

# [Talking Technology](#) [The untouchables technology can't break through](#)

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor



Last week we began a series on breakthrough technologies.

We looked more closely at fuel cells and hydrogen that, in my opinion, has the potential to be one of the most transformative technologies of our time.

The introduction of hydrogen technologies into the marketplace will lead to cleaner air and a healthier environment for our children, as well as significant economic opportunity.

Most of us, whether we want to admit it or not, are somewhat resistant to change. I love the quote from a Decca Records executive in 1962 when looking at the radically different but then unsigned group called The Beatles, "Guitar groups are on their way out." How far wrong could you be?

The fact that the Fab Four went on to become the world's best-selling musical act only shows the danger in our traditional way of safe thinking.

Technology, like pop music, changes rapidly. Both thrive from constant innovation and fickle audiences.

Often the reason that adoption of innovative technology products is so low has more to do with the technology industry making promises that they just can't keep.

Early adopters try the technology only to be disappointed with the performance and results.

The video conferencing industry can be accused of this. Promises such as "completely eliminate the need to travel," was the promise made to business customers that "video conferencing would revolutionize how we communicate."

Video conferencing simply hasn't delivered – at least not yet.

High costs, difficulty of use and issues of reliability have kept this market, which many people had high hopes for 15 years ago, limited to worldwide revenues of \$780 million US.

However, a recent report from Frost & Sullivan said North American video conferencing services revenues may climb to \$5 billion by 2007.

Quite impressive growth for a struggling industry.

Most buyers of video conferencing solutions tended to be the larger companies in the health care, education, legal, financial and government markets.

Executives, salespeople, lawyers, doctors and other professionals have also been frequent users of this technology.

To encourage broader adoption, the industry has been concentrating on providing products that allow real-time interactive video with appeal to employees of mainstream companies outside of the niche markets that they have already established.

Post-9/11, the industry saw a boost in demand with many corporations trying to minimize travel and reduce travel costs.

A survey by Runzheimer Reports on Travel Management earlier this year found that about 36 per cent of companies seeking to cut domestic travel costs used video conferencing.

To date, video conferencing has been, for the most part, delivered over traditional telecom or high-speed broadband networks.

As long as each location is equipped with a camera, microphone, monitor, and signal management device you are in business.

In my opinion, it is time that video conferencing technology to be taken to the next level. Why not dream about a broader vision that brings high quality, real-time video capability to the masses?

We hear and read about live streaming in the press that are being pushed by companies that have everything to gain, but if it was that simple why aren't we using it today?

The brutal truth is that today's streaming solutions are still plagued with bandwidth limitations, internet latency, computer requirements and data compression requirements that are huge hurdles that must be overcome in order to bring high-quality, real-time video conferencing to the masses.

But what if those hurdles were overcome? What if on-demand, streamlining video and audio collaboration were possible today, from anywhere in the world, right now?

Well, we are getting closer. The market research is absolutely clear – consumers like us have said that we want to be always on, always connected, always in touch and we are willing to pay for this privilege.

We have an insatiable appetite for fast access, mobile communications and immediate access to our personal and business data and media. You will be interested to know that there are a handful of companies that are working on transforming your world right now by bringing real-time interactivity into your hands.

By providing revolutionary interactive experiences, reality-based content and streamlined communications to us whenever and wherever —from your home phone to your hand-held to your television to your car and to your laptop—as if you were there.

The convergence of interactive technologies, including video capability, is occurring at breakneck speed.

Imagine picking up your phone at home and being able to see your Mom and Dad, who live in Ontario, talking to you over your high quality, low cost, wireless video phone with virtually no delay in the streaming video content.

Better yet, with the touch of a button, you switch them to the TV screen so the whole family can interact with Gramma and Grampa.

You want to continue the conversation as you travel to the Christmas play with your family so you switch to the wireless video connection in your car.

Upon your arrival at the Rotary Arts Centre you switch to your mobile video phone and Gramma and Grampa get to see the performance live!

Oops – security guards at the Mary Irwin Theatre want to confiscate my video phone! Sorry Mom and Dad but we aren't allowed to bring you into see this live performance – at least not yet!

As we embrace new technologies capable of delivering on the promise of high-quality, low latency video collaboration, applications such as real time video interaction will become increasingly popular.

These opportunities open up new doors for commerce and communication that are unique to our time.

Maybe I am not as ready for this breakthrough technology as I think I am.

I recently saw a commercial for one of the new digital camera/video phones and, while I love the technology, I can do without the message.

The real message wasn't so much that I could communicate anytime, anywhere but that it was OK for me to replace my attendance at my daughter's school play with a digital picture or video of me encouraging her.

Perhaps there are things that I want to remain "untouchable" by technology.

To me, I don't want my wife Angela and my children Brittany, Brianne and Joshua to have fond, distant memories of me at the end of a videophone.

That is simply not the legacy that I want to leave.

While I know that there are exceptions, I hope that I can always remember that "share moments, share life" simply means being there – through the high points and the low points, through the successes and the failures of life.

If I am completely honest with myself, I really didn't move my family 3,000 miles to the Okanagan to start a business.

I moved because I wanted more from life than talking to my family from my hotel room in Los Angeles, Stockholm or Frankfurt. I wanted to be there like I never could before.

I wanted to take the time to coach their soccer team, their basketball team or whatever else they want to be involved with.

I wanted to be there with them every step of the way. While I know that I have much room for improvement as a husband and a Dad, I truly hope that there are some untouchables in my life – things that no technology will ever change.

I hope I can always remember the words of Henry Ward Beecher "No amount of technology can ever replace you."

Next week we will look more closely at another breakthrough technology that is revolutionizing how businesses track the location and movement of physical goods.

Steve Burns, CA, CMC, CFP, is the president and CEO of Burns Innovation Group Inc. and Steve Burns Inc. Chartered Accountant, which provide consulting and accounting services to entrepreneurs. You can reach Steve at 763-4716 or via e-mail at:

[steve@burnsinnovation.com](mailto:steve@burnsinnovation.com) or [steve@steveburns.ca](mailto:steve@steveburns.ca)