OWNING A PC TODAY IS LIKE OWNING A CAR IN 1926

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ABSTRACT

Some segments of the population view personal computer (PC) technology as evolving at a mind boggling rate. Growth in the Internet, faster processor speeds and shorter product life cycles are evidence of this rapid pace. Adding to this apparently overwhelming pace are software products occupying megabytes of space filled with so many bells and whistles that it takes years for someone to become truly proficient.

At the other end of the continuum are those who observe that PC technology is being adopted at a pace that is excruciating slow. One of the classic examples supporting this view is that many individuals are unable to operate their VCR, much less delve into the intricacies of a spreadsheet. For this group, the technology is difficult to master and not relevant to large segments of society.

The popular media seems to side with the former group. The media conveys the impression that PC technology is diffusing at a rate like none other in history. In other words, the information revolution is a paradigm shift surpassing even the industrial revolution. This paper attempts to resolve these divergent viewpoints by examining the automobile, "the" machine of the early 20th century.

This paper explores the many striking parallels between the evolution and growth of both new technologies. The parallels form the rationale for using the automobile as an analogous machine to create a time-independent technology forecast. A comparison of the media commentary, timing of key innovations, and economic impact justify the automobile as the basis for a technology forecast which estimates the rate of PC diffusion for the next few decades.

A major innovation, that can significantly affect the base forecast, is presented along with the possible ramifications on the diffusion of PC technology if delays are encountered. In addition, historical automotive events, which might have modern day PC counterparts, are highlighted to predict possible future market trends.