



The internet: the best kind of social distancing.

The Net versus the Virus

The pestilence that has upended our world will be remembered long after its final victims draw their last gasp. Though **warning signs** flashed for years, the plague that abruptly sidelined 2020 still hit America with the brutal psychic shock of **9/11** and **Pearl Harbor**.

As in both those tragedies, the federal government was **badly unprepared**, fumbling vital groundwork. Yet across the board, the people's reaction to the catastrophe has been as big-hearted as before. This crisis is like war, but not a minor one either. Society is instinctively reacting to **Covid-19** much as it did to the existential threats to our survival in both world wars.

Overnight, urgent **new priorities** trump all others. All playtime events are immediately **cancelled** for the duration. Authorities race to **marshal resources** and personnel, pleading against hoarders and profiteers. Third-year medical students **graduate early** to join the fight. Retirees and volunteers are **enlisted**, too.

Unused spaces are seized for new uses for the indefinite future. **Carmakers** retool to make desperately needed equipment. **Labs** stay lit 24/7 seeking solutions.

Common folk add their own efforts to the cause. They're not **wrapping bandages** or running **scrap drives** this time around, but **making masks** and protective gear for first responders. Others risk their own lives to **help neighbors**, while a few seek to **profit** off the fear.

It's war, but one where we find ourselves fighting an **alien invader**. Sure, it's a virus from Earth, not bug-eyed monsters from beyond. But just like in some cheesy sci-fi matinee, the entire planet must unite for the survival of the species against an utterly ruthless, implacable foe. No one is exempt and all are in peril. We're just lucky that this is not a zombie apocalypse.

A Note from the President of SWCP

Here at SWCP we have successfully converted to about 90% remote workers. We still have a couple of people working in the office/datacenter daily to do things that can't be done from home (like handling incoming mail and replacing the odd disk drive).

We've been keeping busy helping customers upgrade to faster DSL or fixed Wireless connections to help with working from home, installing VPN servers to let people access office resources from the couch, and automated backup services which keep on going even when there's nobody in the office to change out tapes.

It looks like these stay-at-home orders are likely to go on a bit longer than we all first thought. But hopefully by the time this message goes live we will see the desired flattening of the curve. Hang in there, but not too closely, and we'll get through this together.

Mark Costlow

President, Southwest Cyberport

Popular culture (as well as **Bill Gates**) realized this was coming, and convinced governors like **Andrew Cuomo** of New York, **Gavin Newsom** of California, and our own **Michelle Lujan Grisham** to take effective actions early in the catastrophe.

The tool needed is as harsh as it is ancient. But **quarantine** has been effective throughout history even when medical science was not. Keeping the infected isolated works. **Death rates** from various cities during the **Spanish Flu** of 1918 prove it.

Anyway, the doctors have nothing else. **Social distancing, self-quarantine, and isolation** have become our new watchwords. Ironically, the country has come together in the effort of staying apart.

As in all historical plagues, unique social causes made this one possible. **Urbanization** and **globalization** get some blame, but the ease of

modern transportation allowed the coronavirus to jet around the globe, faster and further than any disease ever has before.

The world that Covid-19 invaded was smugly complacent, relying on supply chains of essentials from overseas that are **easily disrupted**. Modern delivery systems over the last few decades have allowed managers to reduce warehouse inventories to the **bare minimum**, too. This is why authorities must scramble desperately for vital medical supplies.

Everything from medical science to the Cold War has helped more humans **grow old** than ever before – with more than 16% (49 million) over 65 in the US. While very young, old, ill, and weak people have always been among pestilence’s favored prey, any groups in confined spaces can provide a deadly harvest for the coronavirus, more each day.

The internet now more than ever

We are, however, extremely fortunate in one respect: we have the **internet**. Made to survive an atomic war, the net has **shown its worth** in man-made and natural disasters, helping to locate people and organize relief efforts after 9/11, the tsunamis in Indonesia and Japan, and everything else .

This disaster is different, however, as pestilence kills leaving infrastructure untouched. At least connecting people is not a big concern. At this precise moment in history, the internet is stable, mature, and widely accessible at home. The technology is **just enough** to bear the **additional burdens** it must shoulder in this calamity.

In fact, the net makes isolation practical by allowing us to arrange our lives online, not to mention much of our shopping. Even **video streaming** appeared at just the right time.

Working from home was already trending, so the web was ready. With cameras and microphones everywhere on laptops and webcams, video calls and conferencing are quickly becoming the new normal. And for millions stuck inside, lonely, bored, wanting to help or inspire, social media has become a daily worldwide DIY show-and-tell extravaganza.

Without the net, the need for face-to-face meetings would create many more casualties, and we would know much less about what’s going on, too. The web has been vital in **spreading** the very latest information and limiting **misinformation**. And one of the most important functions of the net right now is to **track** the coronavirus to get the **statistical data** necessary to fight it.

The daily body counts featured in the news are only made possible by constant reporting over the

net. **Big Data** and **artificial intelligence** are busily crunching those numbers to analyze every aspect of the infection as well as the effects of human behavior on its spread.

State officials already use cell phone **location data** to track the effectiveness of distancing measures in NM. Internet-connected **thermometers** are being used to alert officials to new infection hotspots. Much effort centers on detecting and tracking infections, necessary to corral such a crazy-contagious agent, but also tricky, too.

One **proposal** from Oxford uses cell phone data with an app that caches contacts with nearby phones. If the user tests positive, all those phones will be automatically alerted. The combination of both mass and individual tracking needed to achieve this may well complicate surveillance issues later.

Pandemics always change society. How much depends on severity and duration, of course, but new stresses inevitably emerge. After the **Black Death**, peasants had more freedom and artisans could charge more, yet corruption flourished because so many of the best clergy had died tending the sick. Centuries of struggle were the result.

After Covid-19, the internet will be even more important and fought over than it is now. The net has proved to be essential; now it will become central. Access to the net may become a **human right**.

People rush back to **normalcy** as soon as they can. But useful practices adopted during the pandemic will remain – like being able to work from anywhere and who knows what else.

Just don’t expect this brave new world too soon. The ancient Romans who lived through the **Plague of Justinian** left us a bit of advice: “Flee far, stay long, come back slowly.” Be patient. We are still in the early days of this crisis. April will be a long month.

Our job for now, young and old, is simply to stay hunkered in the bunker. SWCP will be here to help keep you connected to the world beyond your walls.



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