8 Things I Learned About Tech in 2012

This year flew by, and we all learned a lot along the way -- especially in the world of tech. Herewith, my personal list of the eight vital lessons of 2012.

1. The Death of Steve Jobs Adversely Affected Apple

Apple " style="color: #0c74a6; text-decoration: none;" data-crackerjax="#post-slider">stumbled badly with its Maps app [1], whose icon hinted at the app's incompetence: It was directions for driving off a bridge. The app was a huge embarrassment for Apple, something that probably wouldn't have happened if Steve Jobs had remained at the helm. Heads rolled, including Apple iOS chief Scott Forstall.

While Jobs gave the green light to some rare questionable products (I'm looking at you, MobileMe), he was also notorious for holding up shipment of a product that wasn't ready, no matter what the consequences. Now the company's stock is in a tailspin, due in no small part to Apple's latest errors and corporate infighting, and by extension, the untimely absence of Jobs.

2. Electric Cars Are Going to Be Affordable and Practical Soon

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" alt="Chevy Volt" title="Chevy Volt" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;" data-width="950">

Electric cars have wonderful acceleration and can save you money on gas. For instance, I lived with a Chevy Volt for a week that gave me the equivalent of more than 100 miles per gallon. But electric cars are still way too expensive, even with help from the U.S. government's $7,500 tax credit. However, there are signs of affordability on the horizon.

Notable examples are the Tesla Model S sedan that's somewhat cheaper than its Tesla Roadster brandmate, and Chevy's upcoming electric Spark that will cost thousands less than most electric cars while offering Corvette-like acceleration. This was a year full of building, testing and innovating for the electric car industry. Give them two more years, and these zippy conveyances may actually be cheaper and more practical than their gas counterparts.

3. We're Really Going Mobile

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" alt="mobile tech" title="Mobile technology" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;" data-width="1920">

Desktop computers are becoming the tools of specialists. Even those lovely ultrabooks and Retina-screened MacBooks Pro are having a hard time keeping up with the explosive growth of mobile devices.

Tablets and smartphones are the fastest-growing source of traffic on the web today, and that became even more apparent in 2012. Most of that traffic is driven by the

widespread adoption of smartphones, with sales growing at a rate in excess of 50% per year, according to ComScore.

While sales of laptops and desktops are falling, they're not dead ... yet. Users are becoming device omnivores, getting online in a variety of ways, often using all at the same time for a multi-screen experience.

4. Microsoft Ain't What It Used to Be

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" alt="Windows 8" title="Windows 8" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;" data-width="1468">

Microsoft used to be able to throw its weight around with hardware vendors, while earning billions from licensing Windows installations on new PCs and laptops. Now that people are starting to slow down their purchases of PCs and buy more mobile devices, Microsoft has lost its mojo.

Then there's the " style="color: #0c74a6; text-decoration: none;" data-crackerjax="#post-slider">stumble of Windows 8 [3]. For those of us who are accustomed to Windows, we find ourselves going back to the old desktop and yearning for that old "Start" orb. New users are confused by the existence of both a desktop and the new Pinterest-like interface. There's some powerful new technology under the hood, but the idea of combining mobile and desktop interfaces was ill-conceived.

Sales of Windows 8 and the Microsoft's new Surface tablet are disappointing, according to" target="_blank" style="color: #0c74a6; text-decoration: none;">analysts [4]. In short, I think Microsoft jumped the shark this year, and it's going to be tough for the company to recover its past glory.

5. The Old TV Model Is Dying

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" alt="abandoned tv" title="abandoned tv" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;" data-width="1920">

The next generation of TV viewers are not channel surfers. Broadcast viewership is down. They've cut the cord. The average American used to watch more than 7 hours of TV per day, but the younger demographics (many of whom are *Mashable* readers) have better things to do and thousands of sources of video to share and watch.

Case in point: PSY's video "Gangnam Style," which just surpassed 1 billion views on YouTube. Now that's what I call mass media. Almost anything important enough for this young demographic to spend time watching is available online, one way or another. Further evidence of this sea change: in 2013, even the Super Bowl will be available online.

6. How Big Data Can Help Win an Election

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twitter twitter" style="color: #2daae1; text-decoration: none; margin-top: 0px; margin-right: 0px; margin-bottom: 2px; margin-left: 0px; width: 30px; height: 30px; line-height: 1; font-size: 3rem; position: relative; display: inline-block; white-space: nowrap; text-indent: -9900px; -webkit-transition-property: color; -webkit-transition-duration: 0.3s; -webkit-transition-timing-function: ease; -webkit-transition-delay: initial; padding: 0px !important;" data-fragment="m!ccc2" data-image="">> [2]" class="social-share microcontent-share-badge network-badge network-badge-linked_in linked_in" style="color: #0073a4; text-decoration: none; margin-top: 0px; margin-right: 0px; margin-bottom: 2px; margin-left: 0px; width: 30px; height: 30px; line-height: 1; font-size: 3rem; position: relative; display: inline-block; white-space: nowrap; text-indent: -9900px; -webkit-transition-property: color; -webkit-transition-duration: 0.3s; -webkit-transition-timing-function: ease; -webkit-transition-delay: initial; padding: 0px !important;" data-fragment="m!ccc2" data-image="">> [2]" class="social-share microcontent-share-badge network-badge network-badge-pinterest pinterest" style="color: #bf1e25; text-decoration: none; width: 30px; height: 30px; line-height: 1; font-size: 3rem; position: relative; display: inline-block; white-space: nowrap; text-indent: -9900px; -webkit-transition-property: color; -webkit-transition-duration: 0.3s; -webkit-transition-timing-function: ease; -webkit-transition-delay: initial; padding: 0px !important; margin: 0px;" data-fragment="m!ccc2" data-image="">> [2]

" alt="Political Data" title="Political Data" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;">

If President Obama's get-out-the-vote technology (Narwhal) had failed, and Mitt Romney's (Orca) had succeeded, there might have been a very different election result in 2012. Republicans depended on faulty polling data that misdirected their candidate to swing states where he actually didn't have a chance of winning.

Meanwhile, data whiz Nate Silver forecast an Obama win, correctly naming all the states where Obama emerged victorious. There is no longer any doubt that Big Data can not just help win a presidential election, but forecast the winner with pinpoint accuracy.

7. Infotainment Systems in Cars Aren't There Yet

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" alt="GPS" title="GPS" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;" data-width="1698">

The idea of distracting "infotainment" in the front seat of a car is shaky to begin with, but car companies got slightly better at it in 2012 nonetheless. Apple's Siri will soon find its way into GM cars, offering a less distracting way to control in-car gadgetry.

However, no infotainment system is nearly as good as iOS or Android, and no automaker has been able to perfectly integrate apps into the automotive environment yet. We would be better off with a completely voice-controlled system, but that's hard to do in such a noisy environment. Until all cars can drive themselves, this idea still needs a lot of work.

8. What Happens When Technology Suddenly Goes Away

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" alt="Hurricane Sandy charging station" title="Hurricane Sandy charging station" style="max-width: 100%; vertical-align: middle; border-style: initial; border-color: initial; border-width: 0px;" data-width="1920">

We don't often think about how much we depend on technology until it's gone. During Hurricane Sandy, millions of people lost power " style="color: #0c74a6; text-decoration: none;" data-crackerjax="#post-slider">in more ways than one [5]. Without their mobile devices, TVs, lights, fuel, and for some, even running water, it was a harsh throwback to the 19th century, but without horses.

" style="color: #0c74a6; text-decoration: none;" data-crackerjax="#post-slider">Websites suffered [6]. When one datacenter in Manhattan went offline, *The Huffington Post*,*BuzzFeed* and all the Gawker sites went offline with it. The upside? People had to talk with each other in person, and depend on each other for even the most basic things. People helped each other. It was an enlightening experience.

What did you learn about tech in 2012?

" target="_blank">Read More [2]

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December 24, 2012

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