

## Gadgets You Should Get Rid Of (or Not)

The common rap against technology is that it leads to an accumulation of devices. But the nature of technology is changing. Fewer products are doing more tasks &mdash; all accomplished by countless lines of massless software code.

And so we no longer need to accumulate products. If anything, we can cut down. The question is, Which can be replaced and which are fine, or even preferable, to keep? It is plain as day that paper maps and Rolodexes have given way to their digital counterparts. But what else can you get rid of? Here is a list of common consumer technologies and products and a somewhat opinionated judgment on whether to keep or pitch it.

**DESKTOP COMPUTER** Lose it. You may have one now, but are you really going to replace that deskbound PC when it becomes out of date? Assuming you are not a hardcore gamer or a video editor, laptops have all the necessary computing power the average user needs. If you want to replicate that desktop experience, you can always connect your laptop to a larger display and keyboard.

**HIGH-SPEED INTERNET AT HOME** Keep it. With the advent of devices like the MiFi, which converts a 3G mobile signal into a Wi-Fi cloud for multiple devices to share, you might be thinking about giving your Internet service provider the boot and using your cellphone as your Internet connection, even when at home. That would work &mdash; provided that you get a strong data signal where you live; that you never intend to stream video from Netflix, YouTube or Hulu; and that you have an unlimited data plan from your wireless provider. Given all these caveats, it probably makes more sense to stick with your I.S.P.

**CABLE TV** Depends. While you may and should hold on to a good broadband connection at home, it is debatable whether you need to pay for cable TV. Sports fans probably will want to keep it, as many leagues restrict online content, but casual viewers who mainly want some shows and movies to watch could get by with a good Internet connection and some low-cost subscriptions to services like Netflix, Hulu Plus and Amazon Instant Video.

**POINT-AND-SHOOT CAMERA** Lose it. Yes, a dedicated camera will probably take a better picture than the small lens and image sensor of a smartphone, but it will not be that much better. And a point-and-shoot has limitations of its own. It is hard to share photos until you have transferred them to your computer, and there are no apps for cameras, as there are for smartphones, that allow you to quickly apply cool filters and treatments to the shots you took. Perhaps most important, a camera may or may not be close by when a photo-worthy moment arises, but it's very likely that your phone will.

**CAMCORDER** Lose it. Camcorders get squeezed at both ends of the video spectrum. On the low end, smartphones can capture video, and while it may not be Imax quality, many people do not care. At the high end, new digital S.L.R. cameras (like Canon's EOS Rebel T1i, which costs around \$750 with a lens) can shoot full-HD video while taking advantage of all the interchangeable lenses that were created for still photography. That camcorder you have now is probably the last one you will own.

**USB THUMB DRIVE** Lose it. File sharing does not require hardware anymore. In almost any case you can think of, you can move files around digitally via the Internet. That could mean signing up for a service like Dropbox, which creates a private, shareable hard drive in the cloud, or by simply e-mailing yourself attachments and storing them in the drafts folder of Gmail, Yahoo Mail, etc. A USB drive is just something to misplace or break.

**DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER** Lose it (probably). Do you have a smartphone? Then you have a music player. Why load yourself down with an extra gadget? Apple popularized the music player with its iPod, but when was the last time you saw that iconic white box with the dial on the front? Music is data, and many multifunction devices can handle it along with many other kinds of data (like video, e-mail and apps). The one exception may be if you enjoy music while exercising. In that case, a tiny player like the iPod Shuffle might be a better accessory than a larger, heavier smartphone.

**ALARM CLOCK** Keep it. Smartphones can be terrific alarm clocks. They can ramp up the volume gradually, display weather information and awaken you to your favorite song. And when on the road, they are still light-years ahead of the incomprehensible alarm clocks in hotel rooms. But a recent daylight time glitch in iPhones that fouled up the clock could give some early risers pause. Furthermore, setting and resetting smartphone alarms may require a dive into one submenu too many; turning a little knob on the back of a clock and flipping a switch is still simplicity itself.

**GPS UNIT** Lose it. The least expensive GPS units cost around \$80. But your smartphone can do the same thing, if not more, for half that price, or even free. Android smartphones already have Google's turn-by-turn navigation app built in. And earlier this month, Google announced that the company would be including live and historical traffic data in route planning, so you hopefully get to where you are going faster.

**BOOKS** Keep them (with one exception). Yes, e-readers are amazing, and yes, they will probably become a more dominant reading platform over time, but consider this about a book: It has a terrific, high-resolution display. It is pretty durable; you could get it a little wet and all would not be lost. It has tremendous battery life. It is often inexpensive enough that, if you misplaced it, you would not be too upset. You can even borrow them free at sites called libraries.