

Digital Savant: 2016 tech predictions include an Internet of Things bust and success for Netflix

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Sometimes the future is a little more clear in certain years than in others. And so it was for 2015, as celebrated soothsayer Omarstradamus (my future-predicting alter ego) made a round of predictions for the year as 2014 was closing.

Before we look ahead to 2016, let's look at my Omarstradamus predictions for 2015 and whether they came true:

VR CELEBRITIES WILL EMERGE. I guessed that virtual reality filmmaking would evolve so quickly online that a new breed of YouTube-like celebrities would begin to draw fans. That part was wrong, but VR did make headway in 2015, generating excitement about products such as Oculus and HTC Vive, which have yet to become available to consumers.

PODCASTING GETS EXPERIMENTAL. Omarstradamus foretold a shift in podcasts away from comedy and [pop culture](#) to true crime and serialized fiction as podcasters spread their wings in more genres. As of this writing, the top podcasts on iTunes include "Serial," "Criminal," "Radiolab" and "TED Radio Hour," while one of the buzziest new podcasts of the year was the whimsical "Mystery Show" from Gimlet Media. Comedy and pop culture are still popular, but podcasting is getting more ambitious with great shows in all genres.

CYBERHACKS GET WORSE. According to CNET, hacking of major companies got so bad in 2015 that nearly every American was affected by at least one cyberhack. Victims included the FBI, VTech, Trump hotels, Patreon, T-Mobile, Scottrade, the IRS, CVS Health and Anthem. But perhaps the most embarrassing data breach was at Ashley Madison, a company that made a business out of facilitating affairs for married people. Whoops!

APPLE WATCH ONLY A MODEST SUCCESS. Before the launch of the Apple Watch, Omarstradamus said it "will be too expensive to be a huge hit at first, and most will wait to see what's in the next version." Given Apple's reluctance to share sales numbers for the wrist devices and the \$100 discounts some retailers were offering toward the end of the year, it seems the Apple Watch isn't a flop so far, but isn't an instant roaring success either. I'm one of those people who hasn't bought one yet but can't wait to see what 2016's second-generation device looks like.

UBER WILL UNLEASH AUTONOMOUS CARS SOONER THAN ANYONE EXPECTED. Autonomous cars did hit the streets of Austin (with engineers on board), but they came from Google and are still in the testing phase. Uber instead caused waves by clashing with city government, pulling public pranks to support its cause and growing into a company valued at more than \$62 billion (more about them in a moment).

Not too shabby on the foretelling! That sounds like 3.5 or 4 out of 5 depending on how harsh a grader you are.

Now, on to 2016! Here's what Omarstradamus sees in the great crystal ball of tech predictions for the year ahead.

THE "INTERNET OF THINGS" WILL BECOME A PUNCHLINE. Increasing frustration with "smart" products that seem anything but,

more interoperability headaches for early adopters and high-profile hacking incidents and downtime for services that are supposed to just work will uglify the rosy picture tech companies have painted about the smart home and connected Crock-Pots. Despite a few promising new products, the term "Internet of Things" will come to be associated with devices that don't work like they should and are more trouble than they're worth.

BOOM TIMES IN AUTOMATED CARS. No, automated cars won't be commonplace on roads in 2016 or affordable for any of us, even if there's a sudden technological breakthrough. But companies getting into the business of self-driving cars, including Google, Apple, Tesla, Uber and every auto manufacturer, will be doing massive hiring and supply-chain scouting, creating a big talent demand for engineers and auto-industry and machine-learning experts.

NETFLIX STAYS ON TOP. You could argue that Netflix had a breakthrough year in 2015, putting aside concerns that its subscriber growth was slowing by simply offering the best streaming video service out there with some of the most compelling original TV series, comedy specials and even an Oscar-caliber movie. That movie, "Beasts of No Nation," will end up with at least one Oscar, becoming Netflix's first Academy Award winner. The company will also sign a deal with a major broadcast network, securing exclusive streaming rights to a slate of TV shows. If I had to guess which network, I'd say Fox. Netflix will also start branding its growing stable of exclusive movies, TV shows and comedy beyond just calling them "originals."

APPLE MUSIC BECOMES APPLE ENTERTAINMENT. Apple will expand its fledgling Apple Music pay streaming music service, which, like the Apple Watch, was only a modest success (and not beloved by all) in 2015, to include television, movies, concerts and even books for one streaming/download monthly fee. Offerings will be limited at first,

but it will serve to better compete with companies such as Spotify and Amazon Prime, which appear to be eating into Apple's long-standing dominance with iTunes.

Here's to a happy 2016 from your mystic seer Omarstradamus!

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