

Wonders of New Age Technology



If you're bored, it's probably your own fault. When I was a first-year student in 2002, I was exceptionally shy and introverted, like many of my engineering student friends. I grew up with technology and was one of the first among my peers to sacrifice a bit of hard-earned internet-café job money (intended for a few on-campus treats at Steers) to buy a USB flash drive. I would crawl under computer laboratory desks to find the USB port to plug it in, much to the amusement of my peers who were still using floppy disks. Six months later, there were extension cables on the tables to plug in your 'stick'. Google and Wikipedia were novelties, and search engines like Yahoo and Alta Vista were considered great for starting an internet search. The library computers and staff were invaluable for finding relevant information on all subjects.

I was not suffering, nor was I unhappy, because there were very few modern tools available for any kind of 'instant solution' to a problem. Learning was by discovery and, to a large degree, it gave me great satisfaction. It just took lots of time, and when I was frustrated, getting help was not as simple as 'googling' it. Nor was it easy for me to approach my lecturers (who were all great, by the way) because I was simply too shy. I've come out of my shell since.

As I read through the abstracts for this month's edition of the journal, I was again amazed by how far we've come as a human race in leveraging technology to our advantage. This month's edition features a particular paper based on a master's degree project in mining engineering that piqued my interest. Within seconds, I could open the dissertation online and read all about it. As a Xennial, a cross between Generation X and Millennial, I deeply appreciate the ability to instantly access information. I am reminded of a quote from The History Boys, in which the eccentric Mr. Hector says, 'The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – that you'd thought special, particular to you. And here it is, set down by someone else, a person you've never met, maybe even someone long dead. And it's as if a hand has come out, and taken yours'.

Those moments come when I read papers and explore new things. This keeps me hopeful that we have a bright future, despite our challenges as an industry. We have gargantuan sets of data to explore, centuries of knowledge at our fingertips, and free tools to leverage all of this to our advantage.

You simply can't be bored or out of ideas. If you are, it's probably your own fault. When in doubt, Google it, watch a YouTube tutorial, or ask ChatGPT for some ideas. Also, invite a young person for coffee—they'll help you more than you might expect!

M.W. Erwee
Pyrometallurgist