



# lastword

by Janine Adamson

## The future is feeling

**During our latest readership survey, one thing was apparent – CPM readers treasure physical copies of the magazine. In fact, 65% of those who participated answered ‘no’ when asked if they’d be happy to receive a digital only version.**

However, part of me questions whether this’ll continue to be the case when we’re celebrating our 50th birthday and our audience demographic has subsequently shifted. In many ways, I’d like to think we’ll still hit the presses (and on a personal level, I really rather hope so), but in time, reality may suggest otherwise.

For me, technological advancements fall into two broad camps – those which truly address a need which otherwise would remain unanswered, and are thus adopted with little reticence. And then those which although assist, seem to sap some of life’s precious enjoyment.

Similar to a magazine, let’s take books. Yes I can read a book on an electronic device, but do I want to? The answer is no. Books provide a joy that many of us human beings crave – to be whisked away from the doldrums of mediocrity so we can submerge ourselves in an alternative world. With a book, it’s almost physical, as you

turn the page on each chapter and lose yourself to literary escapism.

Call me an old romantic, but I partake in much book swapping and purchase my material from second-hand book purveyors or my favourite, ‘chazzas’ (charity shops). So there’s nothing I adore more than imagining who perused the pages before me; I often chuckle to myself when I’m about to fold down a corner on the same page as the previous owner.

Like an imaginary friend, you can take a book anywhere – it doesn’t require charging. You can lend it to a neighbour, and en masse, books evoke a sense of grandeur that a tablet could never realise.

As with fashion trends like flared trousers and tasseled lamp shades, I’ve noted that some ‘advancements’ appear cyclical. For example, I’m sure we’ve all been graced with stories from our elders about self-service check-out blunders. Initially hailed as the speedier approach to supermarket shopping, the fact you have to seek human intervention to bag a cabbage says it all. And now, some retailers are re-instigating ‘archaic’ conveyer belts – my mum will be especially pleased!

I have another example – the death of the high street – although I’m unsure this one is truly reversible. It was only last week when I saw a petition to bring back physical stores in response to online shopping fatigue. I have to agree, I’ve been cat-fished too many times by a highly edited marketing photograph. You can’t mistake the quality when it’s in your actual hands.

Maybe I’m completely wrong here, but I don’t want to live my life as an android;

I want to feel something real. That’s why I believe this magazine can’t be written by AI or some form of bot.

Collating ‘facts’ about a topic is one thing, but interpreting it correctly and delivering it with character and sometimes wit (yes, we try), surely can’t be possible? Will AI evolve so it can truly evoke emotion? Or curate a topical and engaging magazine which addresses the here and now of arable farming with absolute technical accuracy?

If that does indeed happen come 2050 I probably ought to start worrying, although if I’m still your editor by then, something has likely gone wrong – I hope to be on the cusp of retiring my pencil.

For now, I’m in this trusted position because I’m passionate about our industry and want to get it right. Will a machine feel the gravity of what’s involved like I do? Will a digital-only version of CPM

be passed around the farm kitchen table in the same way?

What will undoubtedly change is how our website and wider online presence functions – something which we’re already in the process of addressing. I know we’re the poor relation in comparison with other knowledge-based sites; I hope we can improve such in a few years rather than it taking 25. I’m almost certain technology, in some guise, will help to facilitate.

Nevertheless, as our lead article suggests, we should allow technology to dictate a little. Where we’re making our industry more efficient in ways humans couldn’t dream of, I’m all for embracing that. But I’d also like to propose we don’t forget our hearts and minds along the way either – recognising what brings us joy.

Farming is hard, life is sometimes even harder...but please, can we let a girl have her magazine?



*As an aside, I was sent this wonderful photograph of 87-year-old Peter Simpson who is still advising growers in the South West, including on the latest oilseed rape varieties. Images like this bring me much joy.*