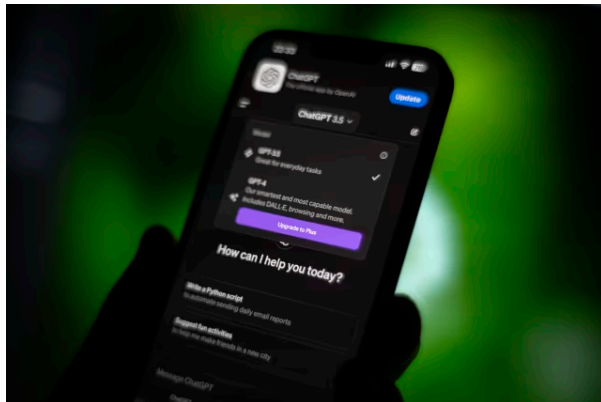


AI | TECH TRADER

# After 40 Years, a Tech Columnist Says Farewell. But First, One More Thing.

By [Eric J. Savitz](#) Following

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I'm not sure how AI is going to make money, but some of what you can do with chatbots is remarkable. If you aren't experimenting with AI, you're making a mistake. (JAAP ARRIENS/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES)

No one has more experience leaving *Barron's* than I do. And here I go again.

My first departure from this place came in 1998. After a decade here, I was lured to *The Industry Standard*, a feisty dot-com era upstart which declared itself “the newsmagazine of the Internet economy.” It was a ton of fun, but the *Standard* couldn't survive the

bursting of the bubble. It filed for bankruptcy in 2001, and was sold for scrap.

*Barron's*, of course, continued to thrive. Pets.com hat in hand, I came back here for another nine-year run, among other things spending years as the first *Barron's* blogger, writing what we called [Tech Trader Daily](#). That was super fun, but all good things eventually come to an end, and in 2010 I left again.

I won't bore you with everything that happened to me after that, but suffice to say I eventually spent six years in corporate

communications—what journalists call “the dark side”—before returning to *Barron's* for a third time in 2019.

Now here we are five years later, and I'm hitting the road, Jack, for one more career adventure.

But before I go, I wanted to offer you one more list of thoughts—I've been doing a lot of those in recent years. This time, it's some musings on technology and innovation that I've had since joining the newswires at Dow Jones in 1984 and *Barron's* four years after that. So, here it goes, 40 years of lessons condensed into nine paragraphs:

- **Most of the time**, the next great thing just isn't that great, although it always make for fantastic copy. Let us [raise a glass](#) to 3-D televisions, [the metaverse](#), virtual and augmented reality, 3-D printing, personal drones, cryptocurrency, blockchains, NFTs, Web3, fake meat, legal marijuana, Segways, Quibi, and Napster. Let's all fondly remember Google+, Google Glass, Netflix Qwikster, Apple Ping, Apple cars, Apple Pippin, Apple Newton, Apple eWorld, HP iPods, Windows Mobile, Microsoft Zune, Clippy, and Microsoft Bob. Let's spend a moment recalling the rise and fall of Flip camcorders, MoviePass, SecondLife, Hyperloop, WeWork, Jawbone, Webvan, Juicero, nanotech, superconductors, Theranos, Solyndra, SPACs, and direct stock listings. Turns out, [it isn't easy to change the world](#).
- **No question, technology involves experimentation.** But most start-ups fail, and most products never succeed. Be skeptical, but not cynical. Be open to new ideas, but don't get suckered into nonsense, and tamp down your FOMO.
- **Not all of the things on my list were obvious losers**, but some screamed “fail” from the get go. There's [no better example than 3-D TVs](#). A little over a decade ago, the show floor at the annual CES tech trade show in Las Vegas was dominated by television manufacturers pushing the idea as the biggest thing to happen to consumer electronics since the death of the picture tube. To me, it seemed flat-out delusional to think people would watch football, SNL, or the local news while wearing a ridiculously dorky headset. Ignore marketing blather and trust your common sense.

- **Now to be clear, sometimes the next great thing really is that great.** Personal computers, Wi-Fi, cloud computing, iPhones, social media, the internet, streaming television, Google, Facebook, YouTube. And by the way, there were naysayers on all of those.
- **I was going to include artificial intelligence on the winners list**, but it isn't impossible it ends up on the overhyped one. The jury is still out. I'm [not sure how AI is going to make money](#), but some of what you can do with chatbots is remarkable. If you aren't experimenting with AI, you're making a big mistake. Be a skeptic, not a Luddite.
- **The truth is that many things end up somewhere in the middle**, semi-useful ideas that simply don't offer the returns investors fantasize about. Segways didn't revolutionize urban transportation, but they're popular for tours. WeWork cost SoftBank billions, but the business just emerged from bankruptcy. There really are markets for legal weed and fake burgers, but the impact hasn't been nearly as earth-shattering as bulls hoped.
- **While many fantastic ideas come from two guys in a garage**, the companies with the best chance of leveraging innovation are those with the deepest pockets, the keenest marketing acumen, and the most customers. There's a reason that the key players in AI include [Microsoft](#), [Alphabet](#), [Meta Platforms](#), [Amazon.com](#), and [Nvidia](#). In the eternal battle between David and Goliath, the odds strongly favor the big fella.
- **There are advantages to being new and nimble**, but it's [even better to be old and nimble](#). Some of the most interesting bets on AI right now are [Corning](#), [IBM](#), [Oracle](#), and [Hewlett Packard Enterprise](#), which together have been around for 415 years. That overnight success story Nvidia was [founded 31 years ago](#).
- **Remember this, from the physicist Richard Feynman:** “For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations.”

I've loved writing for *Barron's*, and the last five years have been the sweetest, an unexpected second boomerang back to my journalistic roots. I will miss writing this column most of all.

Not every call I made here worked out, but a lot of them did, and I hope I at least gave you some things to think about along the way. I

am grateful to all of you who came along on the journey.

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