Stanford eCorner

Examples of When Convergence Works and When it Does Not

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Though some types of convergence devices become extremely popular, says Wirt, others never catch on. In certain cases, it is clear why the convergence device has never caught on (like a washer-dryer combo), and in others it is not so clear (like why people never use the built-in calculators on their cell phones), he adds.

Transcript

So let's do a little more survey cause I think, you know, it's not maybe the world's most represented group here at Stanford but in terms of early adapters, I bet this is a pretty interesting group. So, how many people here have a clock? Yeah, like everybody has a clock right? How many people have a radio at home? Everybody has a radio. How many people have clock radios at home? How many people have upgraded their clock radio ever? Did you ever get to throw out your old clock radio and get a new one? A couple of people. Not too many people. Not too many people upgraded. How about TVs? Who's got a TV? All right almost everybody. Who's got a VCR? Almost everybody's got VCR. Who's got a TV-VCR? We got a picture of one right there. You know, combo unit. All right that's pretty interesting.

So in the real world, about 10% of TV sales are combo, TV-VCRs. How about receivers? Remember in the old days, we used to have, you know, an amplifier and a pre-amp and a tuner. We had a whole whack of stuff with the little black boxes like that. They call that components. How many people have component stereos? We got a few here. How many people have receivers where all that stuff is really in one box? Okay that's... How about the boom box? A boom box I guess would qualify as kind of a combination thing, a receiver. So that was interesting where like almost everybody had at least one converged device a clock radio and almost nobody had a very similar kind of converged device a TV-VCR. The other stuff was kind of in between. All right.

How many have washer-dryer combinations like this little guy here, you make that two whether they're stacked or side by side, people have to had it. How many people have, this is kind of an unusual thing but I don't know if you have one of these. This is a combination of washer-dryer. You just put your stuff into one thing and it washes and then it dries it. Oh, we got one, two. It doesn't work. It doesn't work. It doesn't dry it? Or it doesn't wash it? It has...It's an interesting product actually. It has some problems. It's one of my rentals.

I don't have it, I kind of have it but it's got some kind of a heating element in it. It's like some tremendous amounts of electricity. It washes but it flip dries. It's like, it doesn't heat the dryer up. So it's just like clothes dries and dries and dries for four hours, five hours. Maybe that's why more people don't have one. How about toaster ovens? How many people have toaster ovens? Yeah, a lot of people. And hand pencils? I'm not even going to ask if everybody has a Pan Anda pencils of some sort. Okay. Just a couple more.

So we got can openers. Cause this kind of can opener also has a bottle opener typically at the end here. Anybody got one of those at home? A lot of people does. Swiss Army knife. That's kind of converged. A lot of people. How about a, here's a spork? The same washer-dryer person has a spork. Okay that's good. Saving space in the laundry room and in the kitchen drawer that's, okay that's good, that's good. So you can see there are some, you know, it's not always that you put two things together.

Just a couple more and then we'll be done with this exercise. But phone answering machine, you know, it's a combined product. How many people have separate phones and answering machines. Okay. It's about 50/50 I'd say. In multifunction devices, this is like a scanner, faxer, printer, okay. How many people have a separate like a printer and a separate scanner or a separate fax machine? This is one that's pretty interesting. So we already know everybody here had a phone. How many people have a calculator? Anybody who doesn't own a calculator here? And do you use your phone, people that don't have a calculator? I saw one person said yes. And an MP3 player.

How many people have an MP3 player? And how many people listen to MP3 sounds, something else like you could listen to it on a PDA or a phone? Okay, so it's good. So if you think, you know, kind of convergence as where it's had I'd rather have one device than two. I'd rather have something that takes up less space like the combination washer-dryer. You know, sometimes it's not quite as straightforward as it seems, the signs are a little confusing about what might be happening. You think why, it's really convergence, this was definitely going to happen but, you know, you ask about other things I think the phone calculator ones and especially a good one because like basically every phone pretty much has a calculator and if you look at your phone as if it were a calculator, it's got the screen, it's got the 10 numbers on it. What does a calculator do that this doesn't do unless you know maybe some trig functions or something. So, you know it's not obvious like why we have convergence of some devices and why we don't have convergence in other ones and that's what I'm going to address a little bit as we go through here.