

Technology being wasted on smart gizmos

All of our technology is completely unnecessary to a happy life. Tom Hodgkinson

Mark Pavilons

While Bill Gates may disagree with Tom's observation, we all know that technology has become our worst, double-edged sword. The massive info sharing through the Internet has its obvious advantages, namely oodles of information that transcends time and location. It's instant and limitless. Virtually everything you need, and a lot that you don't, at your fingertips. Some argue that our reliance on tech makes us less intelligent and lowers our collective IQs. We no longer think for ourselves, preferring to allow our gadgets do all the hard work, like remembering phone numbers and birthdays. How many of you still remember your home phone number from when you were a child? Can you believe that a rotary dial phone is a relic? James Thurber once said that "Progress was all right. Only it went on too long." You only have to look around at all the nifty gadgets for sale to prove his point. Our homes are filling up rapidly with so much tech, it's scary. Techy gadgets in the home are designed to simplify everyday routines and keep us connected to the outside world. The "heart of the home" - the kitchen - boasts a ton of ever-evolving technologies that do just that. Amazon smart home capabilities, much like the Amazon Echo with Alexa, are currently in development to be added to a suite of appliances. You will soon be able to speak commands such as "Alexa, microwave on medium for 45 seconds," or "Alexa, set the freezer temperature to zero degrees Fahrenheit." With some Whirlpool appliances already implementing this technology, GE, Kenmore, LG and Samsung are quickly following suit. Some appliances currently have app-based technologies incorporated and you can check the status of your fridge through a phone app or voice commands to ensure settings are correct and the appliances are operating optimally. Or you can operate your oven without even being near the appliance. Taking it a step further, the Samsung FamilyHub Fridge uses a touch screen display as a communication centre for creating shopping lists and calendars that can be sent directly to a phone-based app. A camera inside the fridge allows you to see everything you have in-stock, taking the guess work out of what you may need to shop for. That's what everyone needs, the ability to window shop in your own home! I bet more technology went into this than what was used by NASA to put a man on the moon! The June Intelligent Oven, at roughly \$1,500, is a counter top oven that perfectly bakes and roasts most foods automatically. Once you place your dish inside, artificial intelligence senses the item type and weight. A touchscreen display will provide the suggested cooking method for you to select. An interior camera and WiFi connectivity allow you to view the cooking progress on a mobile app. Worry-free for little ones who may be nearby, the outside stays perfectly cool while cooking. "Now you have time to read a book and be smarter yourself!" reads the promo. Ok, I can see some merit in this, but what about good, old Jeeves? Who wants to watch a pork roast cook on their phone? Titanium Falcon's Talon Smart Ring is a device that combines smart home control with jewellery. It gives you command and control of devices by simply using hand gestures. You can now control some of the newest models of washing machines to your smart phone. Those nifty little vacuum robots have been around for a while now but they've become a lot smarter. The Evovacs Deebot Ozmo can switch between mop and vacuum mode when reaching different floor surfaces. It also links to your smart device via an app to tell it which rooms to clean or not. One bit of tech I don't mind at all is my smart TV. I also like my voice command remote. Samsung has a microLED TV called "The Wall." It consists of a modular design that lets you assemble your own display to whatever size you desire. Although making a 146-inch display is currently very expensive, it will get cheaper down the road. Even our mattresses are becoming "smart." Magnismartech is an app-enhanced "bed system" that collects data and adjusts the mattress while you sleep to help improve your future "sleeping experience," and it can even react and prevent potential snoring events. So, while technology maintains its dizzying ascent, the lifespan of batteries is still the biggest hurdle! And few are immune to power outages or brownouts! In almost all of today's appliances, the only thing to fail is the ominous, and expensive "motherboard." So the smarter things get, the more expensive they become to maintain and repair. I can envision a mountain of mother boards, discarded phones and gutted fridges piling sky high on some uncharted island in the Pacific! I find it a bit weird that all of this expertise, engineering and human thought goes into making our lives simpler and easier. In any survey I've filled out in recent years, nowhere does it ask whether I want a talking fridge or singing toilet. Do we really need any of these things? Okay, maybe the goal here is to free up our time from tedious chores, time that can be better spent with our families. However, when everyone in the family is on their phone, it's no longer quality time. I think advances in household gizmos only gives us more time to engage in trivial pursuits.

I believe technological advancements should have loftier goals. I'd trade in my smart phone any day for a cure for diabetes. I really want Alexa to work on a sustainable clean power source, instead of finding me the closest Chinese take-out restaurant. I want my AI fridge to provide clean drinking water for everyone in the developing world.

