Stanford eCorner

The Convergence of Technology

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Video URL: http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/934/The-Convergence-of-Technology

Wirt talks about how the convergence of technology is an interesting trend that has led to an influx of multi-functioning devices. Convergence devices save space, add convenience, and can sometimes enhance the functionality of the combined product. The Palm Treo is a great example of a convergence device and functions as a phone, handheld organizer, wireless email, text messaging, web browsing and even a digital camera.

Transcript

So, what I was going to talk about today though, was a topic that I think is very germane. I see it all over the place, which is really about convergence. And I think the part that's interesting is how technology evolved. Just like my undergraduate degree was in, how different media evolved. And we can look at today how different technology has evolved. What does that mean in terms of product design in particular? What are converged products people think of? This kind of product here, for those of you online, I'm holding up a Treo 600. So this is a convergence of a cellphone and a PDA, for example. And is that going to impact, for example, sales of a regular old PDA or is that going to impact sales of phones? And how is that going to work? It's not just convergence of those products but what about mp3 players? This could be an mp3 player or a media player. Maybe you can look at a portable video on that. So I want to try and see if we could learn something maybe a little bit from history of technology, what's happened in technology, and how that is going to evolve in the future.

Because basically, what people think about is they think convergence is basically inevitable. I did a little Google search. Google is a great research tool. And you could see, look at convergence, 3.7 million hits on the term convergence on Google. So a lot of people are talking about it, obviously. And the basic notion that people have is that phones, everybody has one. Tom asked about palms. How many people here have a cellphone? Probably a better question is how many people here don't have one? Is there anybody? No? Everybody has one. So people are thinking, "Well gee, if everybody's carrying one..." Generally people think, well, you don't want to carry like a pocket full of devices, all different kinds of devices. Well, isn't the phone going to cannibalize everything? Isn't everything going to shrink down and fit into that phone? And just to take that further, aren't multi-function devices better? More is better.

If your little device was a phone and it was a PDA, that's good. And if it was an mp3 player, that's good. And if it was a radio, that's good. And how about a television set? There are phones that do all those things right now. Probably when you come down to it, platforms are sort of the holy grail. If you could do a platform like Microsoft's. Operating systems or platforms, that's the best. Because then, you don't even have to know what it's going to be. Other people just add stuff to it. It'll be all kinds of great things.

So as you try to think about that, where this is going to lead, signs aren't always obvious. You don't even know. It might look obvious. It's not always obvious that the future is going to be just like you think it is.