

# **A brief history of Communication**

- **Can you imagine life without your blackberry, facebook, mixit or twitter???**
- **Did you ever wonder how communication began or how it originated?**
- **Communication has changed dramatically over the past decade. This is due to the rapid development of new technologies. The art of communication science has evolved with time and has undergone various stages to get where it is today.**

# **Stages in the history of human communication**

- **Communication as we know it today evolved over a period of time and went through various stages. In early civilisations there was a need to communicate and instruments such as a ram's horn, drumbeats and smoke signals were used and during the Middle Ages, homing pigeons were used to transmit messages. In modern times communication is often available by means of pressing a button ( phoning someone, sending a message via your cellular phone, typing a letter on computer or switching on the television)**

# Age of Speech and Language

- The development of communication did not replace anything preceding it. Gestures, the development of language and the need for interaction with others merely contributed towards modern-day methods of expression.
- It is not very clear how language originated. Some believe words imitated sounds that accompanied gesture; others believe words came from expression of emotion (crying or laughing) while another school of thought believes that language resulted because of group activities (like working together).
- There are more or less 3,000 languages spoken worldwide today. In South Africa we have eleven official languages and each of these languages has been influenced by other existing languages. Many language characteristics in your mother tongue have been taken over from older languages.

# Age of Writing

- In prehistoric times drawings and pictures of animals and people in cave paintings and cuneiform were used to communicate.
- For generations cave paintings provided people with a way of recording customs and traditions

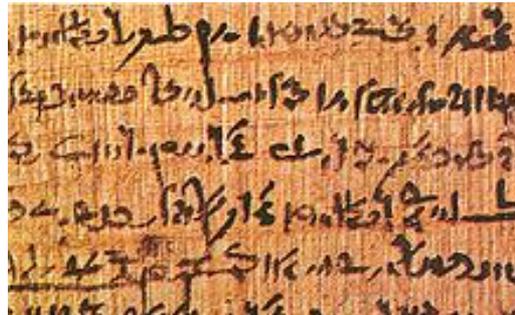


- **Wedge shaped strokes on clay tables ( known as cuneiform-pictographic writing in which symbols represented objects) represented ideas. Sounds were later added to identify pictures and in about 3500 BCE ( Before the common era), the Sumerians used words that sounded similar to create meaning ( for example “bee” and “leaf” created “belief”). A complete cuneiform system had more than 600 signs and a cuneiform script discovered in 1929 contained an alphabet of consonants.**



# Age of Print

- In medieval Europe the preservation of learning was one of the major responsibilities of the monks. One way this task was done, was by meticulously copying entire texts onto papyrus (paper had not been invented yet). Crafts men and manuscript copyists also participated in this activity to ensure that books were made available and that information was communicated to people.



- **In the West, however, at around 1438, the German printer Johan Guttenburg invented a mould for casting individual letters in metal and published the first book in the 1450's. The Gutenberg Bible (1455) was the first work in Europe to be printed with movable type ( about 200 copies were printed).**
- **News-sheets an early form of the newspaper were later developed, which flourished and circulated rapidly.**
- **Society was easily influenced with the spread of books and information as they could share their knowledge. More people began to read and write.**
- **However the release of the newspaper became the first true mass communication medium.**

# **Age of Electronic Mass Media**

- **In modern times personal computers have become known as Multimedia PC's because various forms of media, such as cameras, telephones, videos, compact disks and images can be integrated to enhance the accessibility and distribution of information.**
- **Mass media is the term used to denote radio, newspapers, television and the Internet- media that can be used to reach the masses.**

- **Radio - Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian that was familiar with the work of Samuel Morse, invented the first “wireless telegraph” and patented it in England in 1896. On 12 December 1901 he transmitted his first transatlantic message between Newfoundland in America and Poldu in England. Today Marconi is credited as the father of Radio. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was established on 1 August 1936.**
- **Film - Two Frenchmen, Niepce and Daguerre invented film during the 19th century. By the early 20th century the movie camera and projector were available and motion pictures became an important source of entertainment. By 1905 cinemas were built in Europe and United States. In South Africa film can make an important contribution to the democratisation and development that needs to take place.**

- **Television - Television means “to see at a distance”. It is transmission of images and sounds to distant screens by means of electrical or radio waves. John L. Baird showed the live television pictures in London in 1926. The first television service in South Africa was introduced on 5 January 1976. Today SABC channels broadcast in all 11 languages reaching an estimated 18 million people.**

# Information Age

- **Also known as the computer or digital age.**
- **The rapid development of technology has provided greater access to information, in terms of both speed and information.**
- **The explosion brought about by computer technology has led to the revision of many laws regulating access to and communication of information.**

# The Internet

- The internet makes use of almost any kind of electronic transmission promoting the sharing of information, enhancing business transactions in terms of reducing time to send and access information and supporting global interaction between organisations and people.
- The Internet can be regarded as a universal library, the worlds first viable commercial democracy. The Internet is not free and users have to register with a service provider and also pay for the time spent on the Internet. Some websites provide information free of charge while others rely on subscription fees.

- **E-mail - E-mail has become an essential part of communication within and between organisations. It has replaced letters, faxes and telephone calls in both business and personal lives. E-mail is fast, cheap and reliable.**
- **The World Wide Web (WWW) - is a part of Internet in which information is presented. Tim Berners-Lee created it in 1989 at the CERN Particle Physics Laboratories in Switzerland. The WWW combines words, graphics, video and sound, adds colours and includes advertising and downloadable texts and programmes. It is possible to search for information on almost any topic using a key word or phrase. A collection of papers belonging to the same organisation is called a “web site”.**

- **Newsgroups and chatrooms - newsgroups and chatrooms enable people who share the same interests from all over the world to communicate. A chatroom is an electronic gathering place for people with similar interests.**
- **Teleconferencing - is a way to hold meetings with people who are in different distant locations and is a substitute for face-to-face communication. Videoconferencing and Audioconferencing use telephone and video technology.**
- **Telecommuting - enables people to work at home three or four times a week. They are connected to the main office by a computer and is widespread in the United States.**

# Activity

**1. The five major stages of the development of human communication**

**are distinguished according to different stages:**

**a) List them in historical order.**

**b) Write down the medium or technological development that characterised each age.**

**2. Briefly describe the most important social outcome of the**

**development of the age of electronic mass media. .**

**3. To which electronic mass media are you exposed daily and how has the use of these enriched your life?**