

# Scientist: Rate of progress slowing

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A U.S. scientist says that the rate of innovation peaked around the year 1900 and might actually grind to a halt comparable to the Dark Ages.

New Scientist reports that James Huebner's view runs counter to the conventional wisdom that technology is advancing at an ever-increasing rate, with computer chip densities doubling every 18 months and computer power more than keeping pace.

But Huebner, a physicist at the Naval Air Warfare Center in China Lake, Calif., told the magazine he decided to find out why new innovations are not being developed as fast as predicted.

"Perhaps there is a limit to what technology can achieve," he said.

Huebner used two measures of innovation, the 7,200 major innovations listed in "The History of Science and Technology" and the number of patents granted in the United States. He plotted the first against world population and then divided the number of patents granted in each decade by the U.S. population.

He discovered that the first graph peaked in 1873, while the number of patents per capita in the United States has been declining since 1915.

Huebner's study is to be published in Technological Forecasting and Social Change.

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