

Is Skype a Dirty Word? (and other musings from the mind of a computer repair business owner)

As I sat near Bailey's recently and sipped my coffee, I watched a group of teens congregated near the library. Whether I wanted to be or not I was subjected to their conversation. Ah, to be young and carefree again, I thought. After I stopped reminiscing about times when I had a full head of hair, I heard a phrase the group were continually repeating. One would tell the other "Skype me". Were they angry at each other and trying to tell each other off? Were they being rude? In fact, no, they were referring to one of the most well-used communications tools out there on the Internet today.

Operating a computer business in Parkville/Qualicum brings me in contact with many different types of people, but primarily seniors. One of the most common questions I get is "I see my neighbours talking to and seeing their grandkids on the computer; how can I do that?"

And that's where Skype comes in. Skype, with its user friendly interface and its aggressive marketing through online channels, has quickly become the premier provider of VOIP, (put simply – the ability to have a voice conversation via the Internet). Using Skype, you can talk to anyone, anywhere in the world, at any time. Add a webcam, which starts at as little as \$20, and you can broadcast your image to whomever you are talking to. The beauty of it – **it's free!**

I have been using Skype for several years now, primarily for talking to my dear 85 yr old grandmother who resides in Florida. She is about as non-technical as anyone I know, yet she has been able to use Skype without any major problems. It's wonderful to see her face light up on screen when she sees me, live and in person. Although I'll admit, her grin grows even larger when I put my kids on my knees so she can see and talk to her great-grandkids too. Years ago, my family would record cassette tapes (remember those?) over the course of a week, then mail them to Grandma. Although that was nice at the time, it seems so archaic in today's instant communication society. It feels much better to see her and it has kept me in touch with her far more than ever before.

So what do you need to use Skype? Only 3 things, and likely 2, if not 3 of them you already have. You need a high speed Internet connection, a microphone and a webcam. Nearly all laptops sold in the last few years have a microphone and a camera built in, and nearly all of us already have high-speed connections. So check it out – at www.skype.com – the website will walk you through the installation and set up in a friendly and easy to use manner. Even the most technically challenged will have this up and running in 10 minutes or less. Are there any downsides to using Skype? Well, perhaps you may have to brush your hair before a call, something that was a never an issue with the plain old telephone.

Skype will never replace the feeling of my grandmother running her fingers through what's left of my hair, but it sure is a great tool to keep us in touch, live and in person. So Grandma, I love you, and please don't take this the wrong way but ``**Skype me!**``

Jon Sanders is a resident of the Lighthouse Community and operates a local mobile computer business, Comtech Solutions. Recently featured by the PBQNews for a guinea pig printer rescue, he is available for all of your computer needs. From sales of new and used computers and accessories to service, troubleshooting, virus removal, networking or general computer support - Jon is here to help in a supportive and patient manner. Give him a call at 250-927-8384 and see the difference local service makes.