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COVID-19: A law of its own

By Michael Connory | 08 April 2020



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The virtual world has changed many things in life – and as it remains a place of opportunity and comfort, something has dramatically shifted – since 2015 a darker side to the net has created more pain and worry, writes Michael Connory.

We've seen cyber crime increase exponentially and fraud and identity theft spiral out of control.

And just as criminals continue to prosper, COVID-19 is creating another unexpected consequence – the request to self-isolate is translating into a fear to interact, and as our fear escalates, there are those who are becoming reliant on the internet to shield them from the perils of COVID-19 and what socialising may mean.

The internet is a great thing, it has delivered many benefits, but just as they have been prolific, people still need to connect and engage. We have always socialised – living our lives in complete contrast to how people are now looking to live – COVID-19 is turning us dark.

We are being asked by government to self-isolate for a specific purpose, and although the request is for a temporary period until the threat of COVID-19 dissipates, if the period of isolation extends well beyond of what is being asked, then the fear of self-isolation is leading to loneliness, mental fatigue and other major mental health issues.

There have already been workers across Australia who are beginning to fear interacting with other people, fearful of contracting the coronavirus and the potential impact on the mental health of Australians.

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Since COVID-19 began sweeping across Australia, we have witnessed a psychology in behaviour that Australians have not witnessed before.

We have seen Australians engage in panic buying – turning a position of information into a fever of fear – fear that has spread much quicker than COVID-19, when there was really no need to panic.

As a country, Australia has more than enough food for everyone – our problem isn't the lack of food, but it's our inability to restock supermarket shelves fast enough.

So, what's going to happen when the demand dies down – when people will no longer need everything they have stocked up on?

I look at my children and wonder, who are now at home from school until 20 April 20 and being asked to learn from their laptops. Gone temporarily are the connection with other students, playtime with other children, physical activity during recess or lunch, organised sports – nothing.



How will they connect and who will they connect with online and what will be the unintended consequences of homeschool and isolation?

University lecturers are now teaching from home for the next 10 weeks and once again, there's no interaction with other lecturers or students, the elimination of establishing new connections and maintaining old connections or working in an environment that engenders greater creativity and motivation.

And then there is the legal fraternity – changes to how lawyers are working where cases that need to be prosecuted can't and as they work from home on cases that may see no resolution or not even being prosecuted how will that impact on their mental health?

Lawyers are extroverts, social beings who thrive on interaction and the thrill of engagement. How are they coping, what impact will it have on the legal sector and will it change it forever?

But the most interesting question of all for Australia's legal sector is how will cyber criminals seek to exploit the industry?

That's almost anybody's guess as to what some cyber criminals may have in mind.

During the weekend, I went shopping for a TV, and it was amazing to see the near desertion of a store that has a prominent profile for all things electronic and computers. Fascinated, I asked a sales assistant just how quiet it has been? I was told it had been very busy, as people flocked into the store to buy computers so they could work from home.

How people have reacted to COVID-19 the fear that has been engendered, and the behaviour of many as though Armageddon was arriving, are a fascinating study in behavioural and social psychology.

The internet provides us with access to everything online, and that means our connection is genuinely a digital reality – a phenomenon that will continue to grow.

So, what are the unintended consequences of all that is COVID-19, the fear of the end of the world and prolonged social isolation and the fear to interact?

Australia has already seen exponential growth in phishing attacks throughout corporate Australia – via mobile and email, a 130 per cent jump for the same time last year in attacks and an initial increase of 112 per cent financially, translating into an estimated loss of \$890,000 every day.

Cyber criminals are taking advantage of understanding the landscape that lays ahead and the fear Australians are now riddled with.

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While I understand the importance of containing the impact of COVID-19 and the economic impact it will and is going to have on Australia and globally will be significant, what about the impact to our mental health?

And the question remains, what will the unintended consequences be?

Michael Connory is the CEO of Security In Depth.

delivering essential content to our communities, writes Alex Whitlock, director of *Lawyers Weekly*.

(<https://www.momentummedia.com>. we'll keep delivering for our community in the face of COVID-19)

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