



Comment Article

360°IT – Forwards through the rear-view mirror

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

Last year, I had my 50th birthday. With the thought of having to work for another 50 years at the back of my mind, I decided to take a look at what I had lived through - and what may be ahead.

It's been an interesting half century in technology: the first human in space in 1961, first man on the moon 1969, first heart transplant 1967, first test-tube baby 1978. IBM's first transistorised computer (the 7000) was launched in 1959. The first commercial modem from AT&T came in 1960 - the same year COBOL was developed. The first interactive computer game was written in 1962 (SpaceWar!).

I could go on - the 4-node ARPANET in 1970, the first hard disk drive for microcomputers in 1980, the PC in 1981, Lotus 1-2-3 developed by Mitch Kapor in 1982. The Apple Lisa brought the first graphical interface in 1983, while 1985 saw the advent of Windows and the first online bulletin board system (BBS). 1988 witnessed the 32-bit EISA bus, the first network virus (a worm) and the first wholly computer-animated film to win an Oscar (Pixar's "Tin Toy").

Into the nineties, and the beginning of the decade saw the birth of the World Wide Web. Linux and PGP were released to the public in 1991. Netscape and Yahoo were founded in 1994. Amazon was born and Java was released in 1995. The Motorola StarTac landed in 1996. Google and PayPal were founded in 1998. The GPU came in 1999, along with Y2K panic and the dotcom boom (and shortly after, bust).

C launched in 2000. By 2001, Napster had 26 million users and AOL 29 million. Firefox and Gmail were born in 2004... YouTube in 2005... BluRay in 2006 (the same year MySpace hit 106 million accounts and Skype 100 million). The Kindle, the iPhone and the OLPC arrived in 2007. CompuServe died in 2009. In 2010, Apple launched the iPad.

So what does all this mean for the future? Well, the first thing to note is that even the largest companies can - and do - disappear. Sun, DEC, Sperry, Compaq, Ashton-Tate, Lotus, CompuServe, EDS are just a few of the names that were seen as invincible in their day - yet all have gone through acquisition or attrition. It's a cautionary lesson for the likes of Google and Amazon - today's darlings are tomorrow's demons, and it requires steel and more than just deep pockets to come through as a successful organisation in the long term - as evidenced by IBM.

The next thing that strikes me is the continuing speed of change in the markets. In storage, for instance, the move from core memory to 8" to 5 .25" to 3.5" to 2.5" has been rapid enough, but we've also seen a huge proliferation of connection types (IDE, EIDE, SATA I, II and II, iSCSI, SAS FC-AL/FC, FCoE, Infiniband and so on). This points to a world that will continue to suffer from a lack of base-level standardisation in many areas.

Change can catch out the unwary. Microsoft was forced near to the edge by the upstart Netscape and its browser at a time when the former didn't believe the web was important. Microsoft eventually responded robustly - and Netscape disappeared into the clutches of AOL and quietly disappeared. The same could happen to emerging cloud providers. The response from the incumbents has been quiet - but we are now beginning to see the emergence of the fightback. Certainly Microsoft Azure is looking promising, and IBM, HP and others are lining up offerings that may put some of the first movers on the back foot.

Computing architectures have also seen changes - the mainframe, midi-computer, tower, rack mount and blade have all played their part in the creation of the platform, and on these platforms we've had time-sharing, centralised computing, client-server and web-based computing. We

have also witnessed the 'expansion/collapse' of IT in the organisation, from completely centralised computing, through data centres, to distributed computing across multiple centres, to the application server model of the late 1990s. Now we have cloud computing - a time-sharing model based on heavily centralised core data centres with a degree of decentralised functional components working against an ASP basis. Plus ?a change.

This brings me to another point - our failure to learn from the past. In the 1980s, the price of modems collapsed to a point where it was easy for people to go out and buy their own. To gain access to business applications from home, many people plugged modems in to their offices and used software to replicate their work desktop on their home machine. Hackers soon learnt that by randomly calling numbers and listening for a modem handshake, they could easily break into a system.

In the early 2000s, the price of wireless access points collapsed in a similar manner - and users installed them at work, leaving access open, not changing or hiding SSIDs and using tools such as VNC to replicate desktops. Now we have cloud computing, along with an explosion of cheap, intelligent access devices from smartphones to tablets. Will users have learned anything from the past anything about information and access security? Don't hold your breath.

The past is not always a good barometer of the future, but I do believe it can offer some indicators of the broad changes likely. So I'll leave you with my own top five predictions for the future:

1. Change will continue.
2. Many of today's darlings of the IT industry won't be with us in 5 years' time.
3. The way we do things won't stay the same for long.
4. Standards will remain an unreachable goal.
5. There will always be a better (or different) way of doing things round the corner.

Anodyne? Possibly. I hope, though, that I've at least got you thinking.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

<http://www.quocirca.com>