

20006 How can we all fly less? By embracing Skype and FaceTime like our kids

theguardian.com, Adrian Chiles, Wed 22 Jan 2020

[BBC radio show host] Matt Hancock's been doing the rounds to talk about global heating. He says: "We should use technology to reduce carbon emissions."

I [concur] : I too wish we could get a move on and make proper use of the brilliant technology already at our disposal that should by now be saving the planet from the carbon emissions of millions of miles of travel. Planes, trains and automobiles are loaded up every day with people making unnecessary journeys and I'm one of them. I wonder what percentage of God's green earth I've destroyed travelling the country and the world to meet people to talk about work stuff, whom I could have met remotely.

Twenty years ago, companies pushing video-conferencing technology were telling me there would no longer be any need to travel for meetings; eye-contact would be established on video screens and the talking could begin. They were right, but it just hasn't happened. It's mad that in business we don't all have two or more screens open at all times to communicate with clients and colleagues. But no, we say: "We really need to do this face to face; I just *have* to be there." The clue to the nonsense here is in the words "face to face"; you can easily be face to face remotely. That's the point of it.

"But it's not the same!" somebody will wail. And they're right: it's better, nicer, to shake hands, hug or whatever, and then talk while breathing the same air. Of course to do it remotely is sub-optimal. But nothing can be the same now; we just have to change.

Our squeamishness about using FaceTime, Skype or whatever is odd. I feel more shy and self-conscious talking to a stranger face-to-face on Skype than in person. But I suspect the more I do it, the easier it will get. Our kids do it all the time, after all. And at work I'm already there. Presenting my radio show from Salford I now see no advantage in having the guest in front of me rather than up on a big screen in a BBC studio in London.

My suggestion is this: if a meeting actually requires physical touching – perhaps if you're an itinerant surgeon or something – then fair enough, saddle up and ride. Fair enough, too, if you need to embrace a loved one. Otherwise, less satisfactory though it is, let's make more of the opportunities to make eyes at each other down the line.

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