The biggest technology failures of 2016

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Samsung. Credit: Thaivisa.com

2016 has been a watershed year for technology. There has been some spectacular fails that have brought a more realistic perspective to the fundamental belief that technology improves with time. In part, this is because we have now pushed hardware and software to its limits, and certainly beyond our ability to guarantee that it will work as promised, or even secretly hoped. 2016 was the year that technology hit a wall, with significant challenges that will need to be overcome before it can pick up

again and start to bring any of its promised future benefits.

When batteries fail

This was certainly the case with batteries, as Samsung was forced to abandon an entire product, the Galaxy Note 7 because of faulty batteries that spontaneously caught fire. In the end, the problems with the batteries were brought about because of the drive to each year produce new model phones that are thinner and have greater [battery life](link). With each cycle, the engineering challenge becomes greater and the margin of error smaller. Samsung just happened to push beyond that point this year and it ended up costing them around US $3 billion with untold damage to its brand.

Samsung were not the only phone company with battery problems however. Apple has had ongoing battery issues where iPhone 6 and iPhone 6S models of iPhone abruptly shut down with the battery percentage still showing anywhere from [30% to 50%](link). Apple maintained that the problem affected only a [small number](link) of iPhones and offered a limited replacement but has now [admitted](link) that the problem is more widespread than it first thought.

Battery issues are not confined to mobile phones however. Apple's new MacBook Pro has failed to be endorsed by the [US Consumer Reports](link) because its battery life was so erratic in tests that the consumer organisation was not able to determine what a reasonable consumer expectation would be for the product. In a set of tests of the 13-inch TouchBar model, Consumer Reports found that battery life varied from 19.5 hours to 4.5 hours. This mirrored what MacBook owners themselves were finding. Apple has now acknowledged the issue and is [working with](link) Consumer Reports to replicate its tests.

Toxic Twitter and Facebook fake news

2016 was also the year where the world realised that social networks were not only not infallible but also suffering from problems so systemic that it has rendered them almost toxic. Twitter failed to [find a buyer](#) this year basically because of its reputation as being a haven for bullies, trolls, racists and misoginysts. The fact that Donald Trump and his followers found their element in [Twitter](#) only seemed to confirm this. Twitter's troll problem dwarfed its other fundamental issue which was that it still hasn't worked out how to make any money.

Facebook and Twitter became the principle purveyors of [fake news](#) during the US election and like Apple and Samsung with their battery issues, eventually "'fessed up" to the fact that it had it was responsible for this new, and socially damaging, phenomenon. Facebook was trying to stave off admitting that it was responsible because it now has to find a solution and it is really not clear that there is one.

This was the year in which Yahoo proved once and for all that it really didn't care about its customers' security in admitting that it had been hacked at least twice and lost details of 1 billion accounts to unknown hackers. Yahoo insiders talked of a culture that refused to properly fund security in the period before the hacks happened. The hacks may be enough to jeopardise Yahoo's sale to Verizon, or at least shave billions off the already [low price](#).

Nazi AI

Artificial Intelligence proved this year that it is a way off from dooming humanity as Microsoft unleashed a chat bot Tay that quickly became offensive, sending out racist, Nazi and anti-feminist tweets. Of course, one could argue that the chat bot was simply adapting to its Twitter

environment but as the point was produce an AI with real intelligence, the experiment failed. 2016 was the year chat bots were due to be the next big thing in customer engagement but Microsoft illustrated quite dramatically the limitations of the technology.

When things attack

Probably the biggest wake-up call of 2016 was the Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks that succeeded in bringing down a large part of the Internet. The DDoS attack was launched from large numbers of infected Internet of Things (IoT) devices which have been rushed to market with poor to non-existent security. As the number of these devices is already in the billions, the risks that compromised devices may pose is only really becoming fully appreciated.

The list doesn't end there of course. The US election was hacked by Russia, the Australian government proved it couldn't run a website to conduct the census, and the movie industry continued to believe that spending money on ineffective blocks of torrent sites was better than making good movies universally available to customers.

We can only hope that 2017 proves a better year for tech.

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