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Old, Poor Face Digital Divide

I just returned from Appalachia, in a small town just outside of Cincinnati. I spent the better part of my life there, the formative years from five until I was 22, and left for greener pastures down in Austin, Texas....

By Brad King

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I just returned from Appalachia, in a small town just outside of Cincinnati. I spent the better part of my life there, the formative years from five until I was 22, and left for greener pastures down in Austin, Texas.

I get back home several times a year to see my friends and family, but it's difficult to do – especially with my job – for 2 reasons: 1) I don't know anyone with high-speed access (and only a handful with dial-up access), and there are decidedly few wireless hubs near my home; and 2) cell phone access there is spotty at best, which is troubling since I have no reliable way to access my email.

So that's on my mind this morning, and apparently, I'm not alone. The BBC has a piece on the growing digital divide between the technologically savvy and those who aren't (particularly the poor and the old).

I've spent the last 7 years writing about technology, and working in new media, primarily on the three coasts (California, Texas, and Massachusetts) – and in each stop, I've tried, unconvincingly I believe, to explain to those who are used to the massive infusion of technology in their lives that for a majority of this country (Appalachia has 22 million people for instance), emerging technologies hold little sway.

And, it's not that I believe technology advancements are bad. Indeed, I feel exactly the opposite. I love technology. I embrace it. I'm an early adopter. However, I don't believe that the technorati have a good understanding of the way of life in the heartland of the country. That disconnect, I fear, is creating a polarized society (speaking only in terms of science/technology) where the general population is largely left behind.

This isn't a knock against them (and I feel a kinship with the technorati). Simply an observation.

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