

Getting Real about Technology

The truth behind misguided high-tech myths

by Bob Seidensticker, author of *Future Hype* (www.future-hype.com)

Technology is too important to see it incorrectly. If we can get past the industry and media hype—the high-tech hoopla—to the truth, we'll become wiser adopters, smarter consumers, and more demanding citizens.

Myth: High-tech change is getting faster and faster (and faster).

Truth: Technology is changing as fast today as it has in the past. Sure, the progress made over the last fifty years has been impressive: The computer went from laboratory curiosity to business and personal necessity, the Internet was born, and cell phones became ubiquitous. Airplanes grew more sophisticated, nuclear power advanced, and weapons became more deadly. A peek at any similar period since the Industrial Revolution, however, proves technology was just as quickly developed and life-altering then as now. The telegraph was invented soon bridging the Atlantic and allowing information to travel near the speed of light), steamship service began, and cameras were created and refined. What's more, the sewing machine revolutionized the textile industry, and steam-driven printing presses increased page production to 20,000 sheets per hour and drove down newspaper costs. Today's high-tech changes aren't faster—they're just top of mind.

Myth: The Internet has revolutionized everything.

Truth: The Internet has revolutionized *nothing*. It has simply made some things faster and easier to do. You want news? Get it from television, radio, or newspapers—or turn to the Internet. Want to connect with family and friends? Pick up the phone—or use instant messaging. Want to send a greeting card? Pop it in the mail—or deliver it via e-mail. Music store or iTunes? Yellow Pages or Switchboard.com? AAA or Mapquest? Live auction or eBay? The Internet hasn't revolutionized a thing—it just lets you do what you already could do, but with a little more speed or convenience.

Myth: You should upgrade early and often.

Truth: There's no magic time frame—not six months or six years—for upgrading technology. A new release may offer features you need—but, more often, ones you don't need *or* want. Occasionally, the speed of a new processor *will* improve your productivity; more often, however, what's behind the seduction of an upgrade is pure marketing hype.

Myth: Technology always increases productivity.

Truth: Technology can hinder productivity as much or more as it boosts it—mainly by providing a myriad of distractions. Surfing the net, e-mailing family and friends, and playing solitaire or the computer game du jour are among the time-wasters

that cost businesses more than \$750 billion a year on salaries for which real work was expected, but not performed.

Myth: Faster is better.

Truth: Slower is saner. Just because you *can* enable voice-activated transcription while you carry on a drive-by conference call (and entertain the kids in the backseat with an onboard DVD player), doesn't mean you want to— or should. In resounding rejection of high-tech hype, dozens of “slow cities” throughout Italy are pushing back—banning such modern conveniences as Internet cafés, car alarms, and 24-hour supermarkets.

Myth: Latest is greatest.

Truth: High-tech infatuation wastes time and money. U.S. companies lose over \$130 billion a year buying the latest and greatest—without considering whether it meets their needs or if they've got the resources to leverage it. On a smaller yet significant scale, consumers are guilty of the same waste. The moral? Stop worrying that technology is leaving you behind. More often than not, the high-tech train departing the station is only an amusement-park ride.

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