

## Upgrade from Hell



"My phone is already too smart for me and I assume this new phone will be smarter. All a smarter phone means is another way for me to feel dumber"---Delia Ephron, author of "The Lion Is In"

One of the basic laws of system and product evolution in TRIZ is that systems oscillate between simplicity and complexity. Those of you who have attended our workshops have seen the curve showing complexity vs. time and the discussion we had about figuring out where you are on this curve as both sides offer potential opportunities. One can add useful complexity (and hopefully be paid for this additional usefulness) or simplify a complex system or product, in hopes of making it more attractive or appealing to a particular market segment. These are achieved through the use of TRIZ tools such as trimming and contradiction resolution.

Examples we have shown you are remote controls for TVs and phones that only receive calls. My personal observation is that most of the time we are on the overly complex side of this curve. In a recent article (Wall Street Journal, June 19, pA13), author Delia Ephron wrote about "Upgrade Hell" and I encourage you to spend some serious time reading it. She describes the user frustration of constantly changing interfaces, added functions that no one uses (or knows how to use!), forced software purchases to use the unusable complexity, and the apparent total disregard by the smart people who design these devices and interfaces to what people want and know how to use. Their intelligence and design capabilities seem to overwhelm any concept of customers and the few percent of people who will use this functionality. Making a few black and white copies on your office "machine" is another example we have discussed in the past.

So the questions for you, your new product development staff, software engineers, and research people to ponder are these:

1. What new "features" have you added to your product or service over the past few years? Why? Were they based on consumer input or your design capabilities? Have they added value or customer frustration? How much staff have you added to answer questions?
2. When was the last time you thought about SIMPLIFYING your product or service? What new market opportunities might that provide? How much would you save in manufacturing costs? What new market segments might open up?
3. Have you ever actually watched anyone use your product or service? What do they do (vs. what you expect them to do)? Do they use the complexity or figure out how to go around it?

A reminder that my new book "The Ideal Result: What It Is and How to Achieve It" is in final printing by Springer and will be available next month. Let me know if you are interested.

Next public TRIZ class for ASME and AIChE is in Las Vegas, September 24-26:  
<http://www.asme.org/products/courses/triz--the-theory-of-inventive-problem-solving>

Welcome your comments and examples around this month's topic!