



Four revolutions

Our communications technology has gone through four revolutions:

The first revolution: storing knowledge

Written language and pictures meant people could store knowledge in a form which did not decay. We can still see paintings on caves that are more than 20,000 years old. What were these paintings for? We do not know for certain. Maybe they were magic or even score charts. The best hunter can put their score of kills up on the wall just like the hall of fame on some computer games! These paintings needed skill - only a few people could do them but everyone could look at them.

The second revolution: spreading knowledge

Printing made it possible for one person's thoughts to be given to thousands or millions of people. Again skill was needed and the best creators could become rich and powerful. Some authors make millions of pounds from the sales of their books. The second revolution made some people very powerful.

The third revolution: doing it in an instant

In the 20th century communications became instant. Rather than waiting for a newspaper or book to be printed and distributed people could learn about what was happening all over the world in an instant. Radio broadcasts by Winston Churchill during WWII were sent around the world to encourage people. In 2008, 800 million people watched the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics as it actually happened! This needed technicians and engineers to make it happen. Some of the largest, most powerful companies in the world are media companies - they make television programmes, distribute news, make films and connect people.

The fourth revolution: empowering everyone

This is where you come in! Modern communication technologies allow ordinary people to become producers of news that can get around the world on the internet. They can set up websites to share their photographs, write and publish news or even look for others who have the same interests. Some people even find life partners over the net! We can all now produce material that a hundred years ago only a few people could create.

1

The changes in communications technology are getting faster and faster. Your grandfather probably had no television when he was a boy. Your mother may have grown up in a house with no telephone. Talk to your family and older friends about how the changes in communications technology have affected them. Try to collect some real life stories about the first time they had a television, or the first time they used a phone.