

# A glimpse at Intel's futuristic gadgets

July 1 2009, By Steve Johnson

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Wouldn't it be useful to have a gadget that immediately warned you when the information you just saw on the Internet or heard from a buddy might be baloney?

How about a gizmo that helps you remember the names of people you encounter whose faces you only vaguely recall? Or a personal robot with such a gentle touch it could fetch your reading glasses without leaving a scratch?

These are among more than three dozen futuristic concepts being explored by Santa Clara, Calif., chipmaker [Intel](#). Some might seem an odd fit for a company known for its sophisticated microprocessors, which serve as the brains of personal computers and other devices. But Intel's researchers, often working with universities, are constantly looking for innovative products or new uses for those it already sells.

"We want to be focused on breakthrough technologies," Chief Technology Officer Justin Rattner said during an unveiling of the research recently at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, Calif. "We believe our mission is to take risks and define the exceptional opportunities."

Here are a few of the ideas the company is working on:

- **Dispute Finder:** This experiment, recently being tried out at [disputefinder.cs.berkeley.edu](http://disputefinder.cs.berkeley.edu), is designed to enable Web surfers who install a browser extension to instantly know when a news article, blog or

something else they are reading online is contradicted by other information.

Disputed snippets of text are automatically highlighted. When clicked on, these sections reveal contrary or supporting facts, which have been submitted by other Web users, similar to the way Wikipedia compiles its information. Users also can vote on the relative importance of the evidence, with the evidence receiving the most votes getting the most prominent display.

Robert Ennals, Intel's principal investigator for the idea, envisions people one day carrying mobile devices that can check the reliability of what others express verbally.

"The plan is to use voice-recognition software to automatically transcribe what is being heard into text" and then compare that with a copy of the dispute-finder database stored on the device, Ennals said. "We don't think that voice recognition is quite good enough to do this yet, but we hope that the technology will be good enough fairly soon."

He added that the mobile device might be designed to vibrate if it finds evidence contrary to what is said.

- Face recognition: If you often can't remember the names of people you've met and suddenly encounter again, Intel is working on something for you. It's a gadget you'd wear that would be equipped with a camera and a database full of images of your acquaintances.

That way, if you're at a party or other place and run into somebody whose name you can't recall, the [gizmo](#) would recognize their face and remind you who they are.

- Tour guide: Intel thinks mobile devices with visual-recognition

capabilities also would prove useful to people who find themselves in unfamiliar places.

One version might contain information about the interior layout of buildings so it could direct a patient to a doctor's office in a large hospital, for example. Another might function like a vacation tour guide, said David Bormann, an Intel official exploring such ideas.

If you're visiting Paris and go to the Eiffel Tower, such a device would recognize the structure and provide interesting facts about it, he said. And if you point it at a bistro where you're considering having lunch, he added, the device might find reviews of the restaurant "so you can decide if you want to eat there."

- Gentle robots: To lessen the likelihood of robotic devices damaging objects they grab, Intel is experimenting with versions of the machines that are capable of electrolocation, an ability some fish have to detect things by bouncing electric fields off them.

The company, which has equipped a mechanical hand with that capability, says the technology gives robots the "nervous sense of reluctant touch" that human hands display when grasping something delicate.

Intel envisions robots one day fetching and doing all sorts of other tasks for people.

"The robotics industry today is at a point analogous to the personal computing industry of the early 1980s," the company says on its Web site. "In the next decade the number of personal robots deployed in unstructured environments like homes could grow dramatically."

Intel officials generally wouldn't speculate on how long it might take for

these concepts to wind up on the market -- if ever. But a poster displayed at the event noted, "your kid's kid's kid won't think what we're doing is crazy at all."

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