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APROPOS

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apropos

The Mother of Invention

For system administrators, using computer technology is a foregone conclusion. Many of us have been pushing that envelope for years. As such, it's easy to take for granted the impact of what we do has on society. However, recent history has shown that computer technology is increasingly turned to for solutions in our complex world.

The recent terror attacks highlight society's use of computer solutions. As the drama unfolded on September 11, the Web was used equally alongside TV and radio as a source of up-to-date information. The anthrax threat resulted in a number of newspapers and magazines requesting electronic communication over traditional paper mail, like this one from the *San Jose Mercury News*:

Dear Reader,

With the nation's increased attention on the safety of mail, we at the Mercury News have examined our procedures and made some changes. We need your help.

We prefer that those who can contact us by e-mail or, secondarily, by fax. You can find those addresses and phone numbers on Page 4A.

You can find reporters' e-mail addresses and phone numbers at the end of most stories. Thank you for your understanding.

And this one in the November 12, 2001 *Newsweek*:

Readers who have recently sent submissions through the Postal Service should resend them as e-mail text.

It's a shame, in this case, that "necessity is the mother of invention," but it speaks to the reliance modern society has on the computer infrastructure we create and support.

Just as anthrax-laced mail prompted calls to use computer technology, recall the 2000 US election did the same. In fact, it was just last November that the US sat spellbound waiting for the results of a presidential election which, it appeared, couldn't be definitively declared. In that post-election climate, US citizens called out to statisticians, scientists, and engineers to explore computer technology and electronic voting solutions that would avert a future election snafu.

USENIX President Dan Geer has repeatedly challenged us to use our profession and our affiliation with USENIX and SAGE to challenge ourselves and continue to lead the computing world by excellence and example. Recent history shows that increased necessity, as well as our creativity, may be spurring on our new inventions.

by Tina
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