Looking forward

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By the time you read this column, Barak Obama will be the President of the United States of America. Politics aside, I think that this is a positive thing for many reasons, the most predominant being that this is a President that understands technology. He was in High School when the first generation of computers arrived, and came of age at about the same time digital music and video began to change the way we view content. President Obama's initiative to appoint "a CIO for the USA" is also highly commendable.

Both as a nation and as an industry, American science and technology is in rough straights. Buffeted by the winds of disruptive change, market forces, and economic crisis, we must find our way to the future. Obama's appreciation and understanding of technology are among the things that will help us get through this mess. His grasp of the internet and how to use it to spread information and educate people in the process of getting elected (some would say his web effort was the deciding factor) is yet another example of Obama using tech, not just paying lip service to it.

The science and technology policies, direction, and effort of the USA affect people, places and things far from our shores. For example, even if an alternate-energy vehicle has the same cost-per-mile of an internal-combustion, the fact that the money spent is now going to guys and gals in lab coats instead of the usual suspects will change a lot more than a simple supply chain. How the USA addresses an issue affects far more than the issue in question.

As Bill Nye (the science guy) said, "If you think about it, well, even if you don't, the President of the United States, for better or for worse, affects every species on Earth. Oh, there might be a seafaring virus living on or around deep sea scalding-water vents that is unconcerned. But if you're an elephant, a whale, a robust fly, who vectors some exquisitely-evolved misery-causing virus, a tree growing in the shifting borderlands of your species, or an African girl finding her way in school as best she can, you are affected by what the United States does and therewith what this president does. It's real and serious."

Recognizing that reality is key to understanding how important it is to have a Chief Executive that actually knows and understands science and tech in these trying times, and will actually try and create intelligent policies based upon that knowledge. To Obama, the web isn't a series of "tubes" and a grocery-store bar-code scanner isn't a novelty. They are tools that must be properly implemented to achieve the desired result.

So, let's look forward and send the new President our best wishes for his (and our) success. The future of our country and our industry depend upon it. If you have any comments you would like to share on the topic of America's future science and technology policy making, send them to me at alix.paultre@advantagemedia.com [1], and we'll run the best of them here in the following issues.

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