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So did the futurologists get it right?

Here we are sitting in a space station orbiting the moon, reading our electronic newspaper and waiting for the videophone to ring . . . not. When futurologists made their predictions in the 1980s, what did they call correctly and what did they get hopelessly wrong?

In 1989, Malcolm Abrams and Harriet Bernstein interviewed innovators and compiled *Future Stuff*, a book describing almost 300 consumer products that “should be in your supermarket, hardware store, pharmacy, department store, or otherwise available by the year 2000”. Many of them, including the pocket computer, low-calorie beer, the electronic book, Sat Nav and the interactive game network, materialised in some shape or form, but we’re still waiting for the levitation vehicle, deodorant underwear and the walking desk with its built-in treadmill. We’ve yet to see the “intelligent toilet” that takes your temperature and your blood pressure, analyses your urine, and weighs you whenever you use it. We can probably live without the self-stirring saucepan, although I’d love a wrinkle-reducing pillow or a packet of stress gum. We could really have some fun with the telephone voice changer.

And the perfect Christmas present for the executive who has everything? Why, the solar-powered briefcase, of course!

Eleanor Fitzsimons

