WSJ: Google exploring new day for battery tech

April 13 2015, by Nancy Owano

When *The Wall Street Journal* turned out a story recently about how Google was exploring improved battery technology, technology watchers thought Google was not a minute too soon; in fact it was about time battery solutions get a lot closer to reality than at a stage of being under study or very possibly something real by the year 2025.

Quentyn Kennemer in *Phandroid* said, "Google's end game was "to develop the technology for life-enhancing industries which are still growing such as robotics, medical accessories and driver-less vehicles," and as it stands now, he said, "any improvement to battery technology will be good for anything that has anything to do with portable

electronics, so we're sure everyone the world over will be rooting Google on to see if they can make significant progress in a much lacking area." Said reporter Nathan Ingraham in *The Verge*: "Improved battery technology is something that would benefit just about every consumer piece of hardware out there, from something as small as a smartwatch to something as large as an automobile. Unfortunately, most battery advances at this point simply involve companies cutting down the size of as many components as possible so they can cram in the biggest batteries they can make." The consistent thought expressed among numerous sites last week was that battery technology appeared to be in a stalled state in contrast to other major tech areas. Patience has appeared to wear quite thin. Columnist John Davidson in *The Australian Financial Review r*emarked," while everything else in technology has continued to halve or double every 18 months, the humble, stupid battery has barely improved at all this past decade, holding us back. Does anyone really want a smart watch they have to charge every single day?"

The WSJ had the story that there was a Google Research team working on projects to improve batteries. The story was by Alistair Barr. He covers Google for the WSJ along with WSJ's Rolfe Winkler. According to "people familiar with the matter," Barr said, a team led by battery expert Dr. Ramesh Bhardwaj (Dr. Bhardwaj has 70 publication and 40 patents in photo-electrochemistry, electrochemistry and batteries, according to The National Alliance for Advanced Technology Batteries) began testing batteries developed by others for use in Google devices in 2012 and later the group expanded to view technologies Google might develop itself. The group was part of the Google X research lab, said Barr.

As Brian Chen and Nick Bilton said in *The New York Times* in February last year, "Batteries, long the poor cousin to computer chips in research-obsessed Silicon Valley, are now the rage."

Barr said that Google was not alone in looking for improvements: "Google joins many technology companies trying to improve batteries, including Apple, Tesla Motors Inc. and International Business Machines Corp. These efforts have so far produced only incremental gains."

One hurdle mentioned by tech watchers is that it not clear if certain solutions could be mass-produced cheaply enough. Another problem noted in *The New York Times* by Chen and Bilton is that "it is hard to ensure the safety of many new power technologies. A faulty battery could potentially turn into a miniature bomb. So the products require exhaustive testing by regulators before hitting store shelves."

Barr's story quoted Lior Susan of Formation 8, a technology investment firm, who discussed the rationale: "Google wants to control more of their own destiny in various places along the hardware supply chain," he said. "Their moves into drones, cars and other hardware all require better batteries."

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