

Face Off

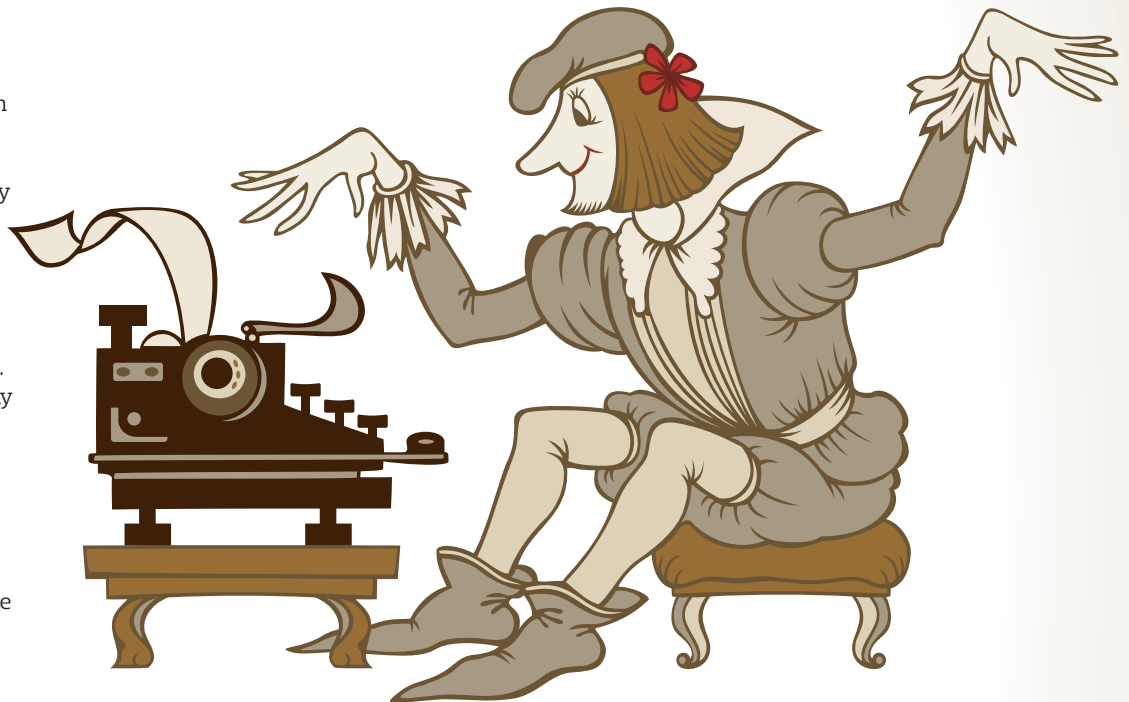
The best way to avoid a happy slapping is to ignore Facebook altogether, says **Kevin Harcombe**, clinging to his not-so-smart phone...

Electronic communication between schools can be an immense source of information, support, and intellectual exchange. Why do my emails, then, seldom rise above 'For sale: 13 whiteboards'?

Other emails seek or offer intelligence: tips on an Ofsted inspector or news of stranger danger (virtually the same thing). These are so-called global or 'reply to all' emails which occasionally spread like virtual wildfire. Today all 450 county heads seem to be emailing about scams. One head warned of tradesmen turning up with 300 square metres of carpet "left over from a hotel job" that the school could have "at cost plus a grand for fitting". Yet another flagged up rogue tarmac layers and an 'education consultant' offering Indian head massage to Y6 pupils, to improve their chances of getting Level 5 in writing. Actually, that might be worth a try.

Friday afternoon is clearly a slack time for some as the bloody emails kept pouring in. Not wanting to feel left out, I emailed to warn about the guy from the Far East who called in offering to swap our old school lamps for shiny new ones, and warned never to exchange the school cow for some magic beans because the resultant beanstalk would be a nightmare to risk assess.

Having pressed 'send' I spent a moment musing - it was either that or complete the interminable DfE survey sitting in mute accusation on my computer monitor (or telescreen as I prefer to think of it in my Orwellian 1984 moments). Face-to-face human communication is fascinating: the happy, gurgling grin of your baby, the cheery "Hello, daddy!" of your toddler, the surly grunt of a slouching teenage offspring when



you innocently, but stupidly, enquire whether they really needed another tattoo.

But now we have an unprecedented range of electronic communication - Facebook, e-mail, mobile telephony - all have added immeasurably to our lives and in so many unexpected ways. My PA is particularly taken with the phones she 'minds' for pupils during the school day - especially when an expletive-filled Eminem ringtone goes off in her drawer when she's greeting the vicar.

Not so long ago telecommunication was accomplished on foot - Pheidippides running a marathon to announce the Greek victory at Snicker, or some such. Now people can organise riots by Blackberry. Civilisation is certainly moving on thanks to messrs. Jobs, Gates, Zuckerberg, et al.

Headteachers have taken full advantage of new technology. At meetings, I notice most of my peers have iPhones (apart from secondary heads who have

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iPads) whilst I still have my trusty text-and-talk device, which is not quite a brick, but which my more tech savvy colleagues look on piteously, as though I were clutching two tin cans joined by a piece of taut string

Musing over, I accidentally-on-purpose press 'delete' on the DfE survey, and flee the virtual world to see some real people, children and parents, as they leave at the end of the day. One parent

greeted me cheerily and noted with approval how there was never a crowd of mums gossiping and moaning at the school gate anymore. "Not since I electrified the gate," I joshed.

"Course, if they want to slag off the teachers they do it on Facebook now, don't they? You can get an app for it on your iPhone," she offered sagely. "Haven't got one," I returned. "You should, you're probably on it."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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