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VIEWPOINT

Everything Old is New Again

by Pamela G. McIntyre

On page 16 of this issue, there is an article by Alan Simon entitled *The Next 5 Years*. It is an interesting projection of the future of database technology. The last item on his list of future events is "at least one unforeseen significant development will occur." That's a pretty broad prediction and for that reason, probably true. What I take issue with is Mr. Simon's statement that this development is something that is not "on the horizon today."

Many things that hit the market are not "new" in the sense that they are completely new developments based on heretofore nonexistent technology. A good example is high definition television (HDTV). How many of you know that HDTV was developed by an American over 20 years ago? This person tried to sell his idea to the major television manufacturers of that time (when the U.S. still had television manufacturers). No one would buy the idea. So who picked up on the idea and is now making millions? The Japanese, of course. The Japanese also developed the Game Boy electronic games. They kept kids occupied for hours and were based on "old" technology. Even Windows 95 is not what I consider breakthrough technology. After all, it still needs DOS in some respects. And then there's the Internet, new to most people. But it has been around for many years, developed originally by DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency).

So as you might have guessed, my point is that most "new" developments are really new uses for old technology. The technology may be refined or improved upon, but it has certainly been on the horizon for many years. Ultrasound is a good example. There are many years between the time it was used to produce pictures of unborn babies and the time it was used to clean your teeth and your jewelry. Laser technology is another example. It has come a long way from weapons systems to noninvasive cosmetic surgery. And don't forget the microwave oven. It came from the space program.

I have no doubt that the uses for existing technology are limitless. And every time I hear someone say that the technology does not yet exist for something, I am tempted to say that it does exist, it simply hasn't been thought of yet.

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Welcome to Viewpoint. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of MTA. Guest writers and responses to columns are welcome and will be printed at the discretion of MTA. Email: MTA@mtechnology.org Pamela G. McIntyre received a B.S. degree in biology from the University of Wisconsin and a master's degree in business and information systems from the University of Maryland. She has spent over 16 years in the field of information management and is currently a freelance writer, and managing editor of M Computing. Email: pgm@erols.com