

Each year, the brightest startups and the world's tech giants converge for Web Summit. From CTOs of Google to CEOs of every household name startup (Facebook, Uber, Netflix...) this is a conference like no other. The four days of lectures and summits map out the future of tech and business with 1,000 speakers and 42,000 attendees sharing knowledge and looking to see where tech will take us next. Here are 10 lessons I learnt while attending late last year...

EMAIL HAS HAD ITS DAY IN INTERNAL COMMS

One of the fastest-growing startups in 2015 was Slack. Nicknamed the Email Killer, Slack is like a WhatsApp for businesses who believe that communication transparency is part of having a more effective, happier team. Instead of emails going to personalised inboxes and siloing away information to different people, all internal messages are made public. This allows for easy searches and for teams of people to have real-time access to all information. It also combines social media feeds, allows you to send and share documents and images, and it works in tandem with Google docs, Dropbox and so on. And of course it's completely mobile. It makes email look like dial-up compared to broadband. "Email will be like the cockroach of the internet, it's got a couple of hundred years left," says Stewart Butterfield, founder of Slack, "but ultimately it's inefficient."

MAKE GOOD DESIGN DELIBERATE

When Web Summit co-founder Paddy Cosgrave was putting together the 2015 edition of his CEO-attracting seminar, he looked at every single detail's design to see how it could work harder. Take the lanyards you wear around your neck for any trade show or conference. He found they were too long, hanging so low as to render them useless. You couldn't see who you were talking to or looking for. As he researched this he found all lanyards are made by one Chinese supplier to a standard length. Changing this length has impacted on how his attendees connect. "Everything is a deliberate choice," he explains. "Make sure every part of your process, product or strategy has a deliberate design behind it." ▶

TECH TALES

Our writer shares ten lessons from 2015's Web Summit in Dublin.

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- 1 Paddy Cosgrave, Founder and CEO, Web Summit speaks on stage during the Web Summit in Dublin, Ireland.
- 2 Slack Co-founder and CEO Stewart Butterfield.
- 3 A smartphone displays the Uber mobile application, which allows users to hail private-hire cars from any location.
- 4 Google's various projects to provide internet access to remote parts of the world are within sight of the finishing line.
- 5 The on-demand internet streaming media provider Netflix on a smartphone.

“On-demand services solve problems that have just been accepted before,” says William Shu from Deliveroo. “Our smart phones are the universal remote control and on-demand caters to this.”

access transforms lives, communities and societies for the better through education and global awareness. Google’s various projects to provide internet access to remote parts of the world are within sight of the finishing line. With a combination of drones, satellites, lasers and balloons, the company could provide cheap access to huge swathes of people living offline. Which means that not far behind their success lies massive markets of untapped potential.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO INNOVATE

Bill Ford, CEO of Ford Motors has always run a motor company, but in 2015 he changed his company’s purpose to mobility. “It’s a change of business model. We are focusing on all things mobility, from autonomous driving, connected cars, shared ownership of vehicles to data collection,” he explains. Seeing a time in the future when widespread gridlock makes owning a car more difficult, his new mission is be part of the solution to a still very old-fashioned industry. “The future is changing anyway, and I’d like it to happen with us. We have to make great cars today and imagine a future where transportation is a service, which requires us to do a lot more than we do today.” The company is testing out its SUVs in India, where the cars can transmit health data from rural communities as well as mapping those landscapes for NGOs. “If you think of the car industry as revolution resistant for 100 years, the business model hasn’t changed from when Ford started, compared to other industries. We are now, though, at a threshold of a series of revolutions in the car industry; it’s really exciting,” he adds.

ON-DEMAND SERVICES ARE HERE TO STAY

In the last few years, our entire lives have been turned upside down by the possibilities of on-demand services. From the global success of Uber, to ordering cleaners and handymen through your phone to picking a takeaway, everything is at our fingertips. The CEOs of Deliveroo and Handy believe the future will be on demand. “On-demand services solve problems that have just been accepted before,” says William Shu from Deliveroo. “Our smartphones are the universal remote control, and on-demand caters to this... They allow more people to be self-employed and add incremental salaries to their regular job with

VIRTUAL REALITY WILL BE THE NEXT FRONTIER

Yes, yes we’ve heard about VR for a while now and relegated it pretty much to the realms of teenage boys and gamers, but that’s wrong says Palmer Lucky, founder of Oculus Rift, the pioneering VR headset company that Facebook recently bought. “The best uses of this new technology will take time to evolve,” says Lucky. “It can be used for storytelling, education, medical simulation, first responder training. VR has the potential to help people learn and understand things they can’t just by looking at a video.” It can even recreate scenarios that are no longer with us or situations the physical world doesn’t allow – such as historical recreations or in-depth looks at molecular structures. It’s only a matter of time before this technology becomes mainstream, with better computers and cheaper technology, we should see a boom in inventive uses for it, just as we have seen with apps for phones and tablets as it’s opened up to more people. “We have a long road ahead of us but in 50 years from now, I’d be surprised if we still carried around smartphones.”

A LOT MORE PEOPLE ARE ABOUT TO LOG ON

At the end of 2015, 2.5 billion people were still without internet access. While this might seem to ignore the fact millions of people are without more pressing things like food and water, there’s no denying that internet

flexible working hours.” So how do you make it successful? You need to pick an industry that needs disrupting, apply new tech and great customer service and focus on giving those customers the best experience you can. “The way you win is not by taking over the world all at once, but picking a postcode and working it until you’ve got lots of happy customers and then move on,” explains Oisin Hanrahan from Handy.

DON'T IGNORE THE POWER OF ONLINE VIDEO CONTENT

For anyone over 25, the concept of vlogging (running an online video blog or YouTube channel) might seem teenage and twee, but be assured it’s nothing of the sort. Trendsetting brands already use partnerships with vloggers to appeal to a younger, mobile, socially acute audience, with great effect, and do so completely off the mainstream radar of online advertising, TV, print and radio. Maker Studios is home to some of the most influential social media stars, (who are often more economically influential than traditional celebrities), and they produce over 200 shows for their online audiences – from beauty tutorials with Brazil’s most popular beauty vlogger to comedy talk shows. And with great impact. Maker’s short-form videos hit 10 billion views a month. Just as other industries have been radically disrupted by the internet (publishing, music etc.), so too has entertainment but more quietly and with a younger audience. If you want to connect with them, you’d better get creative.

LOCALISATION IS KEY TO INTERNATIONAL ONLINE EXPANSION

Fashion e-commerce sites Zalando and the Gilt Group have recently both expanded to multiple international markets, but both say it’s the employment of local models that has afforded them success. “I believe a lot in localisation and invest in the local customer experience, local delivery methods or payment

methods,” says Robert Gentz, co-founder. “For example, the Italians prefer to pay cash on delivery while Germans pay online. We take notice of local attitudes to advertising.” For the Gilt Groupe, it’s about investing in local editorial or visual imagery. “We’re also about to roll-out to key markets across Asia, and we couldn’t do that without local partners in delivery and communication,” says Michelle Peluso, CEO Gilt Groupe.

TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING WON'T WORK WITH MILLENNIALS

Up to 40 per cent of younger viewers online now partake in “ad-blocking” – circumventing the traditional forms of adverts that have been the accepted pay-off for having free content. However, now it seems that combining brands into editorial content is working as a more acceptable form for a younger generation – a 180-degree shift from what has gone before. It means editorial partnerships are going to become more important, but also there’s a need for an authentic, sympathetic approach. The new generation are more ad-savvy, brand aware and sceptical than the generation before. It’s not about shoe-horning a product into a video show, but sponsorship of videos and working in partnership with content creators that align with a brand’s ethos in a much more bespoke manner.

DRONES AREN'T ALWAYS THE BAD GUYS

Drones have been in the media over the last 12 months, for nearly causing commercial jets to crash, to being used for missile strikes in

the Middle East. But drones don’t have to have a negative impact, says Randy Braun from DJI, the world’s leading small drone producer. He has partnered with the UAV Humanitarian Network, which uses drones to map natural-disaster-prone countries. “Sophisticated drone technology arrived in 2015 and it’s changing our business and how we view the world,” Braun says. It’s definitely helped how the village of Panga in Nepal views their world, after UAV went in to train local engineering students on how to fly the drones so they could map their local areas to help the local community decide how to rebuild more quickly and more safely after the massive earthquake last year, which killed 9,000 people and destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes. The 3D maps could see through buildings, and into areas impassable physically, which were then printed out onto waterproof canvas for the villagers to be able to use. UAV is just one example where new aerial technology can save lives and help the developing world progress quicker. ▲



6 The Oculus Rift headset – it’s predicted that virtual reality will be the next tech frontier.
 7 On-demand services such as Deliveroo are here to stay and solve the problems that have previously just been accepted.
 8 Bill Ford, CEO of Ford Motors.
 9 Online video giant YouTube shows little sign of slowing down.
 10 Fashion e-commerce sites, Zalando have recently expanded to multiple international markets.
 11 Sophisticated drone technology arrived in 2015 and it’s changing business and how we view the world.

