

TASK TWO

Read the following text and choose the option (a, b or c) which fits best according to the text. Then write it in the corresponding white box of the questionnaire provided on the next page. Item 0 is an example.

DRUNK, AND DANGEROUS, AT THE KEYBOARD

ANYONE who has spent more than a few minutes over the last couple of weeks trolling tech blogs or cocktail lounges has probably heard about Mail Goggles, a new feature on Google's Gmail program that is intended to help stamp out a scourge that few knew existed: late-night drunken e-mailing.

The experimental program requires any user who enables the function to perform five simple math problems in 60 seconds before sending e-mails between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. on weekends. That time frame apparently corresponds to the gap between cocktail No. 1 and cocktail No. 4, when tapping out an e-mail message to an ex or a co-worker can seem like the equivalent of bungee jumping without a cord.

Mail Goggles is not the first case of a technology developed to keep people from endangering themselves or others with the machinery of daily life after they have had a few. For years, judges have ordered drunken-driving offenders to install computerized breath-analyzers linked to their car's ignition system to prevent them from starting their vehicles when intoxicated.

But as the first sobriety checkpoint on what used to be called the information superhighway, the Mail Goggles program also raises a larger question: In an age when so much of our routine communication is accomplished with our fingertips, are we becoming so tethered to our keyboards that we really need the technological equivalent of trigger locks on firearms? In interviews with people who confessed to imbibing and typing at the same time the answer seems to be yes.

Kate Allen Stukenberg, a magazine editor in Houston, said that "the thing that is disappointing about Mail Goggles is that it's only on Gmail," because many people need cellphone protection, given the widespread practice of drunk text-messaging.

The Mail Goggles program itself was born of embarrassment. A Gmail engineer named Jon Perlow wrote the program after sending his share of regrettable late-night missives, including a plea to rekindle a relationship with an old girlfriend, he wrote on the company's Gmail blog. "We've all been there before, unfortunately," said Jeremy Bailenson, director of Stanford's Virtual Human Interaction Lab. So-called drunk dialing may be as old as the telephone itself, but now, he said, the edge of the abyss is much closer in an era when so many people carry personal digital assistants containing hundreds of contact numbers — including clients, work adversaries and bosses — everywhere, including bars and parties.

And e-mail messages can be particularly potent because they constitute what social scientists call "asynchronous" communication, meaning that exchanges between people do not happen in real time, unlike face-to-face or telephone conversations. People can respond to work-related messages hours after they leave the office — a risky proposition if they happen to log on after stumbling home from happy hour.

The delay in response time means that people have lots of time to shape a response to achieve maximum impact, he said. "If you have eight hours of bar time to think of all the bad things you can come up with, this becomes uniquely damaging," Dr. Bailenson said.

Text-based communication and alcohol are a potent mix in part because people already tend to be more candid online than they are in person, even before they loosen their inhibitions with a drink, said

Lee Rainie, the director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project. "Research suggests that for some people, the use of computers or other gadgets creates some emotional distancing from the person they are addressing," Mr. Rainie said in an e-mail message. The distance, in other words, makes them feel safe — flirting becomes more flirtatious; insults become more insulting.

The latter was the case with one 23-year-old record producer in Manhattan who recalled a drunken text-message mishap on a recent trip to Syracuse University. The producer, who declined to be identified, said he had picked up an undergraduate woman while intoxicated and had accompanied her back to her apartment. But sitting in her kitchen at 4 a.m., he said, he started to have second thoughts. So while she was in the room, he tapped out a message to a friend's iPhone: "Eww Saratoga, what am I thinking? I can def. do better than this ... can you drive my car and get me out of here?"

Seconds later, her telephone buzzed. He had accidentally sent the message to her, not his friend, the producer said.

Months later, after a few more romantic misadventures with her, "We had a long talk and I apologized," he said. "I now write songs about getting my life together."

0. The aim of the test is to check your

- a) ability to type.
- b) mathematical knowledge.
- c) mental agility.

0

8. The very existence of Mail Goggles is a symptom of an increasing tendency to

- a) act irresponsibly at the workplace.
- b) be hooked on computers.
- c) make calls while drunk.

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9. Jon Perlow designed the programme after

- a) feeling ashamed of himself.
- b) submitting an embarrassing letter to a popular Gmail blog.
- c) trying to make contact with an ex-girlfriend.

9

10. Nowadays there is more danger that we send regrettable messages

- a) because of all the work contacts we have.
- b) that mean to offend the recipient.
- c) without proper planning.

10

11. Communicating via computer increases the risk of our messages being more

- a) direct.
- b) impersonal.
- c) inhibited.

11

12. The case of the anonymous record producer exemplifies how we can

- a) get over the problem as time goes by.
- b) send a message to the wrong recipient.
- c) write messages we don't really mean.

12

13. The author's overall approach to the topic is

- a) humorous.
- b) informative.
- c) scientific.

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