

Staying on Top of Tech's Changing Story; TECH WE'RE USING

The New York Times

September 11, 2019 Wednesday 09:00 EST

Copyright 2019 The New York Times Company All Rights Reserved

Section: TECHNOLOGY; personaltech

Length: 1079 words

Byline: Joseph Plambeck

Highlight: From Washington to London. From the price of avocados to Amazon Prime. Here's how Joseph Plambeck, deputy tech editor, rides herd on how tech is changing the way we live.

Body

From Washington to London. From the price of avocados to Amazon Prime. Here's how Joseph Plambeck, deputy tech editor, rides herd on how tech is changing the way we live.

How do New York Times journalists use technology in their jobs and in their personal lives? Joseph Plambeck, deputy technology editor in New York, discussed the tech he's using.

What tech tools do you use to keep on top of the nonstop flow of tech news?

If anyone has an elegant solution for this, please let me know. I rely on a mishmash of email, news apps, mobile notifications and Twitter.

First thing in the morning, I check email on my creaky iPhone to see what happened overnight in Asia and Europe and whether colleagues in those places need me to weigh in or pitch in on anything. Then I do a quick scan of the apps for our largest competitors, like The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and Bloomberg. I don't read everything, but I look for breaking news that we need to jump on right away in my area of coverage, which means I'm looking a lot at the tech industry and politics.

There is a lot less order to the madness for the rest of the day. I rely heavily on the reporters I work with to tip me off to things happening on their beats. I have also signed up to get alerts, either by email or as pop-up notifications on my phone, from news organizations and newsmakers. And I scan many news sites.

I look at Twitter for news, too. But because I rarely feel better about life after I log on there, and because it takes a lot of effort to separate the valuable stuff from the nonsense, I try to limit my time there. I quit tweeting a long time ago. It was a great decision.

You edit reporters who are spread across the United States and also internationally, in London and elsewhere. What tech is indispensable for that?

Phone calls are amazing things. There is a lot that gets misconstrued in written messages. So when possible, especially on important breaking news, I try to touch base by phone with the reporters. I lean hard on many other bat signals, too — emails, text messages on multiple services, Slack messages and Google chat messages. It's not hard to find me.

Staying on Top of Tech's Changing Story; TECH WE'RE USING

We're also working collaboratively more often, meaning that reporters in places as far apart as London, Washington and San Francisco sometimes [write stories together](#). We used to turn to Google Docs in those situations, because multiple people can work in a file at the same time, no matter their location. That meant I had to move the story into our internal publishing system when the story was ready. Now our publishing system has similar collaboration, which is great.

How has the tech story changed since you have been a tech editor?

It is astonishing how much has changed in the five or so years that I've been focusing on tech. We're not only covering the biggest business story, we're covering one of the biggest stories, period. Tech has changed — and continues to change — just about everything.

Five years ago, I think many of us covering tech knew this was happening. The rest of the world is realizing it now as well. I think that is driving a lot of the [backlash to the tech industry](#) in Washington and beyond. People see many changes happening around them, maybe in their pocketbook, office or government. And they are wondering whether we have a grip on where this is all heading.

You edit a lot of Amazon stories and you live near a Whole Foods, which Amazon now owns. Discuss.

Well, I certainly can attest that the [avocados at Whole Foods are cheaper](#) now.

It's interesting to watch up close what is happening to the store after Amazon bought Whole Foods. I'm frankly surprised it hasn't changed a lot more. You can see Amazon bleed into the store more each month, but [most of the changes are baby steps](#).

Next I hope Amazon takes a leap and tackles the horrible checkout lines. Whatever algorithm they use for that needs to be rewritten from scratch.

Are you a Prime member?

I am, and I like to think our family gets its money's worth. In addition to Whole Foods, where we get a discount as a Prime member, we do some shopping on Amazon.com. Our children use Amazon Music through our Echo device. And I sometimes zone out with a show on Prime Video.

It's not that we decided to be an Amazon family. It has just crept up on us.

Outside of work, what tech do you love to use?

I try to use as little as possible. Few things please me more than looking at my iPhone's Screen Time app on Sunday night and seeing that I've been on the phone for less than an hour that day. While it is rare, that has happened.

I appreciate most the technology that is years old now. Google Maps may have saved my marriage. And FaceTime and similar services blow me away. My family recently visited relatives in Florida without me, and my older son called me regularly on FaceTime, sometimes while he was in the middle of a fun outdoor activity. It was great to see his smiles in real time.

I'm really impressed with the technology going into cars, too. We have a thoroughly conventional and midpriced car, a Mazda CX-5. Yet it has some nice safety tech, like automatic emergency braking and blind spot and lane departure warnings. The adaptive cruise control, which keeps our car a set distance from the one in front of us, makes long drives a little more bearable. It also gets O.K. gas mileage. I'm glad we don't need to wait for carmakers to perfect an affordable [self-driving](#) electric [car](#) before we see some of the benefits.

What is your kids' relationship with technology?

Staying on Top of Tech's Changing Story; TECH WE'RE USING

Our boys are almost 6 and 4, and my wife and I try hard to limit their screen time. We don't always succeed. And because we have another little guy on the way, I fear we'll start losing even more often.

We do pretty well keeping them off devices and with limited TV during the week, especially when school is in session. But we are a little flexible on the weekends, and especially when we travel. They each have an Amazon Kindle Fire tablet that we pull out for long road trips and flights. And the 6-year-old loves — loves! — to play baseball and basketball games on an old Nintendo Wii. His younger brother isn't far behind.

Thankfully, they both enjoy real sports even more, so we turn those devices off and play in real life as much as possible. I've been nursing a sore shoulder most Mondays this summer from throwing batting practice all weekend.

PHOTO: Joseph Plambeck, deputy tech editor. (PHOTOGRAPH BY Calla Kessler/The New York Times FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

Load-Date: September 13, 2019

End of Document