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The Bucholz Discharge

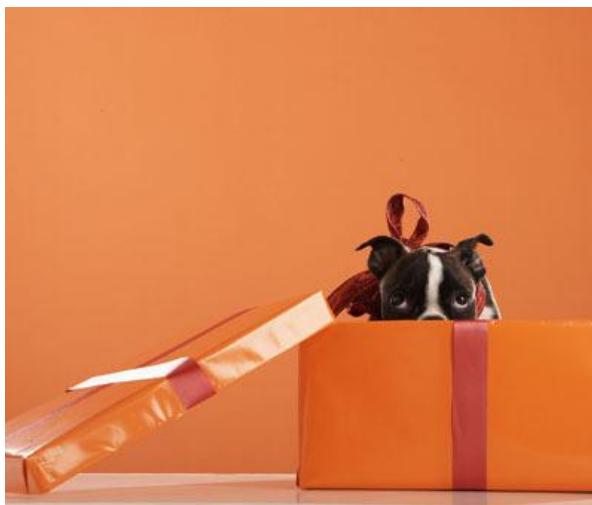
6 Ways Smart Technology Has Made Things Dumber

By Chris Bucholz | July 30, 2013 | 86,280 views

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People are pretty technology-happy these days. We pore over rumors and specs on technology websites, we stand in line to get the newest gadgets, and we beat up people who dare own phones a couple years out of date. New technology isn't just anticipated, it's damn near fetishized. Witness the growing trend of "unboxing," YouTube videos dedicated to providing loving, tender footage of someone delicately taking a new product out of its packaging. Look them up if you want, but maybe make sure there's no one else in the room when you do it; they're seriously almost pornographic.



Thomas Northcut/Digital Vision/Getty Images

Making this image, I guess, basically bestiality. Kind of surprised I found it on a stock image site.

To be fair, the technology we all carry around with us, often just inches from our genitals, is pretty



ELEGIR SEGUIR
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remarkable. These gadgets make life easier and improve it in any number of ways, and are, for the most part, worth getting excited over.

Just not always. In fact, more than a few times a new piece of technology foisted upon consumers has actually been significantly worse in some aspect than its predecessor. Often as not, this is the result of some sort of unfortunate side effect of the new technology, sort of like a new really efficient toilet that uses way less water, only it works by blowing instead of sucking.



Stockbyte/Getty Images

Which would lead to a different type of NSFW video.

And if that sounds unlikely, well, get a load of some of the reverse toilets that we already live with.

#6. Always-on Video Games

[Video games](#) used to be pretty simple. You'd buy one, and you'd slam it into your video game box, and you'd pick up the paddle, and you'd started playing with yourself. Sure, there were probably a few other sexual double-entendres involved that we couldn't pick up on, because we were kids, but otherwise they were pretty straightforward.



Photos.com/PhotoObjects.net/Getty Images

"You know how to fix your cartridge, don't you? It's easy. Just put your lips together and blow."

But that simple process is increasingly no longer how these things work. Putting them in the box doesn't cut it anymore, not unless your box is connected to other boxes, and the other box is working properly and also has your credit card number. This is, in a nutshell, called Always-Online Single Player, and it's already crippled the launches of [Diablo 3](#) and [SimCity](#), and will do so for probably dozens more games to come.



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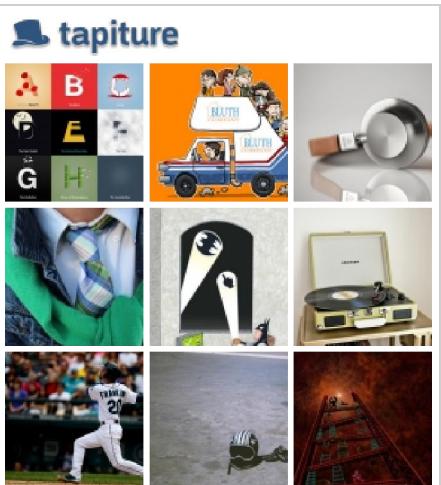
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"Oh, EA, what have you done now, you bag of smashed assholes?"

We're used to new technology improving the consumer's experience, but there's no reason it can't improve the experience (or profit margins) of other stakeholders, as well. And that's exactly what's happened in this particular case, always-online video games being developed to deter piracy and secondhand sales. So really, the technology is better!

Just not for you.

#5. Digital TV

Cable television was originally analog, which, if I understand the Wikipedia entry for "analog" correctly, means that tiny little elves surfing sine waves carried your television programs to you at the speed of light.



John Foxx/Stockbyte/Getty Images

Sounds legit.

Digital cable changed all that, by turning these sine waves into something that looked like escalators made of zeros and ones, which ... are better somehow? I guess the escalators travel faster than the speed of light?



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By CRACKED Staff | 2013-07-29

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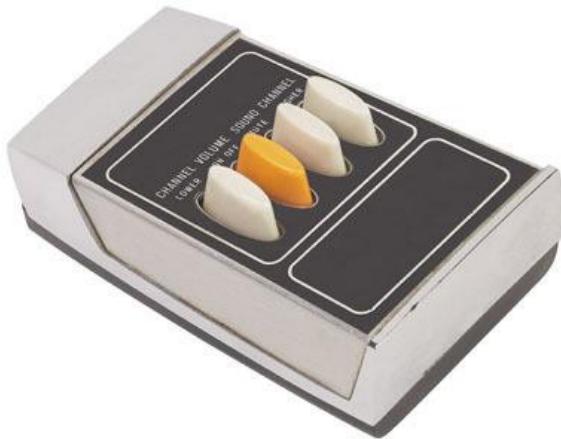
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I'm sorry. I really should learn more about technology before I write these things.

The net result of all this is that digital cable can carry much more programming over the same wire and also incidentally make room for high-definition programming. Really, it's a perfect technological advance where everyone wins!

Except for people who like flipping through channels, that is.

According to a park bench full of angry old men I surveyed for this column, television used to be much better than it is now. You had a remote, much like we do now ...

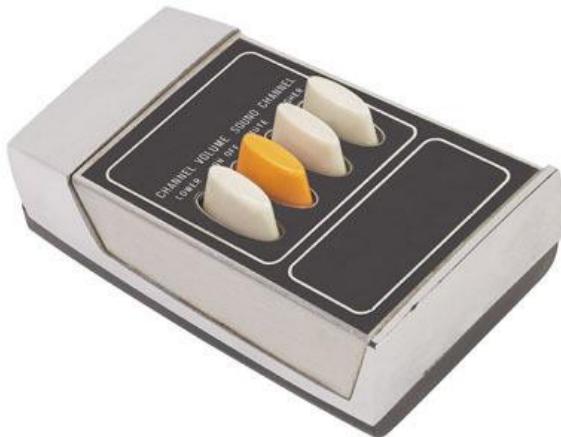


Hemera Technologies/PhotoObjects.net/Getty Images

... and when you pressed a button on the remote, the channel changed. But not in two or three seconds like it does now. It changed instantly. It used to be so fast that you didn't even really need to watch a show, so easy was it to just watch every show all at once.

The reason for the delay is, as expected, a side effect of the technology that's giving us all these hundreds of channels in the first place. At some point, all of this digital content has to be turned back into an analog signal so that it can be absorbed by our stupid, low-tech eyeballs. This is also why digital and high-def cable require those clunky-ass cable boxes. "Changing the channel" has turned from a simple electronic switch into a complicated calculation, and a couple-second delay is all but impossible to get around.

Not that that's likely to placate a bunch full of old men.



Hemera Technologies/PhotoObjects.net/Getty Images

Also, try not to get trapped into explaining how the "Input" button works to them.

#4. Compressed Music

In Latin, "audiophile" means "awkward person," and if you're ever in a conversation with one, you can get a fine demonstration of this by simply mentioning the phrase "dynamic range compression" and watching them instantly flop sweat.



Siri Stafford/Lifesize/Getty Images

"Holy crap, dude. You've got to warn people in the first three rows if you've got a condition like that."

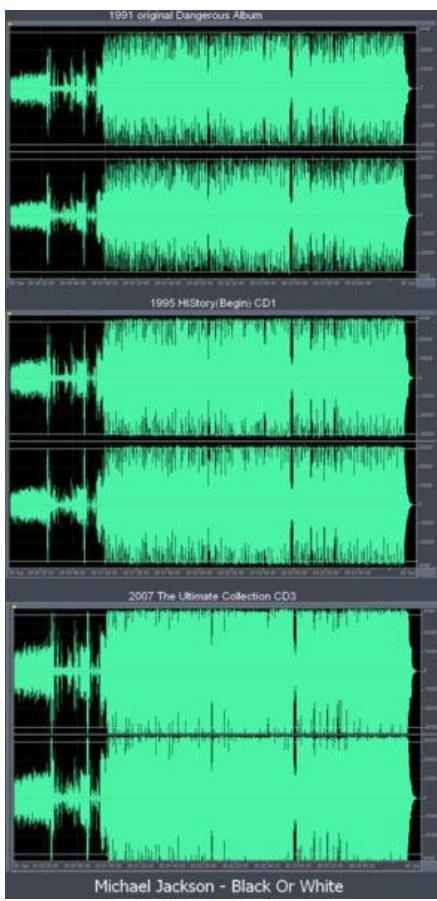
Dynamic range compression is a production technique where the quiet parts of a song are artificially made louder, and the louder parts made quieter. The net effect of this dial twiddling is that the whole song will, on average, sound louder. And industry experts, with long experience studying the music consumption habits of idiots, know that idiots think music that sounds louder is "betterer."



Simon Bremner/Lifesigns/Getty Images

"But the receipt specifically said a *pair* of pants."

Audiophiles, of course, hate it, as it ends up reducing sound quality in exchange for this loudness, and bemoan the ever-increasing amounts of compression record engineers are using in modern audio production, calling it a "[Loudness War](#)."



Wikimedia Commons

Which is a pretty aggressive name for something so dorky, instead of the Gwar album title that it really ought to be.

And that's also a little unfair; there are benefits to dynamic range compression other than loudness. Most notably, it makes a song sound more uniform on low-quality equipment, which isn't

a trivial concern considering how much pop music is listened to on crappy little earbuds or on car stereos with the windows rolled down. Those are real customers – possibly even the majority of customers – and it makes some sense to adjust post-production techniques to accommodate them.



Simon Bremner/Lifesize/Getty Images

"Hey, thanks buddies!"



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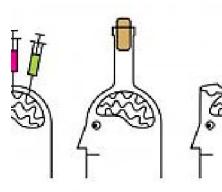
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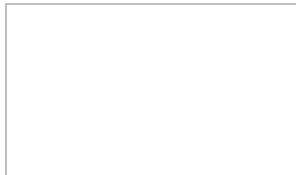
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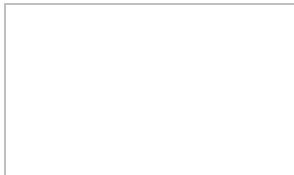
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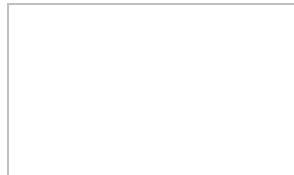
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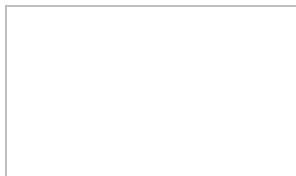
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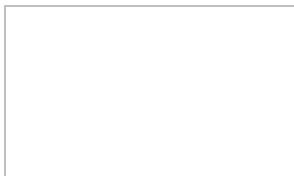
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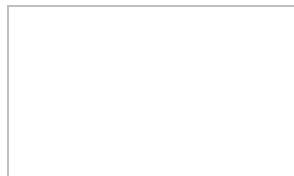
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Chris Bucholz is a Cracked columnist and your favorite comedy writer. He first rose to prominence in 1984 when he was pulled on stage to dance during a Bruce Springsteen music video. He has since done many other things.

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+1 1 0

07-30-2013 | 9:55 AM

As far as #4, well yes, the "loudness wars" have all but destroyed dynamics. The reason, well many CDs are mixed for radio play because musicians love it when they hear their music played over the air waves. Loud mixes serve two purposes. First, the radio station delivers what appears to be stronger signal and two, the louder mix comes through better when your in your car, (when most folks listen to the radio anyway), over your engine noise and other variables including your blower.

[Reply](#)**yayspace**

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:53 AM

Gah, f**k #4. I don't mind all that much compression in the end product, but during production it's caused a lot of arguments. A lot of metal is very compressed (for reasons explained well above), but when overdone and when considerations aren't made for keys, acoustics, or cleans, instead of everything getting "blended", a lot of stuff just gets buried and it sounds like a wall of noise. Nevermind that acoustics and cleans have dynamic ranges needed in order for their phrasing to make sense musically, so there will be arguments between musicians and engineers all the time because the solo suddenly sounds, at best, like just another layer of sound.

It's even worse when the engineer is also one of the musicians, because suddenly only his/her stuff is the stuff you can actually hear with any clarity.

[Reply](#)



pocketlint60

+2 3 0

07-30-2013 | 9:51 AM

About #6: I can't stress enough how always-online single player video games do NOT deter pirates, and do in fact encourage piracy. See, when pirates pirate games with always-online features, the first thing they do is crack and disable the always-online bit so they can play an offline version of the game. But wait, you're probably thinking, isn't that a better version? Yes, it is. Always-online single player games are actually better for the pirates and punish people who purchase the game legally. The people who pirate it don't run the risk of randomly being dropped from SINGLE PLAYER because the SERVER is having issues.

[Reply](#)

rickmcslick

+1 1 0

07-30-2013 | 9:48 AM

Another thing about switching from analog to digital TV signals, and this really only affects you if you don't have cable and use a converter box, but remember way back when, using the bunny ears, even if you had a less-than-perfect signal, you could still reasonably watch your show? There might be a little fuzziness, or maybe the audio wasn't perfectly clear, but you could still enjoy it. Digital over-the-air signals are pretty much all-or-nothing. No momentary static interruptions, just complete loss of signal. Maybe I should just get cable.

[Reply](#)

dfinecy

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:57 AM

This. It's the first thing I said when the whole "conversion" took place. I used to live in middle of nowhere and could usually get a pretty decent signal with rabbit ears but the minute it went digital I couldn't watch anything. Of course, now that I live in the city, it isn't much better and I refuse to get cable...



Salterium

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:47 AM

Except Han shot first...

[Reply](#)

haysoos

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 10:02 AM

Actually, that's not true.

Han didn't shoot first. "Shooting first" implies that Greedo shot at all. Which he did not. Han shot. No one else shot.



mickeyten

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:42 AM

My problem with my last cell phone was that it was too smart to be dumb (as in, it did things I didn't tell it to) but too dumb to be smart (as in, it did them badly.)

On my next upgrade I reverted to a non-touchscreen flip phone and have been much happier. At least now my phone is dumb in controllable, predictable ways.

[Reply](#)

NancyT.

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:32 AM

Mr. Bucholz: I could not possibly agree with you more about the whole widescreen TV thing. If I want to watch my favorite TV show from the 1990s, I can watch a postage stamp; if I want to watch a modern-day show, I still get black bars. But the thing that has irritated the living hell out of me since this stupidity started is that when you see, as one stupid article put it, "the perfectly placed dish of manicotti on the table," you get LESS of human faces. I watch movies and TV shows for the characters, and the wider the picture the smaller the human face. The poor actors are going to have to revert to silent-movie techniques, since we can't see the fast, fierce glance when the director is masturbating over his perfectly-placed dish of manicotti.

Excuse me. You hit a sore point. Could you tell?

[Reply](#)

FataMorgana

+2 2 0

07-30-2013 | 9:32 AM

I sat there for a little while and tried to come up with a better descriptive term for EA than "bag of smashed assholes" and... I couldn't do it. "Bag of smashed assholes" is just about perfect.

[Reply](#)

Haku

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:30 AM

I honestly didn't find much humor in this article, but I DID learn quite a bit. Technology has always been my Achilles Heel, and this cleared up some issues I was having. And it was nice to finally get an explanation as to why soap operas actually look so very different from everything else.

[Reply](#)



bandyTract

+3 3 0

07-30-2013 | 9:30 AM

Putting tablet features on a desktop is exactly like putting a steering wheel on a motorcycle. (Or handlebars in a car.) *Your hands are literally in different places*. On a desktop I have one hand on the mouse and one on the keyboard. On a tablet, I'm holding the tablet with one hand and touching the screen with the other. It's monumentally stupid to try to merge the two.

The fact that Microsoft hasn't changed Windows 8 is a huge F.U. to customers. It's not like they can't, or it would be too expensive, or difficult. They "won't" change it, because somewhere along the line, some suits decided that Windows needed to compete with tablets, or something.

[Reply](#)

Franpa

+1 1 0

07-30-2013 | 9:30 AM

TV interpolation also has the issue of visual artifacts, especially 200hz (240hz) and higher versions where they insert more than 1 frame between source frames. When I get a new TV I'm sticking to one that features 100hz interpolation.

That digital TV complaint is pretty darn legit, channel changing was instantaneous in the good old days, I never really thought about it until reading this article though. I did notice my TV was often a lot slower than my parents at changing channels, especially after first turning it on but it's kinda acceptable.

The delay in changing channels is likely because the video being transferred is compressed/tightly encoded and the TV has to decode/decompress it before displaying it instead of just showing it. It's also likely retaining a "buffer" of data to ensure signal degradation has no impact (Like how Live broadcasts usually are on a 30 second delay so they can kill the signal when something bad happens, before footage of the bad event gets transmitted).

You've seen what happens when the signal degrades right? The picture becomes blocky, audio drops out or you get a "No Signal" message, all of which are infinitely worse than a little bit of snowy artifacting you got with good old analog television.

[Reply](#)

takeadumponme

0 0 0

07-30-2013 | 9:25 AM

Maybe Number 1 just effects people of a certain age because my kids can't see what I am bitching about. They didn't notice the "weirdness" of some of the scenes in the 48fps Hobbit either

[Reply](#)



takeadumponme

+6

6

0

07-30-2013 | 9:18 AM

How about some dynamic compression on my f****g television where it is actually wanted. I can't watch a movie at night in the way I like because I am either straining to hear the dialogue or waking up my kids when the movie calls for some dramatically loud music or just a good old fashioned explosion.

[Reply](#)

wydileie

0

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07-30-2013 | 9:52 AM

If you have a good surround sound receiver, it should have a feature called Audessey, or similar products for certain brands like Pioneer, who make their own. It contains a feature that does this for you called Dynamic Volume where you can set it to the time of day. If you set it to 'Daytime' it will apply very minimal compression, if you set it to 'Midnight' it will muffle the explosions and heighten quiet dialogue for just this purpose.



dzio

+1

1

0

07-30-2013 | 9:04 AM

One more thing about WinXP - quite a lot of people have computers that simply can't run a newer OS. And they don't have to be very crappy computers. Mine can run Skyrim on low/medium settings, but my motherboard is old enough that the drivers for it compatible with Win7 or Win8 (I refuse to even consider Vista) simply don't exist. XP is the only way to go for me.

[Reply](#)

British_Teacher

0

0

0

07-30-2013 | 9:52 AM

Well buckle up chucklefuck, because Microsoft is only going to pander to your amish arse until April 9th 2014. Then they pull the plug. No more security patches, no more updates. Windows XP users will have to fend for themselves and everybody will finally be able to hold on from the tyranical reign of the longest running Operating System in history. That's right, bitches, we're going back to the days when everybody had to upgrade their system every few months just to keep up. Where the developers set the pace and you dance to their relentless tune like horny parakeets. Are you ready to taste the lightning dzio and ride the madness? Because it's ready to taste you.



TehBuG

-21 0 21

07-30-2013 | 8:47 AM

Read first page. saw "QQ QQ DIABLO 3 WAS SO BAD GAIZ!" and diddnt bother reading any more.

Yawn.

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joseeltaco

+11 11 0

07-30-2013 | 8:50 AM

You sir, are an idiot.



Dr.Neutral

+4 4 0

07-30-2013 | 8:54 AM

I must have missed that bit.



Choconado

+5 5 0

07-30-2013 | 8:46 AM

There's a lot of nerd bait to resist in this article, being a geek with a film degree, but there's one thing mentioned, and not exclusive to #1 that bugs and mystifies me. And that's the bit about 24fps always being the standard. Before HD rolled out, for NTSC (Read: The Western Hemisphere) it wasn't. It was 30. And that's why there was always a problem between NTSC and PAL media, which was firmly in the 24 camp. Then when HD technology started coming out, it would all advertise how it was in 24fps, the "highest" standard frame rate, and everyone magically accepted it and acted like it had always been that way, like it was 1984 or something. It is a mystery.

[Reply](#)

iMURDAu

+9 9 0

07-30-2013 | 8:44 AM

Was I the only person who received this article by carrier pigeon and the stupid bird wouldn't post my comment?

[Reply](#)

misfitdave

+8 8 0

07-30-2013 | 8:43 AM

for my entire life ive been trying to explain the soap opera effect to people but i never could quite get them to understand what i was talking about. i often wondered why there was such a big difference in the ways that soap operas/game shows and everything else looked. thank you cracked, is there anything that you CANT do, you know, other than make a better print magazine than MAD

[Reply](#)



MitchG.Robot

+1 1 0

07-30-2013 | 8:42 AM

You're an embarrassment to your country Bucholz!

It's spelled "rumours."

[Reply](#)

shrike1978

+4 4 0

07-30-2013 | 8:42 AM

Actually, 24fps is special. The human eye can perceive between 10-12 individual images per second. It's incorrect to call that a framerate, but that's the closest analogy. Some complex calculus can show that double the framerate of the perception rate is required to make an image look smooth, but that also depends on how the image is shot. Movie cameras leave the aperture open for 1/24 of a second, and then briefly close it while advancing to the next frame. That creates a motion blur within the frame that the visual system uses to more smoothly recreate the motion. That blur isn't present in computer game graphics, which is why higher framerates are generally required there.

Increase framerates can benefit video in terms of motion resolution. If there are lots of fast moving images, 24p can seem choppy at times, which is why newer all digital productions are starting to use 48p.

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