

Confessions of a techno-Luddite

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By GIL SMART, Smart Remarks

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Gil Smart is associate editor of the Sunday News. His column, Smart

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even *less* revolutionary. And so on. Yet at each step of the way, the consumer lays out more money, not just on the device but on the service.

And what, really, are we buying? Are Blu-Ray discs really that much of an improvement over the DVD? As in, are you materially better off because you can now watch movies on Blu-Ray? Now that you have a Wii or a PlayStation 3, is your life that much fuller than when you had to suffer with a PlayStation 2? Will you die happy now that you have an HDTV instead of the old tube unit?

Each incremental improvement compels more spending, which might be fine in flush times. But this supposed "need" has become so ingrained in our cultural consciousness that even in uncertain times, like now, there's still huge demand for the iPod Touch, because it's *so much better* than the iPod without a touch screen.

This is a culture gone crazy.

I'm sure I'll temper the techno-Luddism as the kids get older and peer pressure comes into play. But when we look around at what we believe to be wrong with the world, we focus on external things. It's the monied interests who rig the game so that the little guy can never get ahead. Right-wingers see evil liberals lurking behind every tree with socialism in their heart. Religious conservatives seem to think abortion and gay marriage represent the biggest threats to mankind.

But how about mankind itself?

How about the American way of life we've declared sacrosanct; the use-it-up-and-throw-it-out mentality, the idea that there must always be more things, more credit to pay for the things. At what point does our inability to jettison the idea of "more" and find happiness in "enough" actually endanger our society? Hasn't it already?

On Marietta Pike at Stony Battery Road is Hempfield United Methodist Church, where a big sign out on the lawn calls for a boycott of Christmas. The idea, according to the church Web site, is that the real reason for the season is lost amidst the materialistic frenzy; and the suggestion is to spend less and free your resources for the things that truly matter.

It's got to be a tough sell for a suburban congregation, in a society that has collectively decided that digital cable is what really matters.

But somehow I think the people who devised the "boycott Christmas" campaign would understand exactly what I'm talking about when I say it's too bad the old VCR died, that it did the job just fine.

Some things matter. Other things, no matter how much money we may spend on them, just don't.

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The VCR died.

Now what?

It was 20 years old; my wife owned it when I met her. And it served us quite well. I used to tape "Seinfeld" with it; more recently I taped "Star Wars: The Clone Wars" for the boy.

But the other night I turned it on: nada.

Time to upgrade, I suppose.

SMART REMARKS: It's a bad bill. Pass it.

Except that I have no desire to upgrade. I'm sure the DVR is a wonderful device, but the most popular unit, the TiVo, requires a subscription service if you want access to all the bells and whistles.

That's a bit of a racket, isn't it?

Sure, you can pause live TV and all these other wonderful things, but not merely by buying the unit; you've got to pony up even more money on a regular basis! And I'm simply not convinced that the technology is enough of a leap forward to warrant the continued costs.

I never thought I'd become a techno-Luddite, but it's not limited to the VCR/DVR. Technology as a whole has simply passed the point where I feel the need to keep up with it.

The difference before cell phones and after cell phones was truly revolutionary. The difference between my flip phone and the iPhone is less revolutionary; the difference between the successive generations of iPhone is

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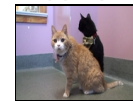
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QUOTE (Artie See @ Dec 20 2009, 12:11 PM)

That is not correct. The series of signs calls for a boycott of Xmas.

One of their points is to differentiate the secular "Xmas" from the religious holiday Christmas. Certainly there is nothing wrong with giving presents to family and close friends, celebrating the Biblical example of the Three Wise Men. But there IS something wrong when commercialism becomes more important than the spirit of the holiday.

Good point. Gil, have you even driven by the church? It doesn't *even have* a big sign for messages. Just a deli-style letterboard.

Also, why do you think it would be a tough sell? For you information, the congregation has been enthusiastic about the program. Do you have a preconceived notion about suburban congregations and their faith?

During Advent, people at the church have been working to use their personal resources to provide for two major mission projects: [Nothing But Nets](#) and a start-up church in Kenya. In both cases, the congregation has exceeded its goals. [Spending less](#) on the materialism and freeing our resources on things that truly matter, that's the message.

jdp

I can't disagree with the point that our culture is extremely "throw away". In my business, many people just want to throw old computers out. Most of them have some use, some don't if they are completely trashed. Before I moved to the area, I had about a hundred old computers that I didn't know what to do with. I finally found a company that would take them off my hands. I was happy about that, but I lived in a rural area and it was difficult because of transportation costs and all. The company paid the costs. That was one of the reasons they were so hard to find.

Anyway, I love new gadgets, but I know better than to stack them up in my house because they end up not being used.

Sometimes, I guess, we have more money than sense.

Alexander

Gil, 'techno-Luddite' is not the proper noun you were after.

Just *Luddite*, which means, any person described as opposed to technological progress and change. (You can check Wikipedia on this.

Luddite is a pretty obscure word nowadays isn't it? I am surprised to see it used in 'popular media'.

jtredd

Actually, the term best applied to Gil is [Neo-Luddite](#) and it is far from obscure, unless your vocabulary only dates back ten years.

citydweller

Gil made a mistake in his column AGAIN?

When will he be fired?

beaker2011

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