

Tech Savvy: The Decade in Review

This has been a heck of a decade. We started it with Y2K, a non-event due to the diligent work of a few. When the hype about Y2K generated by the media died out, people started to critically look at what they had bought. Where a company could survive on PR and buzzwords before, it took a real business plan.

No account of the last decade would be complete without mentioning the World Trade Center. What doesn't get tallied is what that event did to the country. We became suspicious and hostile to anyone different, even fellow citizens, and we became timid. America was founded with a leap of faith and expanded with people willing to chase a dream. Now people choose the safety of unemployment over the risk of opening a business with the possibility of success. This created opportunities elsewhere.

Litigation became the norm. Despite record sales, the RIAA attacks people who they claim have shared files, doing little research into the identities of the accused, coming up with enormous figures in damages. SCO, one of the major companies developing UNIX applications decided to sue everyone rather than work. This did not go as planned. When they could not prove their allegations, their stock prices dropped through the floor, they were delisted from NASDAQ, and fired their CEO.

War in Iraq and Afghanistan meant a temporary reprieve from the ailing economy, and drove technology. Laptops are tougher, encryption is better, and our ability to communicate ubiquitously is due in part to technological advances made during the gulf war. When we endured natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, this communication made the difference in many cases. We saw some real chinks in technology's armor. New viruses with new and advanced capabilities became common, but the objective was the real change. These attackers weren't after discovery and "cyber-vandalism", the new breed of hacker was after control and money.

Computers became faster, not because of a faster rate of work, but because we use multiple cores, effectively putting more processors on the job. We discovered that "less is more", though "cute factor" played a part. What Minis did for cars, Netbooks did for computers. The innovations of these devices found their way into many things, boosting efficiency. We discovered that we could build applications in a web page. Web enabled software became viable with some new scripting and programming languages and techniques.

What will the next decade bring us? Ubiquitous communications. A merging of the cell phone and PDA has brought about the "smart phone", and it's capabilities will continue to increase with the integration of wireless accessories. This will yield a new class of computer, something researchers currently call "wearables". Microsoft will continue its hold on the PC market, though it will loose ground to both Macintosh and Linux.

When the veterans come home, the military will downsize again. This will raise unemployment, and the government will be compelled to do something. They may choose to make it financially inviable to outsource with tariffs or regulations.

Litigation will get worse before it gets better. The RIAA accused a grandmother who has never owned a computer of sharing files, and while they dropped that defendant from the list during discovery, it calls into question their methods. One of these days a justice will question everything.

Finally, they will decode the final glyph on the Mayan calendar. Since the glyph will translate to “Continued on the reverse, please turn over”, the world won't end in 2012.