live quite often. I have experienced problems though, for example my broadband router had broken and I couldn’t go on Xbox Live until I got it fixed, also the Xbox Live service had not responded which again meant that I couldn’t use the service. The other problem is that paedophiles are able to use the service so you never know if the person you are talking to is being genuine or not.

People also use games consoles for watching DVD’s but this has only become available in the newer consoles. With the Xbox you can also put a CD into the Xbox and save it to the integrated hard disk and can then play the CD’s

while your playing a game. Again this is technology that has only recently been introduced.

Another type of entertainment is digital TV. Originally TV and radio used analogue signals but over the past few years more and more digital radios and digital TV's have become available. A digital signal is basically a TV or radio signal that is computerised and has to be decoded at the receiving end in order to watch digital TV or listen to virtually crystal clear music on a radio.

Digital television (DTV) allows you to receive digital transmissions from different TV stations that have installed digital transmitters and record their programmes using equipment that can handle digital signals. With DTV you can enjoy excellent quality pictures and clear sound. But all good things come at a price and in order to watch Digital TV you must buy either a digital TV adaptor for an existing TV, which will cost about £100, or you can buy a new integrated DTV television set known as a iDTV for about £500.

I use Digital TV because I have Sky Digital. It is a good quality picture and good sound and also doesn't cost too much at approx £20 a month. I have a digibox, which is basically a small box on top of or underneath the TV and the signal comes through a Sky dish on the side of my house. The signal is then transferred to the digibox and I can watch the channel I want on my TV. There are a lot of channels on Sky and I only have a few of them. There are also movie channels which show movies 24/7 on about 12 different channels, and sport channel which shows sport 24/7 on about 15 different channels, but to have all these channels can cost over £50 a month. The disadvantage comes when there is bad weather. In heavy rain the signal often gets interrupted which means that either no signal is received or a very poor signal is received. As in a thunderstorm, the signal gets interrupted and no signal can be received. Other problems can be if the station I am receiving the picture from is experiencing technical problems no signal can be received. Most of the time though the quality is good and there is no problem. A revolutionary new technology that Sky has introduced is called Sky plus. With this you get a new digibox and Sky plus allows you to pause live TV, record shows and watch them later without the use of a VCR. You can even rewind live TV if you want to watch something again, such as a good goal in a football match. If you do stop or rewind then a little counter comes up on screen that tells you how far behind the live TV you are, then by simply pressing play on the remote control you can carry on watching from where you paused it or you can just go back to the live TV by pressing the sky button. This is technology that has only recently been introduced and costs an extra £10 on top of whatever sky package you already have.

A sky plus remote control.

Storage Media

There are a lot of different types of Storage Media. Originally data was stored on floppy disks but space was limited and the disks were quite large. Consequently there soon became a need for more and more space to store things on. Floppy disks could only hold 1.4mb of data but then zip drives became available which could hold different amounts of data, the maximum of which was 250mb. The disadvantage of this was that you couldn't put the disk straight into your computer. You had to buy a zip drive which either connected to the computer through USB or you could plug it straight into the computer. This was only a short- term solution and demand came for more and more space. The answer was compact disks, known as CD's for short. Originally designed to hold music, CD's could hold up to 700mb of data, an ideal source for storing data.

Zip drive

Nowadays computers are fitted with CD-Rewriters (CD-RW), which can store music on a CD, make a copy of a CD, or just store es.here are currently two types of disks available they are:

CD-Record (CD-R) – this can only have files or music stored on it once and then you can't add or take anything off the CD.

CD-Rewritable (CD-RW) – this can have music or files stored on it as many times as you want. If you add something and feel you want to add more, you can easily do this.

You can now get a DVD type disk. These can hold much more data than normal CD's but they do cost more and will not work on some older computers.

I usually use CD-R to store music because CD-RW does not work on some CD players, which can be a problem. If I want to store data on a CD however I usually use a CD-RW as most computers can read these and I can always add more data at a later stage.

Businesses use CD-RW on their computers because if they have data that they want everyone in the office to have, then they can simply put the data on a CD and make numerous copies of it. They can then give everyone in the office a copy of the CD.

At school we use CD-RW. For example, in the ICT course, the school wanted us each to have two CD's. They had the two CD's they wanted and then copied them and gave everyone doing the ICT course a copy to take home. The CD's had useful software and information on that I will use while doing the ICT course.

The obvious disadvantage to storing data or music on CD's is that if the CD becomes full then no more data can be put onto the CD. If you want to put a PowerPoint presentation and a word document on a CD then the presentation may take up a lot, maybe even all, the space. This will depend on the content and how many pictures it has on it. If the presentation does take up all the space then there won't be enough room for the word document and that would mean

you would have to use another CD. That would be an inconvenient because you would have to carry two CD's around.

The alternative to CD's is email but the amount of data that can be sent by email can be limited. Also the person who needs the information may not have access to a computer. Another alternative is to print all the information on paper and post it to the person who needs it.

Communication

Mobile phones are everywhere these days and virtually everyone has got one. Mobile phones used to be much larger than they are now and were a big inconvenience to carry around, as they couldn't just fit into your pocket like the mobile phones of today. Only wealthy businessmen owned them, as they were expensive to both use and buy. As with all things, over time they got smaller and smaller and now they can be very small and more and more people have them. They are even regarded as a necessity to young people. People don't just use mobile phones for calling other people though. Texting has become a very popular way to communicate, especially amongst the younger generation. There are two main types of message;

Short Message Service (SMS) – this is the most common use of texting and one of the most useful. A message, just like an email, of up to 150 characters can be sent to one or more people at once for an average of 10p per message. Due to the small amount of characters a texting 'language' has developed to reduce space and therefore enable you to say more in a message. An example of this language would be 'you' has been shortened to just 'u'. They both sound the same but one takes up fewer characters than the other. Hundreds of thousands of these messages are sent every day from mobile to mobile and providing signal is good and both people have there mobile phones on, a text message can be sent from here to Australia in an amazing 6 seconds. New services have become available using text messages. For example phone companies such as Vodafone allow mobile phone users to subscribe to a service where football or cricket scores can be sent to the subscribers phone as soon as they happen.

Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) – Another recent development, MMS is an advanced form of SMS. Instead of just sending a message, new mobile phones will allow you to send photos, or you could send ringtones, or a pre-recorded voice message. These new phones are a little heavier then old mobile phones, but they are more sophisticated. For instance, if you go on holiday, instead of sending a postcard to your friends and family you could just take a picture using the inbuilt camera and send it using an MMS message. You can even add some writing to it.

I have a new mobile phone with a digital camera; I can take good quality pictures and then send them to my friends. I also use a mobile phone to text my friends but to do this I need a good signal and sufficient credit.

Businesses use mobile phones, especially people that travel around a lot and are not based in one location all the time. Salesmen would find it hard to

manage without mobile phones, as they need to be able to keep in touch with their customers, and with one another, at all times.

One major disadvantage of mobile phones is that they are thought to emit radioactivity. Although this has not been proven there are many people that believe that radio masts and mobile phones are a health problem to them and there are strict planning laws regarding the positioning of radio masts.