

# 5 tech trends that will disappoint in 2019



By [Rob Stokes](#)

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Beyond the lip service, I feel like we are in a trough of disillusionment on so many pivotal technologies. In particular, there are five emerging fields which have garnered tremendous excitement over the past couple of years, and yet this excitement is likely to die down in the next year as the reality sets in that the real impact of these technologies is still a good few years away.



Rob Stokes, chairman of Red & Yellow School.

It is useful to understand these fading trends because while rising trends can be obvious, to take advantage of many of them in 2019, you needed to have acted a while ago. However, it is not too late to avoid wasting time and resources on these non-trends, at least for 2019, unless you are making significant long-term bets in which case, load up.

It's useful to understand why we have hype and then disappointment before the real impact kicks in.

*“ This is largely because of a quirk of the human mind: we are very good at thinking linearly and yet technology evolves exponentially. This means that humans tend to overestimate technological progress in the short run and underestimate it in the long run. ”*

For me, this is most notable with the annual iPhone release, which is very rarely surprising in terms of cool new features despite what we hope for. However, if we look back on our phones of five to 10 years ago, it would be hard to imagine the level of advancement today.

Face scanning, wireless charging, screen quality and processor speed have resulted in a dramatic improvement in the quality of the user experience.

Here are five technologies that are brimming with hype and excitement, but certainly, in my opinion, will deliver very little additional value in 2019, despite being absolutely world-changing in the longer term.

## 1. Programmatic advertising

Programmatic advertising has such promise, but beyond incremental gains, it has yet to deliver on that promise. Is that because of poor data, bad algorithms or lazy planners?

The dirty secret of big data is that we have a lot of it, but we're not very good at all at using it well, and programmatic advertising lies at the heart of getting this right. It is still useful today, thanks to its measurability, and is therefore a no-brainer in almost any marketer's toolbox, but the real potential of its effectiveness isn't even close to being reached.

The utopia is delivering the right message to the right person at the right time and nothing more. Certainly, that is a possibility, but until we are able to properly wrangle the mass of data available, we won't see its real potential.

My estimate on this is three to five years.

## 2. Artificial intelligence

AI has filled us with such excitement, but my estimate on the really exciting stuff impacting us is five to seven years, and even longer before we see artificial general intelligence which is the real game-changer.

While we are not quite hitting an AI winter as we have been through in the past, we are still a few years away from the profound impacts this latest wave of machine learning has promised, and I believe we are going to need a few key technology breakthroughs in order to get there.

### **3. 5G**

From the outside, the fifth generation of mobile communications looks like a panacea. Blazing speeds, low latency, reduced energy consumption and, in particular, high-density connections, which will allow us to connect exponentially more devices to the network.

It is the connectivity technology that will properly enable the internet of things and yet despite its hype and early implementations, it is at least four years from being anywhere close to widely available and useful. This is largely because of the investment required, both in the network and devices to enable the advantages of the system.

Yes, we have trendy data providers like Rain Mobile who have jumped on the bandwagon, but in my opinion this is largely a PR stunt and the benefit to the average Joe is still a way off, although when it hits, it will be game-changing because the internet really will be everywhere.

### **4. Virtual assistants**

From Amazon's Echo to Google's Home and a plethora of offerings from the big tech firms, these modern-day virtual assistants in a box have such promise.

And yet it is very telling that the top five most popular smart speaker use cases remained the same year-over-year from 2017 to 2018, with music leading, followed by weather, information, timers, and news.

The reality is that the artificial intelligence available to these assistants is still relatively rudimentary and confined to a narrow set of use cases. For an assistant to be truly useful, it needs to have a far better grasp of context, and this requires substantially more data and much smarter algorithms to process it all.

Until then, we will continue to be frustrated by Siri's inability to understand even the most basic of instructions and queries. My estimate for this technology to be properly useful is four to six years.

### **5. Blockchain**

The golden child of 2017 is going through a rough patch as its poster boy, Bitcoin, gets smashed in the face from every side. However blockchain is not Bitcoin and the promise of this underlying technology is still real, even though it will be a while before it reaches maturity.

We need huge gains mainly in speed (but also energy usage) for the blockchain to start to live up to its potential. However, these problems will be solved and once we can process transactions in the millions per second (rather than tens), and once complementary technologies such as homomorphic encryption become viable, the blockchain will prove itself to be a technology trend as important as the internet itself, maybe more so.

My estimate on this is 10 to 15 years, although I really hope it's a lot sooner.

There we have them, five technology trends that will disappoint in 2019 even though in the long term, they will likely turn our world on its head. Timing is always tricky to estimate, but a compounding factor here is likely to be the negative impact of what looks like an impending bear cycle in the global markets.

Apart from innovation to deliver high ROI efficiency gains, five to ten years of economic pullback will mean the cutting of a lot of high-risk innovation budgets, which naturally means we will take longer to find the profitable sweet spots that exist at the intersections of these technologies and the market.

Again, however, humans tend to underestimate technological progress in the long term – so let's hope that we start to see the promise sooner rather than later. I, for one, can't wait.

## ABOUT ROB STOKES

Rob Stokes is an investor and entrepreneur focused on the technology and education sectors. In his first innings he founded award-winning digital agency, Quirk, in 1999. He built Quirk into one of the largest agencies on the African continent before selling it to the London listed global leader, WPP, in 2014. Today, Rob is Chairman of the Red & Yellow Creative School of Business and serves as non exec director at Brandseye, Openbox and Cloudone.mobi.

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