



The \$100 laptop could give the developing world unprecedented access to computer technologies and information.

## TECH 2005 TOP 10 JOSEPH WILSON'S TOP 10 TECH EVENTS

By JOSEPH WILSON

**1 AMATEUR ONLINE REPORTING** In late 2004, the tsunami in Southeast Asia set the stage for the most revolutionary use of technology in 2005. The world immediately received hundreds of first-hand reports of the tragedy without the mediation of network news crews. Amateur video footage and eye-witness blogs were posted within minutes where traditional infrastructure had been destroyed. Similarly, in Hurricane Katrina's wake, blogs from the Bayou became newshounds' favourite way to find out what was really going on in the disaster zone. The Web edition of the New Orleans Times-Picayune became the hub of a virtual community when it took to hosting blogs and updates online when the physical systems crashed.

**2 The \$100 LAPTOP** This cheap and effective laptop, the brainchild of MIT Media Lab guru Nicholas Negroponte, has full Internet access, open-source software and comes with a hand crank to provide perpetual power. It's earmarked for release solely in the developing world, where it's hoped improved access to information and communication will empower locals, much as cellphones have done in Southeast Asia. Critics contend that Westerners should be providing essentials like clean drinking water before technological gadgets, but tools are often used in unexpected ways by grassroots groups to effect change from the bottom up.

**3 The STEM CELL LIBRARY** In late 2004, South Korean scientists stunned the world by announcing the creation of the first cloned human embryo designated for stem cell production. But the real news came in mid-2005, when the same researchers announced the successful creation of 11 stem cell lines, each one a genetic match for a different patient with a spinal cord injury. Further, the scientists recently announced a plan to open a stem cell bank for scientists worldwide. Expect furious debates over ethics to ensue, especially in the U.S., where President Bush has tightened up laws against creating new stem cell lines.

**4 GOOGLE EXPANDS ITS EMPIRE** It seems that not a week goes by without a press release from Google outlining another foray into the world of business/IT. Since Google went public 15 months ago, its stock has jumped from \$85 to over \$400. The world's best search engine has expanded to include Google Scholar, Google Video and, of course, Google Maps, an explosive effort at democratizing geographic data in exquisitely rendered satellite photos. But the company also raised the ire of many writers recently by scanning "every book ever written" for the Google Print project. The tech world hasn't seen a company take off like this since Microsoft. Whether it turns out to be a benevolent market leader remains to be seen.

**5 FREE WI-FI** Cities around the world have begun to reimagine Internet access as a utility rather than an upper-middle-class privilege. Philadelphia, San Francisco, even the island of Mauritius are on their way to becoming wireless and totally free. NYC Wireless and Montreal's Isle Sans Fils have made headlines for popularizing the feasibility of free wireless for everybody. Toronto has its own grassroots Wi-Fi community in the hands of local upstarts Wireless Toronto and Wireless Nomad, both offering community service.

**6 HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE 15TH ANNIVERSARY** When the Hubble was launched in 1990, no one imagined it would last past the turn of the century. But so far this marvel of engineering and imaging has taken 700,000 stunning pictures and provided scientists with reams of useful data while rekindling the public's interest in astronomy with gorgeous colour images of the depths of the universe.

**7 The IPOD NANO** Apple has maintained its gorgeous visual aesthetics to the point of virtually defining what hipsters want in their pockets. With this release, Apple is at the top of its game. But success is fleeting, and the backlash against the iPod has predictably begun, with sites like [www.smashmyipod.com](http://www.smashmyipod.com) popping up as anti-establishment statements. That said, all the things that make the iPod superior -- the simplicity, the reliability, the ease of use, the old-school Mac font -- are enhanced here.

**8 SATELLITE RADIO** Sirius Canada, CSR/XM Radio Canada and locals CHUM Subscription Radio Canada have finally launched pay radio services that allow subscribers to listen to (mostly) commercial-free high-quality music (all-Elvis channel? Check. Hair metal? Check). The analogy here is content-specific cable TV, which has grown spectacularly despite the price tag to become almost ubiquitous in North American homes. Receivers cost between \$70 and \$300, but prices will steadily drop as the numbers rise.

**9 The AIRBUS A380** Q: What weighs 570 metric tons but is still lighter than air? A: The Airbus A380. In June, onlookers gawked as Airbus rolled out its new double-decker behemoth, a 555-seat jet set to take to the air in March 2006. The truly revolutionary thing is that Airbus seems to have made a concerted effort to create a more environmentally friendly plane. It makes half as much noise on takeoff as Boeing's

behemoths and uses up to 3 litres of fuel less per passenger, about the same as your family car. The plane also earns cool points for inspiring the setting for this year's nail-biter Flightplan.

**10 THE XBOX 360** The Xbox 360 is more than just the newest gaming system with stunning graphics splashed on the screen. This release from Microsoft represents the first realistic contender in the category of an integrated gaming system plus media centre. On this foot-wide box you can play games online, stream videos, record HDTV shows, watch DVDs and make toast. (I made that last one up.) You also get a lifetime online subscription to Xbox's on-screen service line, an unheard of perk in an industry notorious for fickle help lines.

## Tech troubles

### SONY INFECTS YOUR COMPUTER

Sony BMG was hauled into courts this year to defend actions thought to be the domain of virus-writing college kids. Without telling anyone, Sony was implanting software (so-called rootkits) on computers that played certain CDs, ostensibly to track the use of its products. Problem is, this opened up huge security holes for viruses, zombies and other computer nasties. Fifty-two CD titles have since been recalled, but the details of the case are far from wrapped up.

### SPLOGS

In the space of just a few days in October, thanks to Google blog creation tool Blogger, more than 13,000 blogs suddenly appeared, composed of nonsense text surrounding links to corporate sites. Witness the beginning of spam blogs (splogs); technologists are scrambling to prevent them from infuriating genuine bloggers and surfers.

### VIDEO IPOD

See what I mean? We're at the end of the list and I'm already sick of Apple. It's tantamount to heresy, I know, but I say that people use their iPods to add a "soundtrack to their lives," not to watch TV shows on a 2-inch screen. Although initial downloads of popular shows like Lost and Desperate Housewives look hopeful, this release marks the tipping point of over-saturation from Steve Jobs. Middle-class hipsters are notoriously fickle, and the iPod's market ubiquity is dangerously close to making it un-cool.



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