

Shaping a New Generation

The advantage technology brings to education and how to stay ahead of the curve

GENERATION Z

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP



James Whittaker

Distinguished Technical Evangelist at Microsoft

Nothing is more important...

than having a great teacher in a classroom, and making sure that they have the knowledge, support and professional development they need to provide innovative education.



The contents presented here are portions of a larger summit and specific keynotes originally delivered on September 30, 2016 during an educational summit convened by AVID—Advancement Via Individual Determination.

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James is a passionate and visionary leader who has held numerous positions at multiple companies and has shipped major software titles at IBM, Microsoft, and Google. He has published dozens of peer-reviewed research papers and authored five award-winning and bestselling technical books.

Disruptions are the Game-Changers

If you look into the future and see the present, you're wrong. That's not the way the world works. If you look into the future and see the present, you're Blockbuster and not Netflix. You're Sears and not Amazon. If you look into the future and see the present, your days are numbered. However, your ability to look into the future and predict it accurately will make you relevant instead of not.

I'm going to predict the future that everyone will experience over the next decade or so. It turns out that predicting the future is incredibly accessible, because the future is a tweak of the present. The present has been a tweak of successive pasts, or disruptions. In the last 30 years there have been three major disruptions of technology, and disruptions of technology are disruptions of the world.

Symptoms of Disruption

The very first symptom of disruption, or an era change, is innovation beginning to slow. Suddenly, instead of taking four months to build a project, it will take four months of just thinking about it.

The second symptom of change is to understand that where software developers go, the future follows. Software developers are at the vanguard of the future. And if there is developer pain in the ecosystem, someone is going to solve that, disrupt the status quo, and change the world.

Once developers catch hold of a new technology, they run with it. And when developers run with something, they innovate.

Microsoft dominated the 1990s, because they had the most relevant technology. Until they didn't. What was the developers' pain? They didn't know their customers. They didn't know if their customers were male or female, where they lived, what features they used, etc.

Along came the World Wide Web—born in 1989—not relevant until 1999. Suddenly, users all over the world were able to find programmers' software without having to buy it. And programmers would know their customers, because each one would have to set up an account with some personal data.

In the 2000s, Microsoft was betting on Windows and Office, the present. What were companies like Google, Ebay and Amazon betting on? They were betting on the future, by definition, because they were living it.

Developers flocked to these new scenarios, because they built cool stuff. Then, it happened to Google in 2009.

Developers realized that the browser was not the number one app used on the iPhone. Google, though, makes its money on being a browser, yet apps were taking over. Developers knew that an app is a better experience to consume the web than a browser.

In 2007, Steve Jobs took a 10-year-old technology, the Palm and developed the iPhone. Here's the value proposition that Steve Jobs gave. He realized that developers were writing new apps for phones but had no way for consumers to find them. Steve Jobs created the App Store and placed it on the home screen of the iPhone. He also offered to give the developers 70% of the profit for each of their apps sold in the App Store. The success of his vision is history.

If you look into the future and see the present, your days are numbered.

Another glimpse into the future that is here now is artificial intelligence. Search features are already more machine initiated. The Cortanas, the Google News, the Siris of the world, initiate searches for you based on things like your location, your calendar, your expectations, and what other people did in your situation. In the future, the patterns are going to be so strong, that our infrastructure is going to understand our intent better than we do.

Now, the question is what does it mean for educators? Disruption is upon us. It's up to you to figure out how you handle it.

