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Top 10 Categories of Useless Gadgets, Games, Gew-gaws, and Gizmos for Wasting Your Valuable Time

By Seth G. Rowland, Esq.

INTRODUCTION

Most of what you read here in TechnoLawyer relates to “practical technology” — computer software, hardware, tools, processes, case management, litigation support, document assembly — stuff that you need to run a productive law practice. There is no “fun” in this stuff. Understanding and using practical technology is “work.” We all “enjoy” our work — well... at least some of us do.

But technology can be engaging. Why not indulge yourself (or at least your imagination) in a few devices that will give you great joy and maybe even a workout? Drawing on the Internet and [Maxim magazine](#), I have put together some of my personal favorites. I have chosen 10 categories of items that will “waste” your time, “engage” you in another dimension, make you the “envy” of your colleagues, or all of the above.

Don't expect to get the purchase of any of these items past the management committee of your firm... they will NEVER go for it. Rather, be prepared to loosen your wallet instead. Besides, with all the Return on Investment (ROI) from “useful” technology you read about in TechnoLawyer, you will have the time and money for the fun stuff.

1. HANDHELD GAMING SYSTEMS

These portable gaming systems do not appeal just to kids anymore. More than half the games are rated T (for Teen) or M (for Mature), targeted at the adult market. Make sure to connect your earbuds before you fire up one of these systems, and then lose yourself in another world where you have all the firepower you need. Use these systems to entertain yourself on the long commute, during your

coffee breaks, or on those interminable conference calls.

- [Gameboy Micro](#) (\$100 list) from Nintendo doesn't pack the power of higher-end systems, but it can fit in your shirt pocket without making you look like a geek. It can be “skinned” with cool camouflage patterns so that you can accessorize to match your clothes. It plays all the Gameboy Advance games.
- [Nintendo DS](#) (\$200 list) — the DS is for Dual Screen — from Nintendo packs more power, but is more on the bulky side. It has some neat features for connected gameplay, but I would leave it to the pre-teens.
- [Sony PSP Playstation Portable](#) (\$250 list) from Sony runs some of the most photo-realistic games. The screen is so sharp that you can download full-length videos and play them on the PSP. However, the hard-drive is not quite large enough nor the transfer rate fast enough to turn it into a video-player.
- [The N-Gage QD](#) (\$200 list) from Nokia takes the first step in tackling the adult market by adding cell-phone technology to a portable gaming system. Now you have a “legitimate reason” for carrying the device with you wherever you go. The system includes a version of one of my all-time favorite games, Civilization, where you can take a group of people from stone-age technology up through nano-technology in a matter of hours, balancing diplomacy, rational investment of resources, and armed combat.

2. SPORTING ACCESSORIES

With the spring crocuses and daffodils blooming,

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you should get outside, take in a round of golf, practice your tennis serve, or unleash the full power of your homerun slug. But in the dark and cold of winter, you can get yourself into training with this slew of computer accessories for your computer or your child's Xbox or PlayStation 2.

- With the [Electric Spin Golf Launchpad](#) (\$229) from Electric Spin connected to your PC, Mac, or PS2, you can play Microsoft Links and EA Sports' Tiger Woods PGA Tour series. Optical sensors on the bottom of the turf translate your swing into a shot onscreen, measuring your swing, clubhead speed, path, and angle.
- [The HotSeat Solo](#) (\$400) from Hot Seat puts you in the seat of a high-performance sports car at a fraction of the price, and without any risk of injury from reckless driving. It includes built-in Dolby Digital 5.1 speaker-and-subwoofer system.
- [The ButtKicker Gamer](#) (\$150) from ButtKicker exercises the nether regions of your body (and your ears) while you play this action packed game. Connect the ButtKicker module to your office chair, and you can feel the firepower as your butt starts vibrating like it's hooked up to a hardware-store paint-can shaker.
- [DDR \(DanceDanceRevolution\)](#) (\$99) from DDRGame.com will get you off your chair and exercising. With game controllers that connect to a PC, Xbox, or PS2, you have your choice of music. The goal is to control the game with your feet on a 3 foot by 3 foot pad with large buttons. Follow the on-screen directions, set your pace, and the length of your workout. Then on to "victory" and burning off all those nasty carbs.

3. GPS DEVICES

As we loose ourselves in our games, our cell-phone conversations, and our MP3/iPod players, the need for GPS (short for Global Positioning System) devices has grown, as the price of these devices has come down. You can now accessorize your Palm, get a GPS equipped phone, or a dedicated handheld device that will not only tell you where you

are, but give you voice and visual directions for how to get where you want to go (or would rather be).

- [Magellan eXplorist 500](#) (\$400) from Magellan at 4 ounces, fits in your hand or connects to your car's cigarette/AC outlet. Use it to find where you are, how to get where you want to go, and even how to get to the nearest 7-Eleven store.
- [TomTom GO 910](#) (\$899) from TomTom gives you a larger database (U.S., Canada, and Europe) and a touchscreen.
- For the rugged outdoorsman, the [eTrex Vista](#) (\$250) from Garmin remains the trekker's device of choice. It combines a basemap of North and South America with a barometric altimeter and electronic compass. If you ever get lost in the woods (or at sea) this is the device for you.

4. CELLULAR PHONES

From the useful, to the gorgeous, to the sublime. Ten years ago, I ran a technology forum titled "The New New Thing" which looked at the synchronicity of handheld devices. At the time, I had a pager, a cellphone, a PalmPilot, and a Sony Walkman. I predicted that someday soon, you would find all of these functions in a single device. Today's phones now include all those features plus: live video streaming, Internet access, GPS, gaming, digital photos, and digital video. I looked at a few of the new phones, some of which are out of even my price range as an inveterate technologist.

- If beauty is your sole criteria, [Mobiado Professional EM](#) (\$1,900 — and no that is not a typo) from Mobiado would work for you. Crafted from polished aluminum and cocobolo wood, it includes high-res color screen, Bluetooth, and an FM radio.
- The prize for pure design goes to the [RAZR V3 phone](#) (\$300) from Motorola. The device is one of the slimmest phones on the market with a keypad chemically etched from a single sheet of nickel-plated copper alloy. At less than 100 grams, the phone still includes Internet, MPEG4 Video, and a VGA camera with zoom.

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- Few will forgive Palm for going over to the dark side with the release of the [Treo 700W Smartphone](#) (\$399). This all-in-one device does everything you can imagine using the Microsoft PocketOS Smartphone Edition operating system. If you primarily need data (oodles of data) and broadband access, you will want this device. From a Treo 700W you can run [GoToMyPC](#) and control your desktop computer from the road.

5. MASSIVE-MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMING

Enter a whole new world, where your currency has little meaning, and another currency takes priority... game currency, silver, platinum, artistry points, experience points. These online worlds have a very real existence to millions of players across the globe. Items won and lost in the virtual world can be sold in the real world in online marketplaces. Visit eBay or even the Sony Store to see virtual items and avatars for sale.

- [EverQuest](#) and [Everquest II](#) from Sony Online Entertainment. Beware... the nickname for the granddaddy of massive multiplayer games is Ever-Crack, after the cocaine derivative. Once you enter and engage in this world, time stands still. I have ventured into this world with a guest pass, courtesy of an online gamer who goes by the name Huusyer (as in Who's Your Daddy?). Well armored, with buffs and experience points (and virtual cash), I ventured where only the most experienced gamers could go. Abandoning my corpse in some strange virtual world, I eventually emerged... at 3AM real time.
- [StarWars Galaxies](#). If you love Star Wars and want to try out life as a Jedi or a Wookiee, enter here. Featured on an episode of Trading Spouses, this game can become your entire existence as you travel through the galaxy. You can try your hand against computer generated monsters (MOBs) or against other players assuming particular personas.
- [Ultima Online](#) is the first successful online world. It is modeled on Dungeons and Dragons and has its own special rules.
- [The SIMS](#) is for those who want to sit back and

relive high school. It simulates the real world, part chat room, part real world game. The goal is to succeed in life, rather than defeat monsters. And to this end, success can be measured by money (acquisitions), friendship (popularity), or success in a chosen venture.

6. TABLET PC REDUX

I have previously written about Tablet PCs and declared that they could serve as a useful supplement to desktops or full-powered laptops. But these two Tablets straddle the line between "expensive gadget" and useful tool. Because of their minute size and weight, they are extremely portable.

- The [OQO Pocket Computer](#) (\$2,000) from OQO is a real computer that is the size and weight of a Palm. At 14 ounces (less than 1 pound), this small device packs a fully functional Windows XP PC with a 1 GHz processor, 256 MB of RAM, and a 20 GB hard drive. With its BlueTooth capability, you can connect the device to a diNovo Media desktop Bluetooth keyboard and mouse (\$249) from [Logitech](#) and a flat panel monitor resulting in a fully functional desktop PC. Forget about "synchronizing"... you have your full PC in your pocket.
- With the release of the [Motion LS800](#) (\$1,699) by Motion Computing you finally have a fully functional PC that weighs only 2.2 pounds. You can take it with you everywhere. When you need a larger screen, you can dock it to an external monitor and a diNovo Media desktop. You can even carry it in a handy bump case to a construction site ... oops, wrong client, I meant a document production. Connect it to a [Strobe XP300 portable scanner from Visioneer](#) and you can instantly have full imaging capability.

7. VIDEOS ON DEMAND

iPods have launched Apple Computer into the stratosphere, and for good reason. These players are small, well-designed, and deliver great entertainment value. With the release of the iPod (\$299) with downloadable videos from the [iTunes store](#), the iPod went from a device for joggers and road

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warriors to an essential entertainment device. Not that other devices don't let you view videos. Rather, Apple makes it so easy. Now you can download this week's episode of *Lost* or *Desperate Housewives* and watch it while you commute on the subway.

8. WEBCAMS AND PHONECAMS

My wife swore this fad would NEVER take off. Who wants to see poor grainy pictures of your friends on a miniscule screen? She was right, for a while. But now, the cameras support 3 megapixels, the screens are VGA quality, and pictures download at even higher resolutions. Still... why do you need one? You don't! But they're fun.

- [QuickCam Orbit MP](#) (\$129) from Logitech is one smart Webcam. Plug it into your USB port and place it next to your PC. When turned on, this camera will maintain YOU as the center of attention. Using facial recognition software, it will follow your face around the room, keeping it centered and zoomed up close and personal.
- [Xcute S55](#) and [Xcute DV2](#) from Xcute are 6.0 megapixel cameras combined with a Tri-Band phone with TV-out.

9. PENTOP COMPUTING

The [FLY](#) exists in a category by itself. It takes the technology of Anoto, and bundles it into a toy that is NOT a toy. It is a thinking computer stored inside a pen that functions without a screen. The key to the system is in the paper, a specially digitally encoded paper that can be "read" by a scanner in the pen tip of the FLY computer. The [FLY](#) (\$125) from LeapFrog is a device for school age children to "help" them with their work. But it includes a great device for the office. Doodle on the special paper an eight-note keyboard. And then, using the pen, you can play "Taps" or "Chopsticks". Cool huh?

10. ROBOTS AND OTHER USELESS TOYS

- With the pending release of [LEGO MINDSTORMS NXT](#) (\$249) from LEGO, LEGO toys no longer appeal just to children. Smarter, stronger, and more

intuitive than ever, LEGO(R) MINDSTORMS(TM) NXT is a robotics toolset that provides endless opportunities for robotics enthusiasts and LEGO builders ages 10 and older to build and program robots that do what they want. A new "Quick Start" option makes it easy to successfully build and program a robot in 30 minutes. The "brain" of the robot features a powerful 32-bit microprocessor, with 4 input ports, 3 output ports, and 7 6-wire cords. It includes a USB 2.0 and BlueTooth, as well as several sensors.

- [Scooba](#) (\$399) and [Roomba](#) (\$329) from iRobot are robots that wash the floor and vacuum the carpet respectively. These little round disks scurry around on the floor on a search-and-clean mission. You can program each for the parameters of the room as well as the time of day in which to do their business. While you might not need them in your office, they could do wonders in the home, particularly if you live alone. It might even be worth a night out with your favorite person... while the Scooba and Roomba do their work.
- [ERS-7M3 AIBO](#) from Sony is the pet you have all been waiting for. It never needs to be fed, taken out for a walk, or brought to a vet. It is the perfect companion. It only needs an occasional "charge".
- [B. Robosapien V2](#) (\$225) from RoboSapien is less of a cuddly companion and more of... well... a robot with personality. At 24" it may not be the most impressive humanoid, but it responds to verbal commands, walks, talks, and does the rhomba.

CONCLUSION

If you are still with me reading this TechnoFeature, I have one comment — GET BACK TO WORK! This stuff may seem fun, but can result in a colossal waste of time and money. In fact, I spent far too much time researching this article. On the other hand, some of this stuff is way cool so if you have some spare cash and some spare time, go ahead and indulge.

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Recovered attorney Seth Rowland won the TechnoLawyer @ Award for Legal Technology Consultant of the Year in 2002 for his contributions to TechnoLawyer on the subject of document assembly and law practice automation, and more importantly, his service to law firms around the country. He is a nationally known technologist whose company has helped many law firms and content providers build document assembly applications for both internal

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