

The Internet of Things

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INANIMATE/ANIMATE

Devices that we used to think of as inanimate will become aware. Their newly animated state will impact us in ways that will be both mundane and profound, from managing the crispness of our lettuce to the flow of blood to our hearts.

CARRY/WEAR/IMPLANT

The devices we carry are just the tip of the iceberg. There are also the devices we wear, like Go Pro cameras, Nike Fuel Bands and Google Glass. Then there are the devices implanted in us, like monitors and pacemakers, which make us the bearers of multiple nodes on the internet of things.

TRUST

Brands represent many things but, above all, they are shorthand for trust. The level of trust a person looks for in a brand of shampoo – that it should be functionally effective and uncontaminated – pales in comparison to the level of trust required when control shifts from man to machine, object or thing.

ACTIVE/PASSIVE

Some devices are active; they help us to do things. Some devices are passive; they allow things to be done to us.

AWARE

Everything is aware, or at least has the potential to be aware of and interact with just about everything else.

DYSTOPIAN VISION/UTOPIAN PROMISE

Some may consider the internet of things to be a dystopian vision of a world where we become accustomed to machines controlling certain aspects of our lives. Do we want police departments to know how fast we drive? Do we want our employers to know what drugs we take, or what we eat, drink, buy and throw away? Do we want our spouses, parents and children to know where we are at all times? Everyone has a desire for privacy, and there are instances where it may be particularly important that such privacy is maintained.

The question is: will our dystopian fear outweigh the utopian promise? Or will we come to value being rewarded for our good sense and habits, for the chance to live longer and better, for the costs of healthcare to be re-distributed more equably between the behaviorally responsible and the outwardly foolish? Do we relish the freedom that technology creates more than we fear the inevitable uncoupling of productivity and employment that technology already threatens?

PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONNECTED CAR

INCREASED CAR SAFETY

The Mercedes/Lexus perspective revolves around active safety, where the vehicle's functions identify and compensate for driver frailty, the threat of the immediate environment and even the terror of parallel parking. Smart safety will be table stakes across the board in five years.

INCREASED JOY OF DRIVING

The Audi perspective is that drivers will be able to choose whether to engage with the driving experience – from the joy of the open road to the drudgery of stop-and-go traffic – or abdicate it altogether.

SELF-DRIVING CAR

Google's perspective is that human interaction with the vehicle is a waste of time that could be applied to a more valuable, productive activity. To prove its point, Google has produced a self-driving car that has been approved for use in California and Nevada. In all cases, advanced telematics will connect us with the places and things around us, giving brands further incentive to attach discoverable data to the environment.

WHICH CAR SOLUTION WILL PREVAIL?

Which perspective ultimately prevails will be a function of time, place and attitude. The Audi perspective will likely prevail in the medium term, given that people still like to engage with driving (at least some of the time). But Google is likely to own the long game, particularly when all cars will have fuel cells and limited range. At that point, optimizing time and cost will outweigh the pleasure of driving, and self-drive will become the most carbon-efficient form of private travel.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

It seems as though we still have choices but, in the end, it won't really be up to us. We can't (or won't) opt out of consumption, and we can't prevent the things we consume from becoming increasingly intelligent. When we don't run out of ketchup, we will be pleased. When a smart car saves our lives, or a chip finds the dog we love and lost, we will be delighted. When we get a ticket for speeding without seeing a cop, we will be irritated.

When we are denied a job because our health profile is outside certain parameters, we will be devastated. As in all things, the balance felt by the individual will determine an outcome more dystopian or utopian.

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