



CANADA'S HEALTH
INFORMATICS ASSOCIATION



Shelagh Maloney

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The Tipping Point

Both of my children recently celebrated birthdays. Celebrations with family and friends were much the same this year as they were last year – lots of fun, lots of noise and lots of food. The one noticeable difference from this year to last, however, is the fact that for the first time, the kids received many gift cards and cash rather than tangible items that they could enjoy right away. This has resulted in a significant transformational change. Let me explain.

Last year, Olivia and Evan were very pleased to receive gifts that were chosen for them. They opened them on the day they were received and enjoyed them tremendously (although my son is still at an age where 'toys' are a much bigger hit than clothes). This year, somewhat to my surprise, the children were equally thrilled to receive this relatively new phenomenon – the gift card.

While a gift card to the music store or to the mall doesn't offer the instant gratification of opening a new CD or game, the children recognize the promise and choice inherent in gifts that they can choose themselves. First of all, they are filled with anticipation about what they will buy and are intoxicated with the possibilities. They have even researched their choices on the internet before we arrive at the mall. Once at the shopping centre, they don't purchase the first thing that catches their eye but conduct a thorough review of the choices and make a carefully thought-out decision. This produces two effects. First, it increases the value of the purchase because they chose it above other options. Secondly, the level of ownership increases– they feel a higher sense of responsibility to take care of the gift that they've "purchased". So what does this have to do with health informatics?

In previous columns I described how consumers are increasingly taking an active role in their healthcare decisions. Whether it is a consumer product or a health service, an educated decision based on careful consideration of options leads to greater perceived value of the ultimate product/service and greater commitment to maintaining it. Simply put, a higher level of consumer engagement, and the technology that is enabling it, is transforming our world, including our health care system – and is doing so at an alarming pace.

We are embracing health information technology like never before. Strong government commitment to e-health, unprecedented health IT spending, and increasing public engagement are evidence that we are recognizing and embracing the strong value that health informatics brings to the health transformation agenda.

From a COACH perspective, we have seen a 40% increase in our membership numbers in a single year, the e-Health conference continues to grow in numbers as well as in depth and breadth and the number of nominations for our COACH awards surpassed all expectations. Not only that but we are organizing a fall conference in response to a growing concern around recruitment and retention issues in our industry. Imagine, we cannot keep up with the growth.

This is pretty heady stuff for many of us who have been around for awhile and have remained committed to the cause but sometimes frustrated with the somewhat lacklustre response from the rest of the world. Have we finally reached the tipping point? Have we crested the top of the hill? If so, hold onto your hats because it is going to be a wild downhill ride from here.

We are ready. Bring it on...●





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