

## Knowledge is Power. Information Can Kill

I wanted to begin with a pithy example that exemplifies the value of knowledge over information. Then the question, what is knowledge, information, spoke up. Is the world of early 21<sup>st</sup> century interested? Are the bits of information that roll off the Internet bites that have qualities inviting exploration or just some roll of the dice. In most corners of our earth, individuals have instantaneous access to information that less than fifty years ago required entry to a library – somewhere. Today all one needs are two thumbs, a Wi-Fi connection, and whom you have information at your fingertips. You have knowledge. Do you?

For 253 years the Encyclopedia Britannica has been the purveyor of knowledge. Over 7 million sets have been sold since its founding in 1768. Every household privileged to own a set knew they had access to knowledge. In the final printed edition in 2010, the 32-book collection was a compilation of information researched and vetted, enabling you to speak intelligently in your high school history class when reporting on the spread of smallpox in Colonial America. You beamed because you trusted your source to be factual.

Today a simple search of Google brings about 13,400,000 hits to the phrase “History of Smallpox.” I know because I Googled it. Is this the same as searching for that section in the Encyclopedia Britannica? Have the millions of hits been researched and vetted? There is the rub to quote Shakespeare.

Today anyone can produce data bites and label it information. It seems many do. What is the count of those who compile their wares with minimal, if any, research, and appear unaware there is such a verb as “to vet.” We are inundated with information that requires effort and time to fether out the fact. The search – knowledge - in our everything instantaneously world, feels too arduous. So, we go with what “feels” to be fact.

Now in all fairness, information is the first step on the path to knowledge. However, without further examination, the thought could kill. Orville and Wilbur Wright believed in man’s ability to fly. A fact that in 1899 was anything other than fantasy; information provided by the likes of Otto Lilienthal, Samuel Langley, and the ubiquitous Leonard da Vinci that few believed. Over a four-year span. this musing of brothers was researched, experimented, compiled, studied, and vetted provided the steps to substantiate their information was fact.

Today we seem to stop at feeling. "If it feels good ..." and for that, information is killing. Whether a conspiracy floated on Twitter, or a graphical representation posted to Facebook, or a 1500-word article from a Google search, all these are information, that unvetted led to a pizza restaurant being shot into, use of a Sharpie marker, and climate change being "natural." You get the gist.

Today the desire to do the work of knowledge, to take that initial feeling this information will lead to choices of what is best seem irrelevant. The length of time, personal effort and commitment does not seem justified. Given that historically someone else did the work, the assumption seems to be why would they have put this on the Internet otherwise holds court. Historical purveyors of knowledge i.e. Ben Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanac; Edward R. Murrow, News Division CBS would question our premise. Who are today's purveyors of knowledge? I am not inferring we are a world of ignorant souls, but I ask when was the last time you quoted something from the Internet you did not verify elsewhere?

Where historically access to information was limited, today we each have the opportunity to become knowledgeable and with that powerful. Knowledge will continue to bring a person substance because behind that search, that compilation, that vetting, the feeling transforms into confidence and the journey provides the material, facts, that may be disputed but not rendered to dust.