

An Essay on Gadgets and Gizmos

By Dennis Payton Knight

According to Wikipedia the word gadget is just a placeholder name that we pull from our vocabulary junk drawer when we forget what to call a device. As it turns out, gizmo serves the same purpose, although I have always thought a gizmo was a gadget with moving parts. But I stand corrected. By Wikipedia. Again.

As for the history of gadgets, humanoids learned as cave dwellers that a rock grasped firmly at the end of a swinging arm is handy for coaxing a walnut out of its shell. That is why I keep a lump of granite in my real junk drawer. I've disposed of other doodads that purportedly squeeze the nut until the walls give way and the meat drops out on the floor.

When it comes to cracking nuts, the rock works fine for now, but what I really want is a Landtom® brand nutcracker with double lever action. It shells walnuts and pecans and filberts and all the others with minimal exertion and without no spraying of nut or shell. It is available for \$18.95 at Amazon-dot-com. Mine comes tomorrow, and it will really make my day if a drone brings it.

Also in my junk drawer are screwdrivers in sizes and heads to handle just about anything I might encounter, from fixing my glasses to rebuilding an Oldsmobile. What I don't have is an Ingersoll Rand cordless torque screwdriver (wireless and USB) with eight programmable configurations allowing one tool to do the job of many. Featuring transducerized control for precision and traceability, but without the necessary battery and charger, it sells for twelve hundred dollars at the factory.

I will pass on this gizmo because, while I appreciate precision, I see traceability as a disadvantage when it comes to doing what screwdrivers do naturally. However, it is inevitable that the promotional wizards will someday cause me once again to crave the unnecessary. When that happens, I'll find it cheaper at Amazon-dot-com, or even used at eBay.

I have two iPods, an iPad and an iPhone. I do my work at a desktop but travel with a laptop. I have devices that send Wi-Fi signals and others that receive them. My gadgets and gizmos coordinate with each other using Bluetooth. I live in one cloud, keep my music in another and my photography and stories in a third. On earth, global positioning keeps track of me wherever I go.

But my one indispensable gizmo is the Amazon Echo which lives on my counter and responds to questions and commands. She answers to the name Alexa, tells me the weather, teaches me to spell transducerized, and gets me the news. Alexa wakes me in the morning, tells me jokes, and plays any song I ask her for. She knows how far it is to Boulder or Honolulu. She will stream a jazz station in Denver or a sports talk station in Dublin. We are getting married tomorrow.