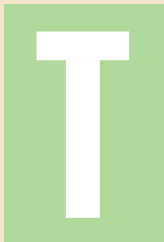




The Better to See You With

The Kodak Camera Provided Technology and a Good User Experience
That Changed Our Sense of the World.
A Simple “One-Button” Promise that Worked.

BY ELIZABETH ROSENZWEIG



his column focuses on products or inventions that changed the world. We will spotlight products that combine a wonderful user experience with strong technology under the hood—a combination that has led to great success for the product, and as a result has had a huge impact on our lives.

What Makes a Product Successful?

It is wonderful to invent a new and powerful technology. Unless it is usable, however, it won't have much of an impact on the world. What makes a product successful? I believe it is the right combination of many integral pieces. For example, a wonderful technology could come forth and fail because it does not have a good user experience. Examples abound of outstanding technical inventions that did not succeed because the user experience was so bad. Or, a new product may have a great marketing plan but nothing under the hood. Products that hit on *all* levels are the ones that succeed.

A well-executed piece of technology, produced in a user-friendly, customer-oriented way, can produce a paradigm shift in the way people do their jobs, eat their food, communicate, learn, travel and exist on a basic level. The best products combine technological prowess with good design, usability and service. Many good

BRINGING NATURAL DISASTERS HOME.

Photography begins to change our sense of the visual and physical world. “San Francisco Earthquake and Fire,” 1906. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.



ideas fail because they can't deliver in one or more of those areas.

What Makes a Product Useful: Beyond Whistling While You Work

To identify products that have caused these paradigm shifts in user experience, it is helpful to first define what makes a product useful. What is a good user experience? The basic answer is that you don't notice the technology. In other words, a good user experience is simple and requires few steps to complete your intended task. In many cases, a good user experience adds enjoyment and satisfaction to a task. Perhaps it is the combination of a good user interface that simplifies the technology, so the user doesn't need to see what is “under the hood,” as well as applying entertainment and fun. Think of a car motor. You don't have to know how it works to be able to use and enjoy it. A good user experience goes beyond whistling while you work.

Being a student of history, I have always found it fascinating to see what the past can teach us. What, if anything, can we take with us, to our contemporary place in time, and use again? Advances in technology can affect the evolution of humankind in large and small ways. For example, big leaps ahead were made with the introduction of the printing press, central heating, refrigeration, the assembly line, the automobile, the telephone and the Internet. But smaller advances—such as the staple, Velcro, disposable diapers and ballpoint pens—have



GEORGE EASTMAN invented the Kodak camera in 1880. He is pictured here on board the S.S. Gallia in 1890. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.



"YOU PUSH THE BUTTON, WE DO THE REST!"
"Descending Vesuvius,"
1888. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.

also had an impact that steered our evolution to other inventions. Ideas beget more ideas.

George Eastman Invents the Original Kodak Camera

A good example of this is the process that George Eastman went through when he invented the original Kodak camera, first on the market in 1880. When he started taking pictures, photography was in an early stage in the development of its technology and was not for the weak or average person. The act was highly technical, requiring the photographer to take pictures with a wet



ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

Improved technology allowed photographers to go farther away from their darkrooms to shoot battlefields. “The Spanish Artillery,” 1900-1919. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.



MAKING THE WORLD SMALLER.

With a camera in hand, relatives across the continent and overseas became real.

“Hands and Baby,” 1937.

Courtesy of the George Eastman House.



plate and develop them immediately. Photographers who wanted to take a picture of the landscape had to put their darkroom on a cart, hitch it up to a horse and trek their way out into the wilderness.

Many wonderful landscapes of the American West were captured on wet photographic plates and brought back to civilization for all to see and share in the taming of this new frontier. In fact, these photographs influenced the way the American West was settled, and Timothy O’Sullivan and William Jackson’s geographical photographs helped establish the national park system.

Eventually the dry plate was invented. This allowed photographers to go farther into the field. Though they still carried heavy large-format cameras, they did not

have to rush to develop the plate. They could expose their picture and bring it back to the darkroom later.

The real breakthrough, however, came with roll film. Roll film allowed more pictures to be taken at one time, but, more importantly, this invention helped create smaller, more accessible cameras. Still, these advancements were not enough to get the average person involved. The user experience was still too difficult.

**The Kodak Promise:
Making the World Smaller**

The breakthrough in photographic innovation was the Kodak camera, first introduced in 1880. The slogan alone was enough to draw many people: “You push the button, we do the rest.” In fact, many

companies have borrowed from that phrase in their own marketing campaigns. After all, what could be a better user experience than a technology that doesn’t ask any more from the user than one button push?

The Kodak promise was simple and it worked. The customer bought the Kodak camera, loaded with 100 pictures, for about \$10. The camera had a one-hole viewfinder, one button for picture taking and a simple crank to advance the film. Once all the pictures had been taken and the film was used up, the user sent the camera, with film intact, back to Eastman Kodak Company for processing. Users then received their 100 prints, along with their camera loaded with film to take another 100 pictures.

PROOF OF WAR.

Photographs bring evidence of war. "Vietcong Arrested," 1968. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.



"NOW LOOK PLEASANT, PLEASE?"

With the invention of the Kodak camera, photographing family events—and pets—became common. 1915. Courtesy of the George Eastman House.

The customer experience included not just the technology, but the *interface* to the technology. The company provided not just the technology and a good user experience, but a complete service package. The Kodak camera was a huge success. People began taking pictures all over the world. Photographs of trips and family events became common. And this changed the way we thought of the world. Finally, we were able to see, with our own eyes, places we had never visited and people we had never met. The relatives from across the sea became real. The war became closer. We had visual representation of things we'd only read about, or heard about, and that became considerable evidence of something's existence. The world became much smaller.

In addition to changing geography and politics, our sense of the visual and physical world changed. We could freeze time and see who really won a race. We could see what it looks like when you jump up in mid-air, and freeze that position, as if you would never come down. We could cut a head off of a body, and not hurt the person. Our sense of reality expanded. Although a photograph may show a person's head without a body, viewers could understand that the body was there, head still attached.

What's Next? Seeing the Big Picture

What can we learn from this piece of history? Perhaps the lesson is in seeing the big picture, and having the intuition and luck to put the right pieces of the product

puzzle together. Today the technology of photography, just like any technology, is evolving. What is interesting is where it is going. What pieces are being put together? In olden days it was the evolution from wet to dry plate, to roll film and then to a good user experience. Now, we have digital cameras, the Internet and home computing. Yet despite these advances, we have yet to solve the problem of the whole digital imaging system, or to provide a good user experience for it.



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