



Staying connected

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How does a technology geek handle deprivation of cell phone service and Internet connectivity? Not well if last week's National Genealogical Society (NGS) conference in Raleigh is any indication.

The convention center is brand new, opened in 2008. You'd think that it would be state-of-the-art, right? It was, for the people who weren't confined in the exhibit hall. The vendors were relegated to a basement location, or at least a below-ground location where cell signals dare not travel. As a consequence, most people were unable to use their cell phones. In fact, it seemed that only those with Verizon service could reliably connect. Strange. Brand new facility; only Verizon works in exhibit hall (I think there was one other service that had limited connectivity). Didn't any of the convention center designers realize this would be a problem? Surely genealogists aren't the only ones who have experienced the lack of communication.

The consequence of lack of connectivity to my business was that I was not able to use my credit card processor, which uses a cell phone connection to process the charges. Luckily I brought along my manual credit card imprinter as a backup. I am also able to process credit cards through a Web site, but we had very limited and intermittent Internet connections. At conferences I usually rely on the free, generous Internet access provided by Dick Eastman of [Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter](#). But even Dick experienced [problems with his Verizon provider at this conference](#) because of the location of the convention center.

As soon as you left the exhibit hall, you were able to receive cell signals and use free wireless Internet service provided by the Raleigh Convention Center. So if they can provide that on the main floor, why can't they provide it in the exhibit areas? Can't they boost the signal or find some workaround?

My niece and I sat at our booth for four days feeling incommunicado. She is a twenty-something technophile who spends many waking moments texting her favorite people. I usually stay in close touch with my husband when on the road, but was only able to connect with him in the evenings (I know, what did we do just ten to fifteen years ago without this connectivity?). We were able to use that Internet connection pretty regularly on the first and second days, but the third and last days of the conference we actually had to sit and talk to each other (or our customers)! This is the same niece who is a Facebook buddy and sat next to me on the couch last summer and sent me a "Flair"

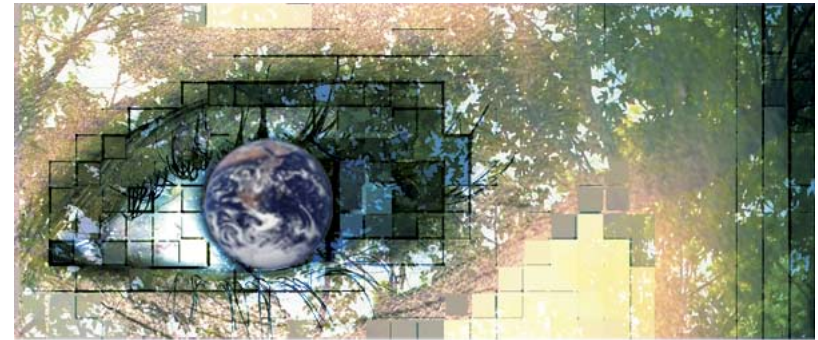
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button that said “I sent you this flair while we were in the same room.” We got a huge giggle out of that button. Perhaps we have technology issues?

So what’s the moral of this story? I’m not sure. As soon as we left the conference, both my niece and I returned to our cell phones and our connectedness, and we logged on to Facebook and Gmail accounts when we were done traveling. The reality for us is that we rely heavily on being able to instantly communicate with those important to us. When that ability is taken away, we stumble and stutter and don’t feel complete until we are connected again. Perhaps we need some form of counseling. Is there a free Web site for that? **DG**



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