

feedback

Our Own Worst Enemy

This article by Michael Pallamary is applicable far beyond just surveying. As a society we have become altogether too dependent on technology, which is spelled out so clearly in Neil Postman's little book entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. So, what applies to surveying knowledge, legal language and math (geometry and trig), at bottom line has to do with a rich understanding of the English language, for us born and raised in this land. So much of higher math is language as much as number crunching. Postman says in his little book that our current American culture is 3,000 miles wide, and one inch deep, for which even a high school grad does not need an interpretation (at least most of them, I would hope?). Anyway, from religion to politics, look at the mess we're in, and much of it has to do with such meager "substantive" reading habits, compared with texting, or just about anything on TV, virtually all of which is low level, both intellectually and morally. But the stats show that we Americans watch an incredible amount of this trivia in any typical week. I say "we" but in this case I choose to be one of the minority; absolutely minimal TV. Thank God for good books. So, keep up the good work, and blessings on you and yours.

Substantive: having a firm basis in reality and therefore important, meaningful, or considerable

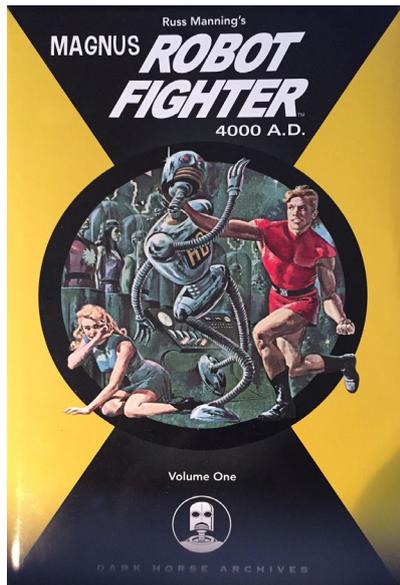
—Steve Womble, *CBI, PE*

Via the internet

Pallamary responds:

When I was young, I was a fan of a comic book series entitled "Magnus - Robot Fighter, 4000 A.D." I recently acquired a reissued compilation of these stories on Ebay. According to the story line, "... Metalmen were created solely to ease man's tasks of life. Yet by the year 4,000 A.D., these perfect servants [robots] had become the masters of men, and only the through the incredible powers of Magnus could the human race be saved!"

What fascinated me with these comic books was its glimpse into the future.



Originally published in the early '60s, writer Russ Manning predicted all the services provided by robots. Over the years, I envisioned all the ways technology would affect land surveying. Many years ago, Curt Brown predicted a day where land surveyors could capture coordinates from satellites. Indeed.

I agree with Mr. Womble. Our reliance on technology is unsettling.

What awaits us next?

—Michael Pallamary, *PS*



Michael Pallamary's editorial ["Our Own Worst Enemy," October 2016] strikes a cross-cultural cord, which reverberates as a sad side-effect of otherwise-beneficial technology. I am a lawyer (although I am also an architect, and I understand enough about surveying to be dangerous). As one who deals in transactional legal matters, I draft documents and negotiate with other attorneys over contractual matters. There is a direct parallel between the AutoCAD-button-pushing surveyor who doesn't understand the principles underlying that button-push, and the stubbornly-contract-clause-inserting lawyer who doesn't understand how to construct an agreement to support a specific business arrangement. Worst is the legal scrivener who uses contract-creating

software to assemble the agreement—programmed to include boiler-plate provisions that may be worth considering but do not necessarily apply in a particular case. That is when professional software ceases to be a constructive tool to speed the process and instead morphs into a dangerous weapon that can explode and indiscriminately hurt everyone in sight, regardless of which side of the negotiating table they are on. In both surveying and lawyering, the practitioner must understand the underlying principles before using any tool, whether analogue or digital, and must think through each apparent solution that the tool produces to ensure that it is relevant to the specific problem at hand. Anything less than that is an abdication of the fiduciary responsibilities that define a professional.

—Andrew Alpern

Pallamary responds:

There are many parallels between the work of an attorney, and that of a land surveyor, as Mr. Alpern notes. In both professions, there is a tendency, to simplify things, if nothing else for convenience and economics.

With regards to Mr. Alpern's observations, land surveyors encounter the same thing when preparing ALTA surveys and many other documents. Unfortunately, far too many surveyors blindly accept these boiler plate documents, never questioning the reasons while blindly incurring needless liability.

As with other professionals, at some point in time, we must all measure the decisions we make and the things we do. As I pointed out in my original article, blind allegiance to technology is unwise. It requires little thinking and it is inconsistent with the fundamental precepts of land surveying.

It is evident we must all take a step back and return to thinking for ourselves. Let's join Mr. Alpern.

—Michael Pallamary, *PS*

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