

Obsolete Learning Technologies

By **Joshua Kim** December 29, 2009 10:57 pm

The Silicon Alley Insider recently named [21 technologies that became obsolete](#) this past decade. My favorites from the list included: the PDA, paid e-mail accounts, dial-up, film developing, video rental stores, landlines, public pay phones, VCRs, phonebooks, and CDs. What **learning technologies** have become obsolete this decade?

1. Scantron Sheets: When I first started teaching (in 1997) we would give multiple choice tests on Scantron sheets, which would then be graded by the Scantron scanner. Today, thankfully, high-stakes multiple choice testing has been replaced by the testing engines in the LMS. We also know that good pedagogy involves frequent, low-stakes testing - and that mid-term or final multiple choice exams most test students ability to take tests.

2. Overhead Projectors and Transparencies: Remember the days when textbooks would come bundled with color transparencies (matching to tables and graphs from the book) that we would show with the overhead projector during class? I remember doing lots of photocopying on to transparencies of my own teaching materials as well. For each class I'd have to lug in the "portable" overhead projector, as many classes did not have a permanent one installed.

3. Classroom VCR/DVD Players: The showing of any video in class longer than 10 minutes (save for film or media classes) has always driven me crazy. Nowadays any video should reside in the LMS (either linked to the campus streaming server or uploaded for shorter clips), available for students to watch outside of class on their own time. Not so long ago showing video inside of class seemed acceptable, nowadays that time can be used for discussion and debate.

4. Course Packs and Course Readers: I don't know the whole legal history of course packs (here I need my higher ed. vertical search engine), although I understand that it is long and complicated. Nowadays I'm not sure why anyone would produce paper copies of course readings, where it is much easier for both students and faculty to link or upload course readings into the LMS. I think we have about universal integration between library course reserve systems (with copyright cleared readings) and our learning management platforms.

5. Photocopiers: I must have photocopied thousands of articles during my student years. Journals could not circulate, so the process involved tracking down the appropriate journal article, finding a working photocopier (not always easy), and creating a stack of articles for later reading. Today we search our academic library databases (or Google) and print. Tomorrow we will download the articles to our e-readers.

6. Microfiche: Card catalogues are a pretty distant memory for me, but microfiche made up a big part of my life as an undergraduate U.S. history major. Microfiche was the media we used to view old newspaper articles. It was a tool to discover primary source documents. Today I still see microfiche readers hanging out in the library, although I don't think I've ever witnessed a student

using them. Fact is, if the archives are not online then for all intents and purposes they do not exist.

7. Language and Computer Labs: Language labs are basically gone - computer labs are not far behind. With almost all students coming to campus with their own laptop it makes little sense for colleges spend precious resources on a roomful of desktop machines. I'm wondering if thin clients are even necessary - wouldn't it be more cost effective to have a few loaner laptops available for students when their own computers break down? Could money saved on computer labs, maintenance, upgrades, staffing etc. be re-directed to learning technologies?

8. Paper Journals and Periodicals?: This is a giant can of worms - I know. We can debate reference books and other paper products. I'd like to understand why paper subscriptions to journals and periodicals are still necessary when we have full-text searchable databases. My guess is that publishers don't discount electronic texts, so that is no cheaper for schools to forgo the paper option. Is this true?

21 Things That Became Obsolete This Decade

PDA's

Remember that trusty stylus? The once-awesome Palm Pilot had no chance with the advent of the Blackberry, and then, of course, the touch-screen smartphone.

E-mail accounts you have to pay for

In a word: Gmail

Dial-up

Static... dial tone... repeat a few times... ah, internet!

Definitely won't miss that process.

Getting film developed

Does anyone actually do this anymore?

Movie Rental Stores

The massive popularity of Netflix and Video-On-Demand has made it virtually unnecessary to go to an actual store to rent movies. Blockbuster is feeling the shift -- the company is set to shut down [960 of its stores](#) this year alone -- and we bet they don't last long into the new decade.

Maps

No more getting lost on those epic road trips... just punch in your destination into your GPS or smartphone and you're good to go.

Does anyone else find this one a little bittersweet?

Newspaper classifieds

Mainly thanks to [Craig Newmark](#), the internet became the place to go to find a job or sell your old couch.

The Landline

With wireless penetration in the U.S. currently at [89%](#), it's no surprise that many people are using their mobiles or internet voice services as their primary way to

connect.

And when we consider the fact that about [one-fifth](#) of American households were wireless-only as of June 2009, it's not hard to conclude that the landline is on its way out.

Long-Distance Charges

In the same vein of VoIP and cell phones, it no longer costs extra to make those cross-country calls. And Skype and various other free internet chat services make international calls totally free (at least for now).

Public pay phones

Obviously. Even [homeless people](#) have cell phones now.

VCRs

DVD players [first](#) outsold VCR's in 2002; by 2004, they were outselling them at [40 to 1](#). Combine that total shift to digital movie-watching with the development of DVR, and you had the inevitable death of the poor VCR.

Fax machines

With the advent of the e-fax, and considering how annoying regular faxing can be, we think it won't be long before everyone's taking a bat to their fax machines

Phone books, dictionaries, encyclopedias

Our old bastions of data have been fading fast over the last few years, replaced by -- what else?-- the internet.

Note: there are still at least [101 other useful purposes](#) for those gigantic tomes. **e.g.** Keep one in the garage, tearing out pages to soak up oil or other

unpleasant spills.

- . Use them for flower pressing.
- . Tear out pages to start fires in woodstoves.
- . Make a booster seat with directories and duct tape.
- . Create papier mache or decoupage projects.
- . Soak up pet urine for free instead of using paper towels.
Mulch vegetable gardens.

CDs

Poor CD's. But could anything really have withstood the amazing convenience of digital music and the worldwide adoption of the iPod? As album sales dropped by another [13% this year](#), it's only a matter of time until the CD becomes just a relic of times bygone.

Ditto to the gold ol' [Sony walkman](#).

Backing up your data on floppies or CDs

This decade, we said hello to sleek external hard drives and tiny thumb drives.

Getting bills in the mail

Envelopes! How quaint. The ease and speed of online bill-pay and banking, plus [the environmental incentives](#), will probably make mailings obsolete soon.

Buttons

Bye, bye buttons -- the iPhone seems to have sent us hurtling towards a touch-screen world straight out of [Minority Report](#).

Losing touch

Social networks have practically erased the possibility of ever losing touch with anyone.

The downside: you can no longer use that as an excuse for never speaking to your creepy first-year roommate again.

Boundaries

Boundaries also went out the window with the huge popularity of Facebook and Twitter.

Not surprisingly, this is not always a [good thing](#) ... especially when it comes to [your mom](#).

Paper

Probably the biggest casualty of the decade. With most communication now conducted online, magazines and newspapers crumbling, and e-readers increasing in popularity, paper is now on serious life support.

It's likely we'll look back and say that, after a [2,000 year](#) reign, paper was killed by the noughties.

Bonus: Record Stores

Records have long been obsolete, except as nostalgia. But the record store, as in a store that sells music, has now been replaced by the internet and iTunes.

15 Gadgets That Changed Everything This Decade

Apple iPod

What is there to say about the iPod? It saved Apple, helped kill the music industry and changed the way the world listens to music.

Samsung Flatscreen Televisions

The flat screen high definition television has TV watchers stoked, and some in the media industry bummed. Hollywood is scared people won't leave their house for movies, opting stay home and enjoy their big screens. Sports franchises are likewise worried.

Samsung is the the flat screen television sales leader, so we're singling it out here. Really though, it's the entire market for flat screen televisions.

Garmin GPS

GPS devices started becoming ubiquitous in cars at the end of the decade, with Garmin selling millions of them. Smartphones are ready to stomp on their market, but these gadgets still have some years to go before they're obsolete.

Research In Motion BlackBerry

Research in Motion was one of the early smartphone leaders thanks to its awesome real time email service. The BlackBerry curve is still the best selling smartphone on the market.

Toyota Prius

There's only one hybrid that really matters, the Prius. Everyone else is playing catch up. It was invented in the late nineties but took off this decade. The Prius has been a regular top seller for Toyota.

TiVo DVR

At one point in the decade TiVo threatened to become a verb. If you were out of the house, you could "TiVo" Lost and watch it later.

In 2008, TiVo's revenue was its highest at \$273 million. Analysts expect sales to slide in the future. Part of the reason: Cable companies built the same functionality into cable boxes, and now we hear "DVRing" more often than "TiVoing." TiVo still owns many key patents, so we wouldn't count it out.

USB Thumb Drive

A radical gadget that gets no respect. Remember the first time you saw one? It was sort of mind blowing that this little guy could carry so much around. It also made work or school easier since you could carry all your documents around.

The price has gone from over \$100 to free. The first thumb drives were rolled out in Spring of 2000.

Amazon Kindle

It's Amazon's best selling product, and it's made big waves, but it doesn't feel like it's from *this* decade. It's gray, dreary, and pretty limited. A hot item for now, but we're not convinced Amazon will own the tablet/e-reader market in three years.

Nintendo Wii

When everyone else was digging deeper with elaborate games and sharp graphics, Nintendo decided to go with game play. Smart move.

The Wii has sold 56.5 million units in its life [as of October](#). Of equal importance, it's sent rivals Microsoft and Sony scrambling to come up with motion based gaming systems of their own.

Nikon D1

This is the Nikon D1, the first Digital SLR to really replicate film. Nikon launched it in 1999. Canon came out with its rival a year later.

With the advent of the DSLR, and the popularity of point and shoot digital cameras, the days of print film are just about over. It's limited to hobbyists, fans of irony, and nostalgic-types.

Pure Digital Flip

The camera of choice for aspiring citizen journalists, as well as nifty little piece of hardware for people capturing memories. A radical upgrade from the bulky cameras of the 90's.

Pure Digital parlayed [over 2 million in unit sales since 2007](#) into a sale of the company to Cisco for \$590 million this year.

Sony Playstation 2

Sony's Playstation 2 kicked off the decade, launching in March of 2000 in Japan.

It flattened the competition, selling [138 million units during the decade](#). At the time it launched, the primary competition was the Sega Dreamcast.

It wasn't just an awesome gaming experience, it also acted as many people's first DVD player.

Motorola Razr

The Razr made cell phones stylish. It set the new standard for design, forcing all the manufacturers to make slimmer and slimmer phones.

It was the top selling from 2005-2008 phone until [the iPhone knocked it off its perch](#). It's sold well over 100 million units since its late 2004 introduction.

Guitar Hero

Plugging a plastic guitar into a Playstation became a massive craze drawing in

gamers and non-gamers, alike. Since the franchise was launched in 2005, Guitar Hero has racked up over \$2 billion in sales.

Apple iPhone

The iPhone is the gadget of the decade. It took elements of all the best gadgets - iPod, Flip, Razr, USB drive, Wii -- and put it in your pocket. It's not as robust as all of those gadgets yet, but it's on its way.

As we enter a new decade, the iPhone provides the clearest roadmap of what might be next.