

You cannot have missed the launch of Facebook onto the stock market, turning Mark Zuckerberg into a multi-billionaire at the age of 28. He is now one of the richest 25 people in the world. In eight years from setting up the company it has grown to serve 900 million users.



We must recognise that the spread of computers means we have to adjust our behaviour or suffer some unintended consequences. Take care when putting personal details on any social network site. (Identity theft; teenage party gate-crashers and so on.)

Computers cannot be blamed for problems due to inappropriate use just as car accidents are frequently due to poor driving rather than the car itself.

The computer's 'Black box' capability is available in cars. Car based computers can contribute to safer journeys. They can sound an alarm if the driver's eyelids droop due to tiredness. They can ensure that brakes do not lock and so help a controlled stop. They can detect if the car is straying across lane markings and they can record information about what the engine is doing and what the dashboard instruments are showing.

It is now possible for such information to identify the root cause of an accident to be an individual's poor driving – with legal consequences.

If a driver uses a Sat-Nav. that shows where the safety cameras are, at what point does society infer that this facility means that the driver is happy to exceed the legal speed limit as long as s/he will not get caught? As a counterbalance, computers on main roads are being used to check average speeds over a long distance.

All these things give rise to privacy issues and cries of "Big Brother". Nevertheless computers make more restrictive legislation easier to enforce, Number plate recognition means that valid insurance, MOT certification and road tax can be verified automatically.

If you buy a car with a keyless system for entry and ignition, be aware: manufacturers are combating a device that can be plugged into the diagnostic port and get the car's on-board computer to programme a chip in a blank fob and hence take control of the car. Be sure the car locks engage properly when you leave it. At least the criminals must break in first.

On a lighter note, if have an iPad, a case is on the market that means you can always make notes no matter how flat the battery - use the pen provided to write on the paper pad set into the cover that protects the screen. Nice touch, that. (Google "Booqpad".)

And news that scientists can now "un-print" a sheet of paper by using a laser to vaporise the toner forming the letters without ruining the paper for re-use, saving trees and carbon emissions. Whatever next?