



Speak Into My Shirt

Remember when there were no little white iPods? Seems like only yesterday doesn't it?

Well guess what? iPods are already obsolete! Next year, MP3 players will be embedded in sunglasses. So, now our kids will be able to be cool and deaf at the same time.

If you are like me, you find the speed of technological change disorienting and especially so when we learn that next year's eyeglass iPods are already scheduled for replacement in the year after next by communications devices imbedded in our clothing!

How to keep up? How to keep our organizations on the cutting edge?

First, we've got to read. Ideas are raining down on us and it will pay to be able to recognize early those that can transform our lives. Let me give you some examples of a wave of innovations that may hold special promise for those of us in public safety.

- By April, 2005, antimicrobial work surfaces will be available for use in ambulances and hospitals. Microbe-resistant agents will be bonded into work surface materials. No more scrubbing! No more disinfectant!
- Soon, there will be no screens to touch. IBM has developed and will soon market wireless mini-projectors/cameras/transmitters that display images on walls, windshields, table tops... you get the idea. Users will touch what appear to be icons and their actions will be recorded by the camera triggering the computer action that is desired.
- The next version of GPS will practically drive our cars. By combining electronic navigation with XM satellite radio and an interactive mobile mapping solution, ambulances and fire trucks will be directed to the scene via routes selected by the GPS based on real-time traffic reports monitored by the XM radio.
- Volvo is set to introduce side-view mirrors featuring integrated mini-cameras that scan blind spots and instantly alert drivers to flashing lights and other phenomena. That may help with folks who claim they didn't hear the siren or see our lights. In addition, if one starts to drift out of one's lane, this system will sound an aural alarm and display a visual signal alerting us to our transgression.
- Diabetics will no longer have to prick their fingers to test their glucose levels. Abbott Labs has developed a patch called Navigator that contains a wireless transmitter that reads results obtained by a hair-like filament that barely penetrates the skin. The system sends this data to a small receiver that can be carried in a pocket of purse. The system can test glucose once per minute for three days. The next step is a sensor that similarly tests vital signs. In the near future, ambulance crews will be attaching a Navigator to their patients and standing by for an instant report on vitals.
- Computer networks are about to become much simpler. Look Technology is marketing a single box that will replace most of the components in a traditional network stack such as the firewall, bandwidth manager, router, authentication server and many others that might cost as much as \$123,500. The Airllok 525 accomplishes all these tasks and sells for just under \$20,000. Make sure your IT guy knows about this.



The overarching message in all of this is that technology, at an ever-increasing rate, will free us from the routine tasks that now take up most of our time. Willingly or not, we will be freed to perform increasingly complex procedures based on highly accurate, quality-controlled data obtained by our ever smarter tools. Think about the impact this will have on training and even the type of people we now recruit as first responders.

The most interesting question is this. Will the public be willing to pay for this new technology and the highly educated, highly trained personnel who will be required to employ exploit it? I fear that people dazzled by the toys will forget that it takes real experts to make them sing.

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