

THE MOTHER OF ALL INVENTIONS

On our quest to find the coolest invention of our times, we invited Dr. Ed Brown to tell us about one invention he swears by, and why.

Ed Brown

Dr. Brown is an emergency physician and the founder and Executive Director of the NORTH Network Telemedicine Program, which he has been developing since 1993. NORTH Network is one of the largest and most active telemedicine networks in North America. Most recently, NORTH Network received the Government of Ontario's Diamond Award of Excellence in the category of "Serving Ontario's Citizens Better."

Dr. Brown currently sits as a board member of the Canadian Society of Telehealth and is Chair of the Nominating Committee. He is a member of the Operational Space Medicine Advisory Panel of the Canadian Space Agency, Astronaut Office and sits as a member of the Toronto District Health Council Systems & IT Task Force.

Dr. Brown was the recipient of the 2003 CANARIE I-WAY award for national leadership in the development of Canada's information highway, "Application of Technology" category. He was also the 2003 winner of *Canadian Healthcare Manager* magazine's Who's Who in Healthcare Award in the Technology category.

Prior to founding NORTH Network, Dr. Brown worked as a consultant for the Ontario Government's Smart Systems for Health initiative and was Associate Faculty at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Ontario (ICES). Before embarking on his medical career, Dr. Brown studied mathematics and engineering at the University of Waterloo.

From Electricity to Videoconferencing

Harnessing it was as simple as Ben Franklin flying a kite and yet ...

We couldn't live without the invention of electricity. It powers today's civilization. Without it, we wouldn't have the basics we have come to expect such as heat, light and communication.

Communication – to Exchange a Few Words ...

Earlier this year, Alexander Graham Bell was shortlisted to one of 10 candidates considered to be "the" greatest Canadian for having invented a revolutionary way of exchanging those few words – the telephone. The impact of that one invention was significant enough to garner Bell all kinds of much deserved positive ink and yet video-conferencing takes the concept of communication that much further – by putting a face to a voice and letting



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you "reach out and touch someone." Topping the telephone, the advent of videoconferencing allows for face-to-face interaction – in real time – just as if the parties were together in the same room. It is truly remarkable to reflect on how far we've come with this technology – from electrons, to communication to, face-to-face technology.

Bringing Care Closer ...

At NORTH Network, we can take pride in the role we've had in extending this technology to healthcare, so that people who otherwise would wait for, or perhaps not receive care, are now able to do so, and much closer to home. In fact, nearly 20,000 patients in Ontario have been able to "see" a healthcare professional from a distance, without having to leave the comfort of their home community. Saving time, money and a great deal of stress, videoconferencing technology allows healthcare professionals to "meet," "interact with" and "examine" patients – though they may be separated by thousands of kilometres.

Over two hundred years have passed since Ben Franklin flew that kite and "discovered" so much about the nature of electricity, and more than 100 years since Alexander Graham Bell revolutionized how we communicate. The combination of electricity and communication made videoconferencing possible and has certainly made healthcare delivery that much easier. Just think what the next 100 years of electricity and communication will bring!