

that is usually built with common components and sold for a few pounds in the local supermarket. This ambitious project required *“copper, to make the pins of the electric plug, the cord, and internal wires. Iron to make the steel grilling apparatus, and the spring to pop up the toast. Nickel to make the heating element. Mica (a mineral a bit like slate) around which the heating element is wound and of course plastic for the plug and cord insulation, and for the all important sleek looking casing”*.

After nine months and at a cost of over a thousand pounds, Thomas finally managed to create a sort of toaster. It lasted 5 seconds, the heating element bursting into flames. However, along his journey Thomas had been forced to resort to using all sorts of other complex devices built from similar standard components that he could have used to make his toaster. Everything from microwaves to leaf blowers was involved in achieving his goal. Our society and the wondrous technologies that we can create not only consume but are dependent upon provision of these standard components. Remove this and the wheel of progress grinds very slowly and very expensively.

Back in 2004, Thomas hadn't attempted this experiment but I was acutely aware that we lived in a world where there's a constant flow of change, where the novel becomes commonplace and where the commonplace enables the novel. This is the environment that businesses live within. This entire process is driven by competition; the desire to differentiate creates the novel, the desire to keep up with others makes it commonplace. If we define economic progress as the movement of our society to ever more complex technological marvels,