

## Second Century



# Crossing the Digital Divide

*In his book The Tipping Point, Malcom Gladwell defines that moment in which seemingly small things can lead to tremendous change. Over the years, our community has been critical of some technological shifts, but quietly and quickly adopted them to the point where they became ubiquitous and even depended upon in everyday operating.*

*As we look forward to establishing what strategic paths are required for the future of ARRL and amateur radio, it is important to look back and gain context into the societal impact of digital transformation and how much of it seemingly “just happened,” and we moved on with our lives, fully integrating the new technology-driven capabilities.*

Air travel is part of our lives in which, if you've been travelling for more than 25 years, you've seen changes. We've gone from multi-part red-backed tickets, to computer-printed tickets, to scannable tickets, and now to no printed tickets. Today you use your smartphone to access your digital boarding pass and itinerary. In-flight entertainment has migrated from a projected movie at the front of the cabin, to pop-up screens, to headrest screens, to in-flight satellite television, and now BYOIFE — bring your own in-flight entertainment — where you use a smartphone or tablet to access the Wi-Fi-based entertainment on board.

At ARRL HQ, the entire staff went through a short case study on MTV. Unbelievably, MTV is now more than 40 years old. The ultimate success of MTV depended on then-recent technology and regulatory changes that saw the Apollo missions, cable television, HBO vs. the FCC, and even depended on the arrival of televisions with stereo sound some 3 years later. MTV encompassed innovation, risk-taking, and faith to drive the music industry to the tipping point of what lay ahead with music videos, downloadable music, and Apple iTunes. In reviewing this case study we asked ourselves: As we look at the digital transformation of what we do — promoting and protecting amateur radio — what are the opportunities and priorities for the next 10 years?

Another major driving force today is the emergence of digital ecosystems. These single-provider digital environments become deeply embedded into our lives by providing many digital services, including and especially digital assistants. Who do you bark at to get the weather? Siri, Alexa, or Google. Apple, Amazon, and Google with their expansive ecosystems of capabilities have made everything so integrated, you wouldn't want to switch to one of the other providers. The migration of your settings and data would be enough to drive you crazy!

Of all the columns I have written — and all of them are reviewed by trusted editorial and contextual eyes — only one has never seen the light of day. It will, at some point. And its subject is social media. This powerful tool has also become a potent weapon. For all the good that it does, the baggage

that comes with it often makes you question why we ever thought it was a good idea beyond giving college kids a way to meet each other. Today we know that bad actors overseas continue to use bogus accounts to drive divisive and even combative behavior within the US, especially during election season. ARRL continues to maintain a social media presence, as the tools and the platforms are so powerful, but to be sure, it comes at the cost of all of us having to deal with bad actors who take to their keyboards with the vigor of a Viking to a sword.

ARRL cannot be everything to everyone. And we don't try to be. There is plenty of innovation happening within amateur radio, and we try to put a spotlight on those things that will inform you, inspire you to be more involved, and to try new things. As we've seen with everything from FT8 to virtual club meetings, amateur radio has already reached its tipping point into the digital realm. As we continue to move through our digital transformation, expanding our digital footprint beyond our magazines, newsletters, and learning center, we look to work with content creators — including several in the vibrant community of ham radio YouTubers — much in the way we have worked with authors for more than 100 years.

We look to make our relationship more interactive, with surveys and live training courses. We want to build an ecosystem that integrates and transforms learning and licensing, and perhaps radiosport. We'll lean increasingly on the use of social media for outreach to non-hams and especially regulators and representatives through their online presences.

How do you see ARRL evolving? Go to [www.arrl.org/ideas](http://www.arrl.org/ideas) and give us your feedback. As we reach toward the younger generations, help them get radio active. Be that connector who ensures no one at your club gets left behind in the digital transformation of amateur radio. And here's looking forward to a great 2024!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David A. Minster'. To the right of the signature, the call letters 'NA2AA' are written in a smaller, blocky font.

David A. Minster, NA2AA  
Chief Executive Officer