



GADGETS & GIZMOS

Inventing the Modern World

Think about what you do in an average day. Think about the role technology plays in your activities. How did this technology come about? How do inventions reflect their times? What do they say about our expectations and the roles of people in society, past and present? And how do inventors come up with ideas for products, processes, and designs?

These concepts will be explored in **Gadgets and Gizmos: inventing the modern world**, a new exhibit at the San Bernardino County Museum that will open on February 14 and run through November 1, 2009. The exhibit, featuring objects in the museum's history collections, is free with museum admission.

"Think about the gadgets and gizmos you use every day and envision doing the same tasks with artifacts from the past," said Michele Nielsen, the museum's curator of history. "Some of our activities involve high tech operations and equipment, like the electronic devices and processes required to use a computer or talk on a telephone. At the same time, we engage in low tech endeavors in our daily lives like brushing our teeth or wiping off the kitchen counter. Amazingly, 'older' technology often works just as well or better than some of what is available today!"

In **Gadgets and Gizmos**, visitors will learn more about how people carried out their day-to-day tasks in the past. Find out what a sad iron is, and examine devices like a precursor to the Xerox machine. "Go Back to the Drawing Board" and design a few gadgets and gizmos of your own. Learn about the U. S. Patent Office and enjoy a review of fascinating, often useful, and sometimes funny inventions that have received a patent. Museum visitors will find themselves recalling the introduction of technology to their own modern world, no matter what their ages.

"I'm of the 'baby boomer' generation, so my modern world already had cars, electricity, and home perma-

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San Bernardino County Museum

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nents,” said Jennifer Reynolds, museum media specialist. “My grandfather insisted that the crystal radios he built for himself worked better than my dad’s Philco. But I vividly recall my amazement when someone hiked by me in the Muir Woods with music playing—a transistor radio! Not to mention entering the computer age when I was in college, with the oft-repeated warning, ‘do not fold, spindle, or mutilate.’”

Back when vehicles were powered by animals, how did the world deal with the resulting insect problem? In **Gadgets and Gizmos** visitors can see a contraption set out on city streets to catch flies. See telephones that had to be hand-cranked to get a signal, a bread toaster that flops rather than pops, and patent drawings for coin-operated toilet paper dispensers and horse sun-bonnets.

“The exhibit will feature inventions that you’d never consider somebody would have had to invent at all, since we’re so accustomed to them today,” said Nielsen. “Not to mention inventions that will make you wonder, ‘what could they have been thinking?’ Have you ever wondered how the eggs you eat get put into that nice paper carton they come in? Well, there is a gadget that revolutionized this part of the egg packing process, and it will be on exhibit, too. I think we love gadgets just as much today, as our predecessors did in the past. As consumers, many of us are engaged by gadgets, as the popularity of catalogs and stores like The Sharper Image attest.”

Whatever the gizmo that captures your fancy in the exhibit, visitors will take away a realization that not only does technology shape our modern world, but that whatever the era, the ‘modern’ world also creates needs and expectations that drive the invention of new technology. “We hope people will enter the exhibit with curiosity about gadgets of the past,” said Nielsen. “We think visitors will be inspired to contemplate all of the gadgets in their own lives, and compare them to those used by folks in years past after they experience this exhibit. Clearly, we still want to accomplish many of the same things people did using these artifacts, we just do them using slightly different tools.”

The San Bernardino County Museum is at the California Street exit from Interstate 10 in Redlands. The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays and holiday Mondays from 9AM to 5PM. Admission is \$6 (adult), \$5 (student or senior), and \$4 (child aged 5 to 12). Children under five and Museum Association members are admitted free. Parking is free. For more information, visit www.sbcountymuseum.org. The museum is accessible to persons with disabilities. If assistive listening devices or other auxiliary aids are needed in order to participate in museum exhibits or programs, requests should be made through Museum Visitor Services at least three business days prior to your visit. Visitor Services’ telephone number is 909-307-2669 EXT. 229 or (TDD) 909-792-1462.

