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## HOW GADGETS MAKE HISTORY

The history of gadgets spans as far back as humanity itself — since hominids began creating tools to make their lives easier. Humans have always created devices and appliances with specific practical purposes that were initially thought of as novelties, due to unfamiliarity with and initial unwillingness to accept the technology. Today, industry has augmented the creation of new gadgets, while certain retailers, including Brookstone and Richard Thalheimer's RichardSolo.com, specialize in popularizing them.

What famous inventors Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell and Leonardo da Vinci, among others, had in common was foresight. They understood that a lifetime spent playing with what others viewed as toys and senseless gadgets would eventually result in indispensable technology. From just that small group, the groundwork for electricity, communications, film, and flight was laid because of their gadgets, which obviously possessed more value than novelty.

Perhaps one of the earliest, most well known gadgets created is the wheel, many millennia ago. Take a ride in your car and witness how truly revolutionary such a gadget became and how much we now rely on it for transportation. A more recent gadget, the Apple iPhone, appears to be the beginning stages of yet another gadget-turned-necessity that will reshape communications.

"The iPhone may someday be looked upon as the device that started a second revolution in computing. Desktop computing was the first revolution. Hand-held computing will someday be regarded as the second revolution, and the iPhone is the product that started it."  
-Richard Thalheimer, RichardSolo.com

All gadgets were not created equal. In fact most inventions are built on the newest technology. The world of gadgets is tiered; devices fall into one of four categories: mechanical, electronic, programmable, and application. Mechanical gadgets include the wheel, as well as later developments such as the pulley, the bicycle, the sail boat, the thermometer and the sort. Following the advent of electricity, gadgets were taken to a new level as inventors began to discover different uses for the newly harnessed energy. The television, radio and quartz watch are examples of electronic gadgets. After electricity, inventors toyed around with electronic information via microprocessor, beginning an age of programmable devices such as computers, and later, MP3 players and the iPhone. Application gadgets include iTunes, Microsoft Office and other computer applications that customize our experience with programmable devices.

Richard Thalheimer, the President and founder of online gadget vendor RichardSolo.com, and founder and former CEO of gadget giant The Sharper Image, understands, maybe better than anyone, that there's much more to gadgets than novelty.

"Certainly most people enjoy the novelty of a gadget that introduces new convenience to their lifestyle. What they forget is that solving these everyday problems is not just entertainment, but some of these devices become functional necessities. In my personal life, I rely on my iPhone, my garage door opener, my nose hair trimmer, my electric toothbrush, and other gadgets that were once regarded as novel gadgets."  
- Richard Thalheimer, RichardSolo.com

Both his former brainchild and his current venture sell quirky, useful and fun gadgets of all types, from mechanical to programmable and application. He has seen some devices, such as the Ionic Breeze air purifier, spur sensational and lasting trends based on a realization of utility value, while others collected dust on the shelves after their novelty wore out. Specialty stores like The Sharper Image and Richard Thalheimer's RichardSolo.com serve a greater purpose: spread new ideas, and give credit to the Franklins and Edisons of the world.

~Ben Anton, 2008

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