

Curtain falling on 'Digital Decade'

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Apple's iPod Touch. David Pogue, personal technology columnist for The New York Times, points to Apple's iPod, introduced in 2001, as among the most influential devices of the decade.

While it got off to a rocky start with the overhyped Y2K bug and dotcom bubble, the era dubbed the "Digital Decade" by Microsoft's Bill Gates has turned out to be a dizzying period of innovation.

"It's been an amazingly vibrant decade for the Internet and for digital things in general," said John Abell, New York bureau chief of Wired magazine, which has chronicled the technological leaps and bounds of the past 10 years.

"People simply don't exist in a non-digital world at all," Abell told AFP. "Even grandmothers and Luddites all have tools and devices -- even if they don't realize they're using them -- which connect them to a digital world."

David Pogue, personal technology columnist for The New York Times, points to Apple's iPod, introduced in 2001, as among the most influential devices of the decade.

"It really revolutionized the way music is distributed and marketed," said Pogue, who also casts a vote for the Flip pocket camcorder from Pure Digital Technologies.

"In two years it has taken over one-third of the camcorder market and has killed the sales of tape camcorders," Pogue told AFP.

Pogue also gives a nod to the GPS navigational unit "which changes the way we drive and also has environmental considerations because millions of people spend less time driving around lost."

Touchscreen smartphones such as Apple's iPhone featuring thousands of applications are also high on Pogue's list.

"It's become a tiny pocket computer in a size and shape that no computer's ever been before -- and mobile and connected to the Internet all the time," said Pogue. "That's a revolutionary set of circumstances."

What's more, he added, "It's only two years old. The iPhone came out two years ago.

"Imagine what the [iPhone](#) and the Android phones and the Palm phones are going to look like in five years? They're going to be smaller, thinner, much better [battery life](#), many more features, much faster."

"Right now we're looking at the Stone Age of these phones," Pogue said. "We think they're modern but they're not."

Another groundbreaking device high on the lists of technology analysts

is Amazon's Kindle electronic reader, which made its appearance in 2007 and has spawned a host of rivals jostling for a share of the digital book market.

The past decade has, of course, also seen seismic shifts in the Web with the explosive growth of social networking sites, wireless connectivity and the rise of Internet-based cloud computing.

Web search and advertising giant Google has become "central to our lives," said Wired's Abell, branching out into "everything you can think of, from mail to documents to the telephone."

In the late 1990s, Pogue said, "creating a webpage took skill, talent, special software -- it was still only for the geeks."

The Internet has become accessible to all in the years since, giving birth to sites such as Wikipedia in 2001, MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005 and Twitter in 2006.

"The beauty of Web 2.0 websites is that it makes it very easy," said Pogue. "Anybody can immediately just type, just type to present their point of view without having any special talent except having an opinion."

"What it does that's really amazing is it connects people who have similar interests, even very narrow interests, who would never meet each other," he said. "They would never be able to connect any other way."

Much of what has come to pass over the past 10 years was presaged by Gates when he gazed into a crystal ball in an October 2001 essay titled "Moving Into the Digital Decade."

"Wherever you are, you'll have the power to control who can contact you or access your information to live your life as openly or as privately as

you wish," Gates wrote.

As for what the next decade holds, Pogue is not going there. "Anyone who tries to predict the future of technology usually looks like an idiot," he said.

Unless you're [Bill Gates](#).

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