# Now You See It, Now You Don’t

Meaghan Ziemba, Editor, WDD

**Vanishing electronics could help save space in landfills and reduce electronic waste.**

If I didn’t recycle or throw them away in the trash, my old cell phones became the property of my daughter’s imagination. Old laptops found their way into Goodwill boxes, and my cassette players and portable cd players from high school are squirreled away in the corner of my closet.

As much as I try to avoid contributing to the growing electronics wastelands, I admit that I too get lost in the hype surrounding the latest gadgets and smart devices trends.

As soon as a new model hits the market, I want it and I want it now. And working for a design engineering publication only makes the itch for new toys more intense.

It is a vicious cycle: See cool gadget. Buy cool gadget. Learn cool gadget. Get bored with old gadget. See a new cool gadget. Recycle old gadget. Repeat. I rarely, if ever, thought of where the device ended up once it was discarded.

To try and reduce some of the electronic waste that I and billions of others produce (and seem to forget), researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are studying how to make devices disappear, or dissolve, so they don’t pose a threat to the environment.

According to John Rogers, a professor of Materials Science and Engineering, the goal of the program is to design transient technology that can dissolve at the end of its useful life. Although I always favored James Bond over Ethan Hunt, this self-destruct concept is the right step towards finding a solution to the overwhelming amounts of discarded tech bits that add to the already oversaturated landfills. It even opens the door for biodegradable electronics used for temporary transplants that fight off infection and get absorbed by the body.

Other vanishing concepts could target global emergencies, such as oil and chemical spills. Once the clean-up is complete, the devices pull a Houdini and disappear into thin air. Even though I think this concept is a pretty amazing, I can't help but wonder where the vanishing materials go. Either way, my daughter may be a bit distraught over losing her constant supply of aging electronics.

*How would you like to have a vanishing phone? What other innovations cold these types of technology lead to? Comment below or send them to* meaghan.ziemba@advantagemedia.com *[1].*

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[1] mailto:meaghan.ziemba@advantagemedia.com