

Title:

Technology Acceleration

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Summary:

Technology is a GOOD THING. Well, most of the time it is. I'm sure you've seen articles bemoaning the NEGATIVE role that technology advancement has played in our lives. I have recently joined the ranks of those doing the bemoaning.

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Article Body:

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Technology is a GOOD THING. Well, most of the time it is.

I'm sure you've seen articles bemoaning the NEGATIVE role that technology advancement has played in our lives. I have recently joined the ranks of those doing the bemoaning.

GADGETS ARE GREAT

Don't get me wrong—I'm a tech guy through and through. I've chosen to work in the technology industry for 20 years, and I love gadgets as well as the next guy. I've got TIVO, a laptop, a cell phone, Wi-Fi, all the standard Hi-Tech fare. I'm an email fanatic. With great anticipation I'm eyeing Home Theater equipment; just waiting for prices to drop a little more and for standards to settle a bit. I love many of the things that technology does to enrich our personal lives, and embrace the productivity improvements that it brings to doing business. And I believe that those who create new technologies and products ALMOST ALWAYS have good intentions, from a societal perspective.

THE LAW OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

But I also believe that the law of unintended consequences is alive and thriving in the technology marketplace. In creating products and services that didn't previously exist in our world, the good is sometimes offset (and occasionally

overwhelmed) by effects on the negative side of the ledger.

Take automobiles, for example. Certainly cars are no longer an example of new technology. But at the turn of the century, they represented one of the greatest leaps forward in technology, and have had wide-ranging, positive societal effects. Autos provided a completely different level of personal mobility, with too many positive effects on our daily lives to list. For businesses, the enhanced business productivity was so enormous that it not only lowered costs, but also allowed totally new businesses to be conceived. Autos and the internal combustion engine that enabled them are truly among the great inventions of all time.

However, do you think the inventors or the internal combustion engine and the automobile had the foresight to envision the amount of pollution this invention has ultimately created? Not to mention the greenhouse gas effect, that is actually causing significant warming to our global climate, with potentially devastating consequences?

Of course, they couldn't. I think this should cause those of us in the technology biz to pause and reflect a bit.

NEGATIVES WITH POSITIVES

There are many more innovations that one could list having major negatives associated with great leaps forward. Cell Phones are another such example. They have provided a leap forward in society that while not quite as profound as automobiles, approaches the same level. They've provided great productivity gains for businesses, and have allowed us to stay connected in our personal lives like never before. But haven't they also contributed negatively to our ability to get away, relax, and enjoy some uninterrupted privacy? I feel this has been a big negative for society, and it's one of those steps that probably can't be undone.

I think even the most driven Type A's among us believe that human beings need at least SOME time to recharge our batteries. Just to get away from it all and relax. Technological advancements have connected us to the extent that it's very hard to do that. You used to be able to take a vacation or a day off, and honestly say you didn't have a phone or an Internet connection available. If you say that now, people might begin to question your veracity. It's possible to be connected nearly everywhere—as a result, it becomes less acceptable than ever to be “disconnected”.

This leads to the biggest complaint I have about the unintended consequences of

the technology revolution:

The general speeding up of our lives.

I'm exhausted--I'll bet you are too For context, most people would consider me a type A personality. So this isn't the complaint of some mellow, laid-back surfer dude. I generally embrace a fast paced life, and particularly enjoy the ability to make progress in business in a rapid-fire matter. But honesty compels me to admit that, at times, the pace of modern life even overwhelms me.

I live out the most gnawing example of this "Acceleration" of our lives every day on the freeways of Southern California. I live in San Diego, which granted is a big city. And big city traffic has, of course, never been much fun. But San Diego isn't New York or Paris by any stretch of the imagination, when it comes to congestion, or the attitudes of the locals. So I don't think I'm reaching for the extreme here.

Compared to even 10-15 years ago, life on the freeways has become hell. I am a pretty fast driver, but on the freeway, it's never fast enough. No matter how fast you want to go, there is always someone coming fast upon you--tailgating and itching to get past you. And it isn't enough to just get around you. The guys in the BMW 3 series have to accelerate and weave in and out of traffic like it's the 20th lap at LeMans.

Those guys have always existed on the highway, you say. And you're right. But the lack of common sense and courtesy seems to have spread throughout the driver-sphere like a bad flu. These days, you try to move into a lane in front of a soccer mom in a huge SUV at your own peril. She may be toting two kids in the back, and of course is talking on her cell phone (those cell phones again!). But she's also caught that LeMans mentality, and no way she's going to intentionally concede that position--let alone the extra ten feet of highway to a "competitor".

I find it especially ironic how the technology acceleration has made other pieces of useful technology obsolete. My favorite is how the speedup on the freeways has eliminated the need for what was once an essential piece of safety technology for drivers: the indicator. It no longer serves a useful purpose on the road. Should you put your indicator on before changing lanes in front of that soccer mom? Ten years ago you certainly should have. But 2005 soccer mom puts the pedal to the medal and cuts you off to prevent you from "moving up a spot" in the unofficial Freeway LeMans. These days, using this once essential technology now only "indicates" to everyone else that it's time speed up to prevent you from making that lane change! God forbid you need to get to that

lane to exit the highway; that next exit better suffice if you don't want to risk a crash. Soccer moms don't glare at you menacingly while doing while cutting you off like the guys in the BMW 3 series will, but the effect is just the same. It's a jungle out there.

So what's the takeaway to this rant?

CAN DOWNTIME MAKE A COMBACK

Once again, I believe that the law of unintended consequences is hard at work. There is a big market being created that while not completely ignored, is underserved. That's the market for enabling our lives to slow back down. Don't misunderstand. I don't mean "giving us more time in the day". That time generated by productivity-enhancing devices seems to just fill back up with more frenetic activity. I mean actually slowing us down, so we can re-charge to sprint another day. This might be a difficult concept for companies to get their arms around, so that they can create new products and services to capitalize on it. But business formation and product creation around this theme would be really revolutionary, and potentially very rewarding.

So the next time you're sitting on the side of the road with a flat tire—and a dead cell phone battery— write me a note. Assuming your wireless Internet connection is still up. I'd love to get your thoughts.