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Black (and blue) Berry

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NCR Today

There is a new calm on the city streets, a gentle tone in casual conversation, a smile from drivers of even the most clogged highways. Something has radically changed in our urban centers this week: Blackberrys are on the blink.

This outage has been reported as a kind-of-apocalypse, affecting business and affairs of state. But, for me, it is a piece of heaven, a get-out-of-jail-free card on a board game named "Work: You Can't Escape It."

Watch people walking as they ignore the insidious device glued to their belt loops. No one stops suddenly to answer the buzz, no one leans over dangerously to type out urgent messages in a busy crosswalk. And yet, astoundingly, the world turns. The sun rises, shops open, people run errands, the sun sets and the day closes.

As I've written about previously, I hate my Blackberry -- it annoys me through and through: the look, the feel, the buzz ... and the way it compels me to be "in touch" with work everywhere and anywhere and all-the-time.

My hatred is, apparently, a sign of failure on the part of a firm called Lexicon. Their job is to create brand names that will deliver positive vibes and stick in the brain. According to the magazine *Fast Company*, Lexicon tackled this problem several years ago for the company Research in Motion, which had invented a dandy new PDA (personal digital assistant). Lexicon knew PDAs were loaded with negative connotations, and so the firm came up with a list of things that engendered good feelings and a sense of leisurely enjoyment to counteract that reality: camping, riding a bicycle, drinking a martini.

Someone added "picking strawberries" to that list, then someone else said, hey, those little keys on the tiny keypad look like blackberries! -- and a warm, fuzzy, endearing brand name was born.

So now, when we hear the word "blackberry," we don't think of sweet summer fruits covered in fresh sweet cream, served out on a shaded porch. We think of that irritating PDA that sucks the joy from every private moment we try to gather up for ourselves. Nice work, Lexicon. Maybe you can name some other new PDA "Bunny Rabbit" or "Baby Smiles."

But, for a few days this week, that simply did not matter. Research in Motion (RIM) is in a state of panic all its own -- the Blackberrys are malfunctioning and the human race is, well, still functioning. The company released a video on You Tube this week, soberly telling consumers "we've let many of you down."

Um, no you haven't. Really. Honestly, just keep doing what you're doing. Or not doing. Please.

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