

Learn how the internet works: How a technophobe went from digital dinosaur to world wide whizz



If someone says 'blog' do you say 'huh?'. Here's where to go if you've had enough of not keeping up

An amusing account by Caroline Phillips of how she faced up to her technophobia and joined the online world with two crash courses in social media, blogging, photography and more

16 July 2015 by Caroline Phillips

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I'm a technological dinosaur. In my world, tweeting involves sparrows; a mouse mat is only important when there's a marsupial involved; and icons are of little significance unless they're slebs granting me exclusive interviews about their upcoming transgender ops.

I've mastered ATMs – but only because they spew out cash. And I can surf the internet in the interests of research. The rest – social media and the like – seems a time-wasting irrelevance to me. I've done my first 55 years without it, so why do I need it now?

So when High50 threw down the gauntlet for me to get to grips with what's going on in the online world, I was less than hopeful.

High50: "We want you to reinvent yourself and become a technological wizard [Would they, I thought, settle for a technological Mud-Blood?], and we know you're starting from zero..."

Me: "Minus 35 more like it."

High50: "...We want you to become a demon blogger. Learn how to build your online presence. Master social media: tweeting, Instagram, digital photography."

I also thought they said something about "embrace it and take a selfie", which I inferred was a photo of me, and I wondered which top photographer they'd commissioned to take it. But I can't be sure because I'd already broken out in hives.

Symptoms of technophobia

I discovered this, oh the irony, via a Google search. If a person exhibits the following symptoms in response to the use of technology, they may be technophobic:

- Feelings of dread or panic (Tricky, in my case, to distinguish from my usual daily quota of dread and panic.)
- Rapid heartbeat (could also be the walk upstairs to the computer)
- Shortness of breath (see above)
- Trembling (that second latte?)
- Extreme avoidance (oh look, there's a flash sale on Outnet!)

I am a technophobe. (The first step towards recovery is admitting you have a problem.) Like many phobias, according to [All About Counselling](#), treatment of the disorder is best left to a mental health practitioner.

Technophobia is in my DNA. As a kid, my mother told me that sitting too close to the television would make my eyes go square. Now, without the help of a mental health professional, it's time to face my fears.

Women over 50 on Facebook

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DATING OVER 50

women over 50 on facebook

Twitter has had a 79 per cent increase in use by the 55-64 age bracket since 2012. And 59 per cent of Twitter users are female.

Tech-friendly types tell me that women over 50 are more likely than men of the same age to use Facebook (strange, when by this age, we're far less comfortable looking in the mirror at our actual faces).

Senior citizens – yes, I'll soon be one – are the fastest growing demographic on Facebook. (Nice to know my demographic's growing as fast as my spine is compacting.) Clearly I have to jump aboard the wave of silver surfing and embrace social media, or drown as a luddite in the antediluvian sea (on which, I hear, Saga offers a wide range of cruises).

A course in extreme tweeting

I arrive at Top Left Design in London's Soho for a three-hour session on Extreme Tweeting, something my kids tell me I'm quite adept at after a serving of Jerusalem artichoke. I'm welcomed by the ebullient founder and social media trainer, Keren Lerner.



Social media expert Keren Lerner will have you juggling platforms like a pro

I explain how much I loathe technology. Tell her that it'll be like trying to explain quantum theory to an orang-utan. And reveal that we've fitted our kids with lampshade collars, like the ones vets put on dogs, to stop them checking their phones every two seconds (the kids, not the dogs).

I also explain that, in my world, deleting cookies is something I do every summer two weeks before I know I have to fit into my bikini, and cloud storage is off the agenda due to a recent shortage of silver-linings. But Keren just smiles knowingly and soon proves that she could get a dinosaur like me as comfortable with a laptop as a Diplodocus with a tasty tree-top.

The five stages of Twitter use

Under her tutelage, I learn oh so much (including Facebook, LinkedIn, blogging and Pinterest). I discover that there are five stages of Twitter use: denial, curiosity, aha, obsession and part of life. I'm at the denial stage, which is, after all, my default browser setting.

I get that Twitter forms the background to news and cultural media. I also twig that it's for reaching out to people I don't know (rather than simply disseminating my own tosh, as I had thought).

I understand that it's a brilliant marketing tool. That it's like – oxymoron alert – a fun cocktail party. That it doesn't have to take long; after all, how much time can 140 characters take? (In Pirandello's case, forever.)

I learn about things like, appropriately enough, Buffer, a scheduling tool, so I can send Tweets even when I'm not there. (Hmm, maybe I can cook dinner without even being in the kitchen.)

I learn about Bitty, the tool for truncating links. How, I wonder, have I lived so long with my links so untruncated?

I learn that I can be a 'lurker' just reading other people's messages (something for which my teenage daughters already think I have a huge facility). I could go on forever, or until my battery expires. But my best bit of advice? Just attend one of Keren's excellent workshops.



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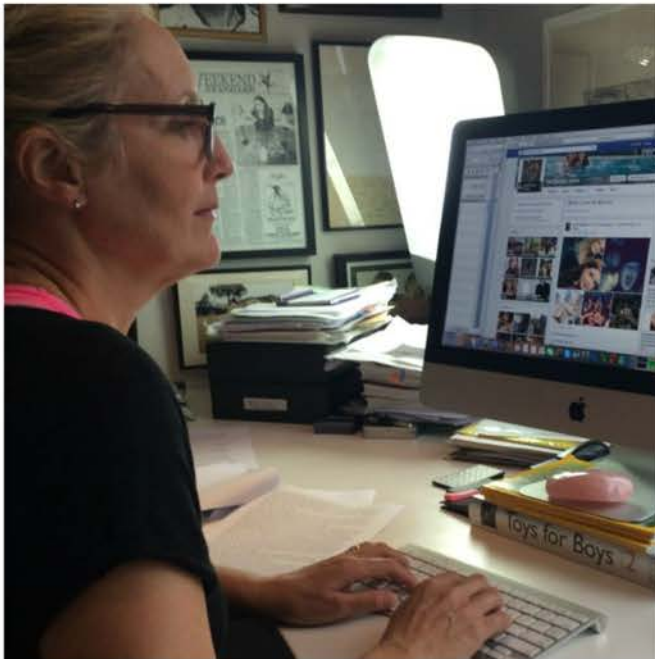
Panning, freezing, shutter speeds: It's no longer gobbledegook after Caroline's LSP course. Photo by Alison Adcock

A crash course in digital photography

Afterwards I go on a weekend course at the [London School of Photography](#), to learn about digital photography. Soon I'm conversant with metering modes, shutter speeds and full frame cameras. Apertures and depths of field. How to freeze movements and expressions. How to catch motion. And how to pan.

We even do night photography. I do homework on P mode (semi automatic) to save doing manual and getting Rothko-style black-on-black. And do you know about raw files? Full of vitamin B, apparently.

After these two courses, I find myself in my free time wandering around taking photos like a Japanese tourist straight off the coach.



Caroline explores a whole new world of blogging, tweeting, gramming and posting

The online world: I never knew there was so much in it!

I also trawl, avidly, through the blogosphere, while seasons pass by. 'Scarlett Curtis: cooking, crafting, living, reading, coping' is a particular favourite; where else can I find touching and hilarious writing on depression *and* cupcakes?

I also find myself hunting out vloggers. Among those YouTube videos celebrating crashing Lamborghinis and cats on skateboards are the small-screen stars of tomorrow being minted on social media.

Online make-up tutorials by Lisa Eldridge, who teaches how to do those fiendishly difficult smoky eyes, are the tops. Of course, by the time you read this these will all be hopelessly outdated memes.

I no longer think that Search Engine Optimisation is something controlled by the Fat Controller off Thomas the Tank Engine. I love that Twitter is great for reaching out to people I don't know. That Margaret Atwood, Alexander McCall Smith and Alain de Botton are Twitter fanatics.

I've done Instagram. I've blogged for the Huffington Post. And I am setting up my own

I've done Instagram. I've blogged for the Huffington Post. And I'm setting up my own blogspot. (Turns out WordPress isn't something found in Travelodge wardrobes just behind the trouserpress).

I won't be doing product placement on my blog because it threatens authenticity. So, unless they're prepared to treble my usual fee, I won't be saying try Micheline Arcier aromatherapy bath oils, they're the best.

Even though I hate crowds, I'm going to become a crowdfunded people's champion. I've become fully conversant with social media. There's just one thing. Tumblr. Let's not go there. Or if we must, can we at least put the missing bloody 'e' back in?! Sorry, I'm a bit of a Sticklr.

Follow [@JournoCaroline](#) or read [Caroline's blog](#)

Top Left Design's one-to-one or group [training in social media](#) is £350 for two hours

London School of Photography's [digital photography for total beginners](#) is £295 (currently 250) for a weekend or four evenings

Sunset photo by [LSP Newsletter #26 winner Alison Adcock](#)



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