

# Innovations to like, and innovations that disappoint

I am all in favour of new technology. It can deliver more to us for less. It can help us in ways we did not imagine. It drives good change in the corporate world, forcing businesses to adjust to new competitors and to rethink their goods and services. It often produces a product or service which becomes a must.

There are also times when innovation produces a product or service which is little or no improvement on what it seeks to replace. Change makers can become mesmerised by the technology and think less about the customer. Much change is healthy, but some change can be expensive, disruptive or simply unnecessary.

I was an early adopter of mobile phones, as it was a big leap forward to be able to contact people from wherever you are. Many of the improvements made to cars, to their safety and comfort, are most welcome. Modern computers enable us to find information without going to the library and to send out material without having to persuade an editor or publisher.

I ask myself which innovations that are currently being discussed would do most to improve my life? Clearly a self driving car that took responsibility for my travel would provide a big increase in freedom and give me back the hours I spend in traffic jams studying the safety of the road ahead. I would like a self controlled Hoover that could clean a room whilst I was doing something else in another room. More automation of other cleaning routines would also be good news.

There are some changes which have not brought obvious benefits. As a taxpayer I get my share of the big bills for switching trains to electric drive, but as a passenger I do not see any improvement of an electric train over a diesel. All the time we generate electricity from coal and gas it is difficult to see the environmental case as well. Electricity as a secondary fuel incurs energy losses at the power station and in transmission as well as in turning the energy into drive power in the engine.

I have given up on my digital radio at home and gone back to the old analogue one, despite the poor BBC signal. The digital radios are difficult to tune in, slow to warm up and often provide a poor quality output. The one I have to have to have in the car regularly cuts out in busy places.

Quite a few of the digital control systems are far less effective than old fashioned switches and dials. Fiddling about with a light display operated by applying finger pressure to a pad is not as quick or easy as setting a dial to a required setting.

I would be interested to hear your list of good and bad new ideas.