

March Newsletter 2012

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When It Comes to Predicting the Future, Science-fiction Isn't Bad

We're still waiting for our personal jet packs, and as far as we know, there aren't any condos for sale on the moon. Surprisingly, though, the world of science-fiction has done a solid job of predicting the gadgets of the future.

Here's a quick look at the tech we use today that was first dreamed up in science-fiction novels and movies.



1. Smart robots: Sure, we have plenty of robots.

They help us build our cars and vacuum our rugs, but what about smart robots — metal beings that actually learn and show signs of a personality? So far, those are only present in science fiction, but according to a report by the *Daily Mail*, computer scientist and medical doctor Henry Markram is busy leading the efforts to create a robot that actually learns. The doctor's prediction? His robot will be complete in 2018.

2. Automatic doors: Today, we take automatic doors for granted. It's awfully nice to walk out the grocery store and have those glass doors swing open at our approach. However, as the editors at *Business Insider* point out, author H.G. Wells predicted this technology in his novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*. Turns out, Wells was prescient when it came to this bit of technology. (Digging to the center of the earth?)

Well, that one hasn't come true just yet.)

3. Leaving our atmosphere: It's difficult to imagine a more amazing achievement than blasting into space. Yet, we've become bored with NASA and its exploits. Back in 1961, though, when Yuri Gagarin became the first human in outer space, it was a pretty big deal. Author Jules Vern surely would have appreciated it. He fantasized about outer space travel way back in his novel *From the Earth to the Moon*, which was published in 1865.

4. Body scanners: *Paste Magazine* reminds us of that scene in Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Total Recall* in which our hero must undergo a full body scan when going through a security checkpoint. These body scans became commonplace at airports across the country starting in 2010.

5. iPads: As Britain's *The Guardian* newspaper points out, the seminal science fiction film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, correctly predicted much of today's technology. This includes the film's astronauts staring into flat video devices, even while eating. Sounds a lot like the iPad.

Of course, science-fiction is far from perfect in its crystal ball capabilities. Here are two notable misses from the world of science-fiction:

1. Individual jet packs: This is probably the biggest disappointment. People still aren't flying around with the help of their own personal jetpacks. We're still stuck walking. Boo.

2. Meals in pill form: Anyone who's running late for a big meeting can appreciate the meal in a pill. Just pop the pill and you're full. No mess and no cooking. This, alas, has not yet come to pass. It's fast-food chains for us when we need a quick bite.

Post Script

March in sci-fi history:

March 22, 1931—Born: William Shatner, aka Captain Kirk

March 26, 1931—Born: Leonard Nimoy, aka Spock

March 22, 1995—Premiered: sci-fi TV series "Sliders," on Fox

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9 People You Should be Following on Twitter

You're on Twitter, and you're tired of reading about what your brother-in-law ate for breakfast (Grape Nuts, again). You're interested in following the tweets of people who have real thoughts and actually have something interesting to say.

You're in luck: Great thinkers, legislators, celebrities, sports stars, scientists, and entrepreneurs all have their own Twitter feeds, and you can catch a glimpse



into their daily lives simply by following them.

Here, then, are nine of the more interesting people that you should be following on Twitter:

1. Kanye West: Follow @kanyewest and you won't be disappointed. The musician is never afraid to say what's on his mind, even if what he says rarely makes any sense. West will probably tick you off at some point, but he's never boring. (Note: PG-13 to R rated)
2. Conan O'Brien: The late-night talk-show host happens to be one of the wittiest people around. He's also a master of the absurd, and his Twitter comments are always entertaining. You'll be happy to know, too, that he never promotes his show through his tweets.
3. Marissa Mayer: You might not know Marissa Mayer, but if you like technology, she's worth a follow. Mayer was the first female engineer at Google. If you want some interesting tidbits about Google and a look into the life of a tech expert, follow @Marissamayer.
4. Mike Massimino: Head in the clouds? Then follow @Astro_Mike, the Twitter home to NASA astronaut Mike Massimino. This astronaut can give you the inside scoop on life at NASA and a glimpse into what it's like to go into space. (He also made a recent cameo on the TV show The Big Bang Theory. And, yes, he tweeted about it.)
5. Rainn Wilson: Fans of NBC's The Office know Rainn Wilson as beet farm owner and top salesman Dwight Schrute. He also runs one of the more entertaining Twitter feeds out there at @Rainnwilson. An example of a recent Tweet: "If I had a bird, I would call it James VanDerBeak."
6. Ryan Penagos: If you like comics, you should know Ryan Penagos. He's the editorial director of Marvel Comics. He's also a busy Tweeter at @Agent_M. Penagos and recently Tweeted about a new Spider-Man video game and gave his thoughts on his favorite comics. (He likes the work of writer Brian Michael Bendis.)
7. Barack Obama: Maybe you didn't vote for him, but Barack Obama is the president of the United States. How can you not follow his Twitter feed? Check out what the Commander in Chief has to say at @BarackObama.
8. Bill Gates: Again, you might hate Microsoft Windows, but you should still follow the Twitter feed of Bill Gates. The man has made an undeniable impact in the tech world. And today, he and his wife are devoting their time to important charitable causes.
9. Lady Gaga: Lady Gaga has become a true Twitter star with more than 8.5 million followers. Maybe you don't like her music, but at least you can learn from a true PR/marketing genius. See what all the fuss is about by following her at @ladygaga.

P.S. On March 21, Twitter turns 6.

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New to Windows 7? These Tips Will Make You More Productive

Windows 7 represents a significant improvement over previous Windows operating systems. However, if you don't know how to use this latest version of Windows properly, you'll miss out on a host of goodies that'll help you work more efficiently.

By mastering a few simple tricks, you'll be able to get the most out of Windows 7.

Find and repair problems without outside help

Is your operating system acting strange? From the Control Panel, click "troubleshooting" to access a series of wizards that will resolve common operating problems. This includes cleaning up systems that are slowed by too much adware and other clutter.

Use AppLocker to block malware

What if you have younger members of the household who insist on installing cumbersome software to your computer? Install too much of this software, and your computer will turn into a sluggish mess.

AppLocker allows you to run and install only programs with your pre-approval. For instance, you can tell AppLocker to only run programs created by reputable companies such as Microsoft. If, say, your kids try to install a program from an unknown publisher, AppLocker will block it.

Preserve battery power

Windows 7 comes with its own power efficiency service. This allows you to access reams of information about how much power your laptop is consuming. This can be important if you're working from a remote location and you're not near a charging source.

Share the love

Finally, you can use a Windows 7-enabled computer as a software-based wireless router with the operating system's Virtual Wi-Fi feature. If you enable Virtual Wi-Fi, any other Wi-Fi devices within range, including tablets and laptops, will view your computer as a new network. These devices will then be able to share your connection.

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Moving Beyond the Mouse: Connecting with Our Computers in the Future

We've already had a taste of mouse-free computing. Touchscreens on our smartphones and tablets allow us to search the Internet, compose email messages,

send texts, and stream movies—all without using a mouse.

But what about the future? How will we interact with our computers in the coming decades? Once we ditch the mouse, what comes next?



Gesture sensing

Consumers who own Wii or PlayStation video games already have an idea. Both of these game systems offer users the chance to play games and explore the Web through wireless remotes that synch with body movements. Wii players can smack a tennis ball by swinging their hands when they hold a wireless remote. They can jog in place, climb a virtual mountain, or shoot menacing robots in the same way. This is known as gesture sensing. The tech isn't quite ready for standard computing yet. However, it's not difficult to imagine a future in which gesture sensing becomes one of the primary modes of interacting with our computers.

Multi-touch technology

But this is just one interaction innovation. There's also multi-touch technology. Again, iPad and other tablet users are already familiar with this. By tapping icons on their screen, they can open apps and programs. By swiping their fingers across the screen, they can flip to a new page on a website. By pinching pages, they can zoom on an image to make it larger.

Voice recognition

Another likely tech jump involves voice recognition. Rather than clicking a mouse button to open a program, users can simply tell their computers to open a particular Word file or close iTunes. Some of this already exists, most notably Siri, the personal assistant built into the iPhone 4S.

No matter what happens, though, the odds are that we'll still rely at least somewhat on the humble mouse. After all, it's served us well for many years.

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Recommended Reading: *You Are Not a Gadget*

Has the emergence of the web benefited society? We certainly think so! (Surprise, surprise.) It has allowed us to get our news from a wider variety of sources. It has made it easier than ever to read books, essays, short stories, and poems from a multitude of authors. It allows us to shop for better auto insurance rates, invest our money and find the best Thai restaurant in town, all in seconds.



But what about the downside of the Internet revolution? That's something that concerns Jaron Lanier, a pioneer in the development of virtual reality and bestselling author of *You are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*. While Lanier agrees that the web has made life easier, he says that the benefits have come at a cost to society's civility and even creativity. That cost is the central tenant of *You are Not a Gadget*, one of the more thoughtful works about our nation's online obsession you're likely to find.

We don't agree with everything Lanier says, but his is an intelligent voice that's well worth listening to.

Now available in paperback on Amazon: Jaron Lanier: "[You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto.](#)"

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