



## Shooting the messenger

“Shooting the messenger tends to validate the message you are trying to ignore” (Norm Hull). No doubt, we are living in trying times, times of personal reconciliation, but also times of rapid changes, some more deep-cutting into our private lives, some requiring a re-engineering of our defences, especially in the world of digital ‘warfare’.

Jessica Hagedorn once remarked “adaptability is the simple secret of survival”. This cannot be more pertinent in the times we are living in.

Dumbing it down is not my intent as the university is a world of intelligence, a world of debate and a world of personal preference in dealing with facts and data. This is somewhat different to the corporate world where top-down decisions are implemented in a linear top-down manner, so, let’s get the top 10 facts out there:

1. **Fact.** The internet and all that it brings (good and bad) is here to stay.
2. **Fact.** Nothing on the internet is ever ‘pencilled in’ – it is written in permanent ink.
3. **Fact.** Only 0.01% of your Social Media friends ‘might’ attend your funeral, and Facebook is not a book at all.
4. **Fact.** Digital accountability is shrouded in mist, uncertainty, challenges, and has a strong taste of imminent regret.
5. **Fact.** The internet is not sensitive to rank, status, intelligence, creed, colour, race – it exposes all in an equal manner.
6. **Fact.** Nothing on the internet is private – once published it ‘lives on’ in the public domain. You are being watched, every second of your day, every second...
7. **Fact.** The line between ‘private’ and ‘corporate’ becomes blurred when ‘freedom of choice’ becomes the only criteria for the decision.
8. **Fact.** Understanding the internet is a life skill, not just a mere service for consumption.
9. **Fact.** Personal preference can be dangerous if not informed by facts, not fancy and hear-say.
10. **Fact.** A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor (Unknown). The same applies to navigating the internet.

The question now arise related to the objective of this communicate. The answer is not a simple matter, and the objective of this message is a conglomeration of rights, mandates, emotions, preferences, and in some instances resistance to change. Irrespective of the complexity, the truth is that we need to find ways to deal with it, not only in terms of our individual preferences, but also in the interest of the hand that feeds us – the University.

Assuming that the message is clear, the next step is to understand ICT Services' role and mandate in this regard. The point of departure here is captured in the following mandate statement:

***ICT Services is an integral part of the University of the Free State and an integrated, key role player in digitally enabling the strategic intent and ongoing, secure digital operations of the University.***

I recently read an article on the defensive powers of the American Airforce and the destructive abilities of their fighter jets. Here the game of Trumps is well illustrated. The F-18 fighter pilot stated "my jet has a machine gun attached to it". In response to this, the A-10 Warthog pilot calmly responded "my machine gun has a jet attached to it".

**ICT is not in the game of Trumps.** Our voice is not the definitive voice in the adoption of any digital technologies, BUT, we do play a significant role in terms of defending the institution in terms of digital investments, digital footprints, digital security, and digital strategies, etc. This stance is then adequately illustrated in the ICT mandate as much as other mandates constitute the role and functions of those functional areas of the University.

In doing so, ICT Services would fail in terms of its role and function if:

- We do not investigate each and every need for digital technologies, especially related to internet-based products and services.
- We provide surety to the Council and University Executives in terms of the digital safety of the University and its staff.
- Protect the financial investments in digital platforms, infrastructures, etc.
- Propose and provide suitable alternatives to technology requirements not supported by the institution.
- Enable the business of the UFS, irrespective of personal interest or preference.
- To be fully transparent in its operations and provide proper motivations for requests not approved.

In support of the aforementioned, how does ICT define its opinion:

1. Fully understand the business requirement as expressed by the user.
2. Determine if there is an approved alternative already approved and supported by the University (under the auspices of ICT Services).
3. What are the short-comings of the university's alternative that might not be addressed by the university's alternative.
4. Technical requirements of the newly proposed product/service.
5. Financial requirements of the newly proposed product/service.
6. Digital safety of the newly proposed proposed/service.
7. Does the proposal align to strategic intent of the University.

ICT Services will only issue a NO-vote if:

- There are (existing) safe and secure, deployed alternative in place.
- The requirement implies a financial investment as either day-one funding and/or annual renewal funding. Here, the cost of the newly proposed product/service has an incremental effect on the cost-of-ownership model of the University related to software and digital services.
- The newly proposed product/digital service is aligned to the technology architecture of the University platforms and infrastructures. If it does not fit, what needs to change to our baseline technology architecture and/or, does it pose a threat to the digital security of the University.
- Does the proposed product/service serve the wider university digital community or is it based on a personal preference.

Lastly, there are processes for the approval of new technologies and the decision authority is the CITC (Central IT Committee) under the auspices of the Office of the Vice Chancellor and Principal. Furthermore the ETLS (Educational Technologies and Learning Spaces) committee under the auspices of Dr. van Staden is specifically focussed on technology needs from the Academic sector. Both these committees have fully operational working relationships with not only Faculties, but also with ICT Services. Pertaining to product/service requests from Support Services, the first point of contact is Mr. Xolani Schalk in ICT Services.

Colleagues, in closing, I am fully aware of the variety of responses this message will illicit and also that the message might infringe on notions of academic freedom, growth, academic programmes, etc.. The bottom line to all of this; we are all in it together, but this is also a governance function of ICT Services, and my office in particular. I (ICT Services) am part of the digital deployment discussions, and am also held accountable for the deployment and maintenance of digital technologies.

Other than this. Thank-you for your kind co-operation in this regard. None of it is easy, none of it is perfect, but all of it is part of where we are in relation to the digital footprint of the University.

Keep well

Vic (the messenger)