

# 6 tech trends to watch for in 2012

January 5 2012, By Mark W. Smith

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For tech companies, 2011 was feast or famine.

Apple continued its trend of crazy high profit margins, high-profile product releases and lines wrapped around stores on launch days. It continues to hoard more cash than the gross domestic product of many small countries.

Things weren't quite so rosy for Netflix, which took a stunning tumble from one of the top tech darlings to a firm that fumbled to respond to a mass exodus of subscribers.

Netflix's woes were first caused by an inelegantly explained price increase and were exacerbated by CEO Reed Hasting's announcement that he would split the company in half and separate its streaming and DVD-rental services. Later he agreed with customers: That was an awful idea.

Therefore, 2012 will not be the year of Qwikster after all.

Looking ahead, here are some things to keep an eye on in 2012.

## BLACKBERRY USERS CONTINUE THEIR EXODUS

These are not happy times for executives at Research in Motion's Canadian headquarters. The maker of the onetime leader in smartphones continues to tumble.

The most recent usage numbers from comScore show BlackBerry at just 16.6 percent of smartphone users at the end of 2011, down more than 3 percent from just a few months before. Android is approaching 50 percent of smartphone users and Apple is nearing 30 percent.

BlackBerry said its next generation of phones, running BlackBerry 10, won't be available until late this year.

Any BlackBerry user with a contract up any time before then will be appropriately wooed by [Android](#), Apple or Windows phones. It's time to make the leap.

## THE RISE OF THE [4G](#) LTE NETWORKS

All the [wireless carriers](#) say they have a 4G network, but only one of those has a high-speed network in Michigan that is worthy of the moniker: Verizon.

The thing to keep an eye out for with 4G networks is the acronym LTE, which stands for long-term evolution. The other top carriers, including AT&T and Sprint, plan to introduce LTE in Michigan this year.

That's when you'll be able to expect some of the superfast download speeds Verizon users enjoyed in 2011.

## APPLE RELEASES THE IPAD 3

If Apple sticks to its script - which it didn't do for the late release of the iPhone 4S last year - a new iPad model will be introduced early this year.

Apple, of course, isn't hinting at what the iPad 3 will include. We also don't know that it will be the iPad 3, especially after most people expected the iPhone 4S to be called the iPhone 5.

Some features to bet on, though: the addition of the high-resolution display and Siri, Apple's voice-controlled personal assistant.

Some recent rumors pointed to the possibility of a smaller, 7-inch iPad model that would compete more with the Kindle Fire's size and lower price point. That's less likely.

## THE CONTINUED RISE OF FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM

Facebook first showed off its vision for a frictionless social Web last fall. Just a handful of services embraced it. Music streaming service Spotify can now seamlessly broadcast what songs you listen to, offering a recommendation engine of sorts for your friends.

Look for more companies to implement this in 2012, including some big names like [Netflix](#) (after an act of Congress amends a dated law that prohibits the sharing of video rental activity without written consent).

Facebook, like it or not, is becoming a platform for more and more facets of our online and offline lives.

Also, allow me to go out on a limb and say we should expect Facebook to make a few changes this year that will upset its user base.

## THE DEATH OF ...

There are a number of gadgets that looked a little peckish in 2011, starved for juice after months of inactivity.

The smartphone was the main culprit, making things like alarm clocks, landlines and even wrist watches relics for generations of users.

Ask someone under 40 what time it is and he will reach for his pocket.

Also just steps away from the digital graveyard: the home printer. It's an increasingly paperless world. And that's a good thing.

## THE END OF THE PHYSICAL MEDIA FORMAT WAR

OK, this one probably is a couple of years early, but a tech columnist can hope.

A friend asked me recently what Blu-Ray player he should buy. I told him not to buy one at all.

As streaming services get more comprehensive, and the pricing model more appropriate, it's time to buy a streaming set-top box like the Roku or Apple TV and hope the experience improves.

Like any early technology, the price isn't right quite yet. Movie downloads often cost as much as the DVD, and users are being asked to store the mammoth HD files on home computers.

The experience, though, is good enough to invest in now.

The last thing I'd do this year is continue buying DVDs that will become obsolete soon.

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