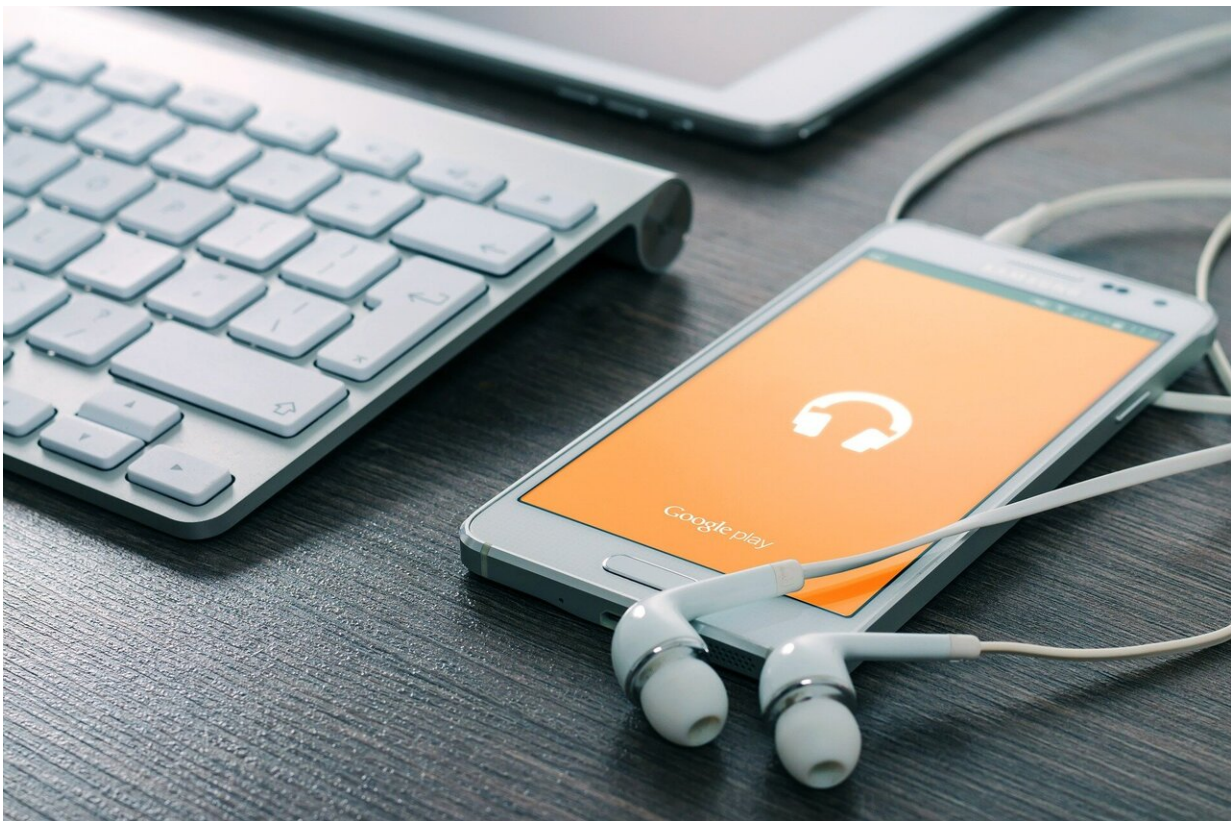


# 2020: A look back at the decade in tech from Alexa to Xbox

December 11 2019, by Edward C. Baig

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

"Alexa" was just another female name. Uber hadn't taken anyone for a ride yet. And the buzz around Facebook had more to do with the fact that seemingly everyone you once knew was turning up on "The Social

Network," and less about the numerous data and privacy scandals that would tarnish the company's reputation later on.

The year was 2010, the dawn of a new decade. And while 10 years is a long time for most every industry, in consumer tech it might as well be a lifetime.

Let's reminisce.

Ten years ago, self-driving cars were a pipedream, the iPad hadn't launched yet, and neither had the photo-sharing phenomenon Instagram, still a couple of years away from being consumed by Facebook.

Chrome OS and Chromebook computers weren't hatched yet either, but it wouldn't be far into the new decade before Google's cloud and browser-based approach to computing posed a real challenge to the longtime PC status quo that was Microsoft Windows.

Microsoft was doing its own innovating, though. In 2010, it introduced the hands-free Kinect motion controller for the Xbox 360 that recognized our gestures and began to get video gamers off their butts.

Five years later, under new CEO Satya Nadella, the Windows 10 [operating system](#) came out to mostly positive reviews.

## **No longer dominant**

It may not have been immediately obvious, but several companies that began the decade in apparent positions of strength were enjoying their last hurrahs.

Social networking stalwart MySpace still claimed around 57 million unique visitors at the start of 2010, but its precipitous decline had begun

(and by then, Facebook had already lapped them).

The arrow was also starting to point the wrong way for other companies about to lose their once vice-like grips on the market. Nokia and BlackBerry (then under Research In Motion) would soon become permanent victims of the rapid rise of Apple's iPhones, Samsung's Galaxy line and handsets from other Android vendors.

Similar autopsies could be written about Microsoft's Windows Phones, which would also disappear well before the decade ended.

## **Fell flat?**

Then again, to even be considered a "has-been" means you would have had to have been a "been" in the first place. But some "hot" tech never even had its moment in the sun.

If you believed the over-the-top hype at the Consumer Electronics Show in January 2010, a stampede of 3-D televisions was about to replace the familiar, two-dimensional TV images at the center of your home theater, adding the lifelike illusion of depth. Suffice it to say, that tech revolution fell flat.

TV makers eventually did better peddling ever-cheaper 4K televisions.

Other highly touted technologies during the decade may have come too soon, but they shouldn't be written off long-term, either. The 2010s surely weren't the right time for Google Glass, at least for regular folks, or, much later, faddish Snap Spectacles. The expectation, though, is that in one form or another, [smart glasses](#) (or even smart contact lenses) will have a future.

The same can likely be said for consumer-focused virtual reality

systems, even as most mainstream customers balked at wearing VR googles from the likes of Facebook-owned Oculus and HTC. The earliest systems such as the Oculus Rift and HTC Vive boasted cool tech. But the systems were a pain to set up, required pricey computers, were expensive in their own right, lacked compelling software and in some instances made people sick.

## **Tablets stuck around**

Only Moses may have been associated with a more famous tablet by the time Steve Jobs, to much fanfare, unveiled the first iPad in January 2010. And dominated by Apple's slate, which launched that April, the tablet category was very much a buzzy business for a while. Don't get me wrong, Apple has sold more than 400 million iPads through the decade, still sells millions more, and the overall business, which includes inexpensive Fire tablets from Amazon, has stabilized.

Apple CEO Tim Cook said last year that iPads outsold notebooks from leading PC vendors. But it was always unrealistic to expect tablets to fully replace laptops. And standalone tablets have been cannibalized to a degree by convertible 2-in-1 laptops, as well as smartphones with screens that have grown to "phablet"-sized proportions.

## **Everything is smart**

Many of the technological leaps that came through the decade have been made possible by speedy advances in wireless bandwidth. The transition from 3G networks to faster 4G LTE and Wi-Fi have helped usher in the age of cord-cutting and how we consume media, a transition very much still taking place today (with the next-generation 5G networks that will fuel the next decade just emerging).

Digital downloads gave way to streaming—and along with it a chronic case of subscription fatigue for many of us.

For better or worse, just about all the products and services that made a mark in the 2010s, or at least tried to, have been labeled "smart:"

Thus, we have smart thermostats, smart fridges, smart watches, smart TVs and smart speakers such as Amazon Echo and Google Home.

"I've been describing this decade as the connected age. We've been talking about Internet of Things for about the past 10 years, and over that period of time, everything has become connected," says Steve Koenig, vice president of research at the Consumer Technology Association.

Maybe the biggest thing the tech industry brought to consumers this past decade, or at the very least the loudest, are the voice-based personal assistants that live in smart speakers, not to mention on our phones, in our cars and, dare we say, even in our bathrooms. No, Alexa, the Google Assistant and Siri were not yet a thing way back in 2010. But is it not a true measure of how far consumer tech has come ever since, that we can now ask Alexa to flush the toilet?

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