

## **Thoughts in the Shower**

**Robert J. Isaacson**

I recently celebrated a diamond jubilee birthday, which I understand, means 60 in the UK, but 75 in the USA. I will seize the prerogative that accompanies this to share with you my perspective of some of the notable directions in our discipline.

- The advances in dentistry and in orthodontics have been simply awesome both in science and in technology. However, if you think these events have come on fast, hold onto your hat because an accelerating speed of change is the hallmark of our society today. McKinsey and Co noted that it took 46 years for electricity to reach 25% of Americans, but broadband already reaches 25% of our population.
- Newspaper editors were recently polled and 41% believe that online will be the most common way to read newspapers in 10 years. How will today's young orthodontists keep up with accelerating changes in our discipline? Based on today's trends, it is inevitable that the electronic media will dominate, and we are in a great position to help shape this future. The possibilities are limitless. All it took for Google was knowledge and a refusal to be limited by the past.
- Imagine a future where all peer-reviewed orthodontic journals were accessible through links. A fantasy you say, and you may be right. However, anything is possible and all it will take is some creativity and willingness to think freely. For example, what if there was a link such that you could be reading an article about subject X in one journal and saw an interesting reference. What if you could click on that reference number and a link took you to the article in another orthodontic journal. How would such cooperation between competing publishers ever evolve? Perhaps someone might create an annual user access fee that the publishers pool and share. The publisher will regain the cost of putting the article online and access will not be restricted. The user benefits with convenience and the profession will always be able to offer state-of-the-art services. To-

day's utopian idea can be tomorrow's new business model.

- This direction touches on orthodontics and its relationship with its publishers and suppliers. I still carry concerns about what is happening in health care and the increasing blurring of the distinction between the professional and business models. Even most retail merchants have strict rules regarding their relations with suppliers. When you realize the direction health care has moved, there is much room to speculate on the future.
- When we were in dental school, a senior faculty member's lecture on practice management essentially said, "Do good dentistry and the public will beat a path to your door." Of course, we scoffed, and allowed as to how it was easy for him to say this as he lived very well, but it is different when you are a neophyte like us. Today's student, of course, has this problem in spades. Still, it is remarkable that this concept has not changed and that it exists in other fields. For example, recently in our newspaper, a local weatherman (Paul Douglas) was writing about how he got interested in weather. His statement was, "If you love what you do for a living, chances are you'll be good at it, and the money will come, but it has to be in that order." Some things do not change.
- Recently, I was reading Walter Isaacson's (no relation, unfortunately) marvelous biography of Albert Einstein. Why could Einstein think creatively and march to his own drummer? He was educated in an authoritarian German system, but it did not stifle his thinking. As Thomas Friedman put it in his column, "Isaacson's take on Einstein's life is that it is a testimony to the unbreakable link between human freedom and creativity."
- I thought I had spent my life in the most exciting change-filled years of orthodontics and it has been all of that. The only regrets I have are that I know the first half of the 21st century will unquestionably dwarf all that has been, and I really would love to be a player in all that is going to unfold. Now is the time where the ground rules get set down. There has never been a more exciting time to be alive!