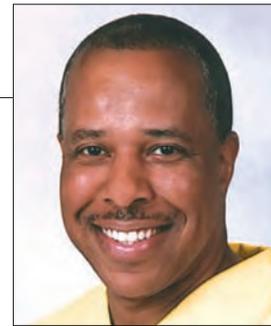


GUEST COLUMN

BY CHARLES THOMPSON



GLOBALLY GREEN

Earth's preservation depends on responsible CE recycling worldwide.

I love reading stories from the great sci-fi writers of the 1950s and 1960s, such as “I, Robot” by Isaac Asimov, and “I Sing the Body Electric” by Ray Bradbury. It’s amusing to go back and reread some of those books today, pointing out items from their “future” (our present) that the authors failed to predict.

No writer from that time period predicted anything like the iPhone, a device so magical that its functionality advances almost daily. The authors were big on the esoteric—stuff such as telepathy and android love—but couldn’t predict a (very near) future with an Internet, where people could visually communicate in real time around the globe. Or that any person, with seemingly nothing more than a wireless appliance weighing less than an ounce attached to their ear, could speak with anyone else in the world, even while traveling. (Lieutenant Uhura’s earpiece in “Star Trek” was way bigger than the average Bluetooth headset, and she’s from the 23rd Century.) The authors would be shocked to discover that the holy grail of early science fiction technology—the laser beam—could be purchased by a child in devices costing less than \$20—in the 1990s!

However, these visionaries also got so much right—artificial intelligence; the marriage of hardware and software, and the resultant bugs; robot labor; the fitful beginning to the colonization of space.

They also correctly predicted, in books such as Bradbury’s “The Martian Chronicles,” the reason for the urgency of leaving Earth: that we had FUBAR’d our own world so thoroughly, the only place hospitable to us was the cold, dark, airless harshness of space. A

popular theme among sci-fi authors of the mid-20th Century was a future Earth where human consumerism and waste created mountains of garbage high enough to mock the sun, which is exactly what’s happening today. The authors were also fond of invoking Chaos Theory (also known as the Butterfly Effect)—made perhaps most famous in Michael Crichton’s “Jurassic

Park”—which postulates that a tiny event in the present (such as a butterfly deciding whether or not to flap its wings at a certain time) can have far-reaching consequences in the future.

The authors were right about the Butterfly Effect. Many of us have seen the recent, harrowing *National Geographic* images of children in India braving supertoxins such as mercury, arsenic and cadmium, to mine a few ounces of gold and copper from our discarded TVs, Game Boys, mobile phones and PCs. We’ve gasped at the images of tiny humans against a backdrop of literally sky-high trash heaps.

That’s our trash, and we’re the butterflies. The consequences of our exponential innovation, our rampant consumerism, and the Pavlovian, insatiable drive to continuously upgrade, have gone global.

Time to Take the Lead

We’re not monsters. We don’t set out to pollute the world with our electronic waste. Most of us want to do the right thing, and most of our clients do, too. To set things straight, our job now is to make CE recycling systematic, simple and safe. It’s not just the noble thing to do; it’s also in the interest of self-preservation, because, just as our actions affect the well-being of the rest of the world, the rest of the world’s actions will soon affect our well-being.

The fastest-growing middle classes in the world belong to China and India, where collectively they’ll soon number over a billion people. Long starved for the conveniences we’ve always enjoyed, they’re already adopting American consumerist habits in alarming numbers. Shopping malls the size of small cities



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are mushrooming across China. It's becoming difficult to tell Chinese and Indian teenagers from their American counterparts, with all manner of gadgetry strapped to their waists and ears. As that huge middle class continues to upgrade, all that trash will need to go somewhere. The electronic compost they'll generate will dwarf ours. As their standard of living rises, they'll become unwilling and unable to accept the dangerous waste we drop on their countries. Soon, they'll be the butterflies, and we'll feel the effect.

We can argue all day about which is the most technologically advanced nation, but America is the undeniable leader in technology behavior. We made ubiquitous the mobile phone, PC and GPS. We invented the iPod. The Internet is, and always was, our baby. And, as our technology behavior goes, so goes the technology behavior of the developing world. If China and India follow our wasteful CE recycling history, Earth will soon be buried under a deluge of jetsam that belongs only in science fiction. As America did when innovating technology, it is time again for us to take the lead, this time in the Globally Green movement.

Social Responsibility & Profitability

A critical step in going Globally Green is to demand less toxic electronics, with all recyclable parts. Apple took a bold initiative with the new MacBook: 100% recyclable, 0% toxins. The new iPods also eliminate toxins. If Apple can do it, other CE makers can.

Next, at our places of business, we need to set the example for both our industry and our clients. Whether you operate a showroom or a warehouse, take quick and easy steps to make it greener. Upgrade all lighting to compact fluorescent or LED, getting a head start on the Federal Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which mandates elimination of inefficient light bulbs (incandescent) by 2012. Don't just install dimming for clients—use and demonstrate it yourself as well. Recycle all your non-electronic waste, too. You'd be surprised at how much stuff you can recycle—pretty much everything except food.

Check with your municipality for specifics.

Here's how you can mix global social responsibility with profitability: Become the electronics recycling and home energy conservation leader in your community. Jumping into the issue, you'll discover that a good number of your clients feel strongly about conservation and social responsibility. They'll be willing receptors for your innovations in lighting, energy monitoring, and HVAC/energy management. They'll be happy that

MOST OF OUR CE WASTE (EVEN THE STUFF MEANT TO BE RECYCLED) ENDS UP IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES—AND THEY DON'T RECYCLE THE MAJORITY. THEY MINE IT FOR VALUABLE TRACE MINERALS, LETTING THE REMAINDER PILE UP AS TRASH. TRUE RECYCLING IS WHAT WE DO WITH GLASS AND PLASTIC: MAKE NEW GLASS AND PLASTIC.

their impulses to upgrade will result in leaner, greener electronics with smaller carbon footprints and no negative impact once discarded. They'll appreciate you for making electronics recycling easy for them, as you offer it free with any purchase. You'll be able to replace your clients' PC and CE power conditioners with new types that manage standby power. And you will become their trusted, go-to destination for all things electronic, enhancing both your profitability and your standing in the community.

Note that driving to your local recycler and dropping off your clients' CE for recycling may not be as responsible as you think. Remember, most of our CE waste (even the stuff meant to be recycled) ends up in foreign countries—and they don't recycle the majority. They mine it for valuable trace minerals, letting the remainder pile up as trash. True

recycling is what we do with glass and plastic: make new glass and plastic. The MacBook is a good CE example: since it's nontoxic and assembled with recyclable parts, you can actually make new stuff from it. Older-technology electronics will require a properly certified CE recycling firm to rid them of toxins such as lead, mercury, arsenic, and cadmium, before recycling. To see who's recycling electronics the right way, and not just turning them into stripped trash, start with these resources:

- The International Association of Electronics Recyclers (iaer.org). Certifies responsible CE recyclers with the Certified Electronics Recycler® designation.
 - GreenerGadgets.com. A great jumping-off point for all things green and electronic; tons of links to green resources.
 - MyGreenElectronics.org, sponsored by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA). Assists in finding CE recyclers in your community.
- Additional conservation resource:
- Greenpeace.org Guide to Greener Electronics. Ranks CE manufacturers on leadership in reducing emissions and toxins, as well as sponsoring recycling programs.

One cool thing about your business becoming Globally Green: it's better than free. You already offer a selection of lighting/dimming solutions and power conditioning solutions—and all are profitable. Many of your home automation systems offer HVAC/energy management modules, and they're profitable too, so is the labor to install them. Responsibly recycling your clients' old CE is as easy as dumping it—if you know the right places to do it. And, best of all, as with the Butterfly Effect, the ripples of your actions will be felt around the world, instantly. It doesn't get more global than that. **CR**

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