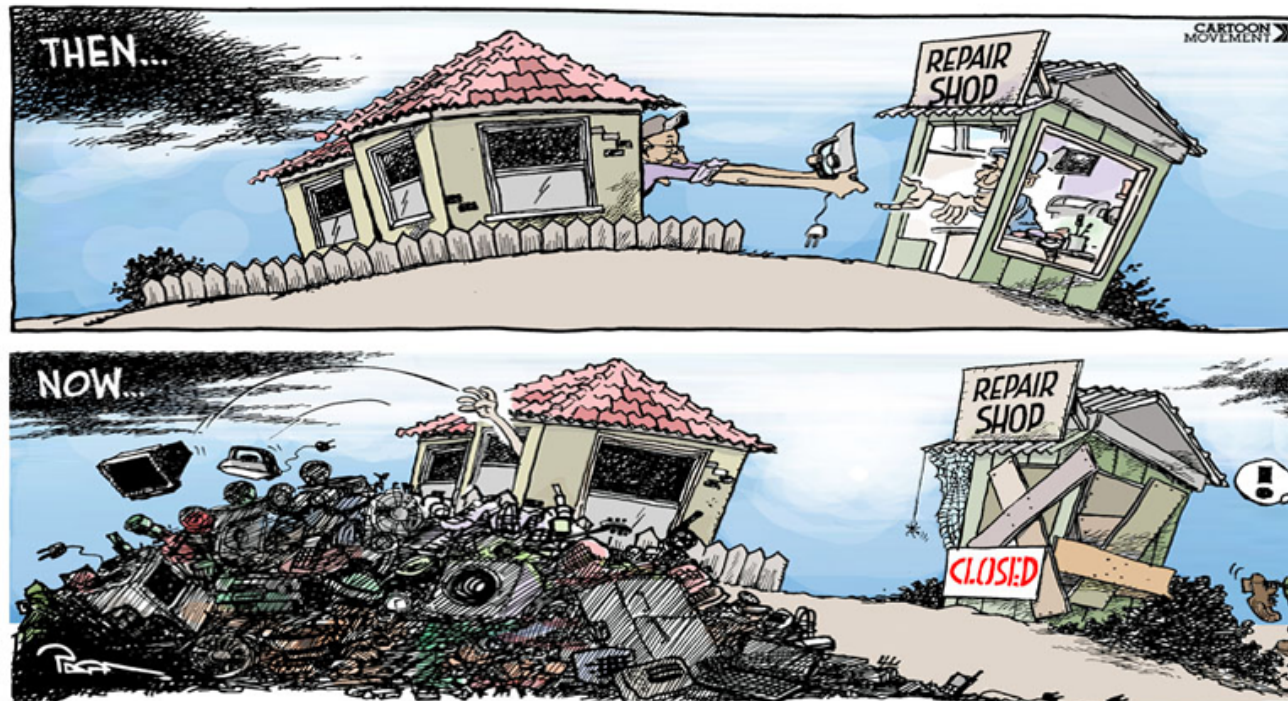


HOME > ARTICLES

Consumerism, Mass Extinction and our Throw-Away Society

BY [KRISTI GARTNER](#) | OCTOBER 13, 2016 | 0 COMMENTS

SHARE THIS



"The throw-away society is a human society strongly influenced by consumerism. The term describes a critical view of overconsumption and excessive production of short-lived or disposable items."

TRENDING

10 Keys To Reinvent Yourself

We all evolve. Change is an absolute. Life is about mental, physical and spiritual growth. The more introspection, the faster there is growth. Sometimes we... [Read More >](#)

10 Effective Ways Leaders Can Influence Others Through Nonverbal Communications

For eleven years now, since retiring from the FBI, I have been working with business executives from all over the world. My principal objective... [Read More >](#)

The Ten (and a half) Commandments of Visual Thinking

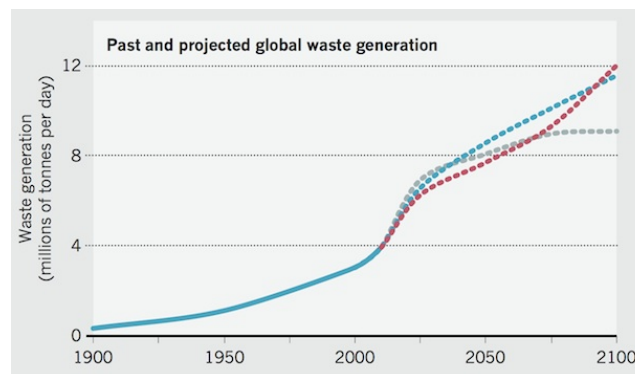
Visual thinking is the future of business problem solving. Using our innate ability to see – both with our eyes and our mind's eye – gives us entirely new... [Read More >](#)

possibility of a mass extinction, the sixth on record for our planet and the first since the extinction of the dinosaurs – sixty five million years ago.

You could argue that extinction is a natural phenomenon and you'd be right, in isolated situations. But considering the scale of this potential mass extinction, we're talking the possible loss of three fourths of earth's current species [1], it's hard to view it as anything other than grossly *un* natural. Rather than the large-scale natural disasters like meteors or successive volcanic eruptions believed to have caused past mass extinctions, scientists say this one's different. Human activities including deforestation, over-fishing, poaching and global warming could be to blame for a sixth mass extinction: Human activities largely driven by our society's demand for having more than we need, resulting in the highest ever annual global waste generation on record [2]. I'm not saying our garbage is the only or even the primary cause of our current environmental situation, but it plays a significant role, and the 'must-have mindset' driving it an even bigger one.

"e-waste represents nearly 70% of the toxic waste in landfills."

Tweet



Global waste generation with projected increase (Joseph Stromberg, 2013)

machine. Whether its food, housing, energy or consumer products, we are taking more from the planet than we ever have before, and there's more of us doing it. Most of us eat more, use more, buy more and have more than we need. And we throw more of it in the garbage. A lot more. But why?

Because, on average, we can.



Take, for example, this scenario. In 1977, the average annual income per capita (US) was \$5,785.00 (\$20,256.00 2013 CPI-U-RS adjusted dollars). In 2013, the average annual income per capita was \$28,829.00 [3]. The Apple II (one of the first mass produced microcomputers) came out in 1977, and could be purchased for an average of \$1950.00 [4] (depending on memory) with a base price of \$1298.00 [5]. That means for the average person to buy the average Apple II computer in 1977, they would need to shell out a whopping 33.7% of their annual income. For the purposes of this scenario, and understanding that this is an oversimplified example for argument sake, I'll stick with Apple; the average price of a MacBook in 2013 was \$1,286.00 [6]. So, for the average person to buy the average Apple computer in 2013, they would need to spend just 4% of their annual income.



1977 Apple II Computer, available for just 33.7% of your annual income in 1977

2013 MacBook, available for 4% of your annual income in 2013

Needless to say, affordability for tech items has increased considerably. This example is just for computers, but think about all of the other equipment we rely on that was once out of reach for the average person. Vehicles, televisions, phones, electronic appliances – in developed nations these things are staples, we all have them – multiples of them even, and we upgrade them at an alarming rate. Drawn in by advertising that boasts leading fuel economy, high efficiency, faster processing speed, better graphics, we buy things we think will improve our quality of life, and often even be *better* for the environment. And don't get me wrong, sometimes they are. But only if we find a better way to manage the stuff we get rid of to make room for the new, improved versions.

If you're taking your used items to the dump, you probably need to re-evaluate how much better for the environment that new item is. The environmental cost of these toxic items when carelessly discarded is staggering in comparison to the environmental (or other) benefits of that new equipment. Accounting for a comparatively small percentage of the total waste in our landfills, roughly 2%, e-waste represents nearly 70% of the *toxic* waste in landfills. Our tech addiction is literally poisoning the planet.

The non-profit organization I represent, the Electronic Recycling Association (ERA) is focused specifically on reducing the waste produced by personal electronics like computers, laptops, phones and other tech you'd find in your average office. We take advantage of the short primary use cycle for this equipment, which more often than not means that there is a remarkable amount of productive life remaining in equipment when it arrives at our facilities. So we wipe it, fix it up, and prepare it for secondary use. Equipment is either provided

contribution. All donations are conditional upon signing an agreement binding the recipient to return the equipment to ERA when they no longer want it or it stops working for responsible processing.

This option is a win-win. Few virgin natural resources are required to refurbish equipment, and often it has years of productive life remaining. Thousands of charitable organizations receive and use this equipment and are able to direct funds to program development as opposed to purchasing expensive new tech gear. Keeping operational tech in use longer reduces the demand for new equipment and lessens the strain on resources. When, inevitably, equipment reaches end of life, it's processed in the most environmentally responsible manner currently available. There is room for improvement there too though, while recycling is a significantly better option than trashing, it is still a resource consuming process.

We're doing what we can, but we can't reuse or recycle equipment we aren't receiving.

So why aren't people utilizing reuse and recycling programs instead of trashing their stuff? Maybe it's because society isn't aware of the impact their waste is actually having on our planet, or maybe the process to reuse or recycle household items isn't simple enough, or maybe individuals don't think their personal choices will have a measurable impact so they opt out of green practices all together. Or maybe fear or denial make it impossible to imagine our planet without 75% of the species that make it such a beautiful and diverse place. A place where we can actually live. But it's a reality, one that has already begun and will directly affect our generation and the generation of our children. This is in each of our back yards.

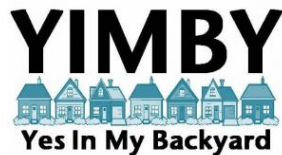


Image c/o <http://www.pccfarmlandtrust.org/yes-in-my-backyard/>

Let's stop *thinking* about how we can change the future of our planet and start *doing* something about it. We can take action, individually, in each of our lives that cumulatively will have a big impact. Just because we can afford new things doesn't mean we need them, or that the things we already have are no longer serving a

What are you doing to lessen your personal environmental impact? What is the company you work for doing? How can our leaders push for more change?

About

[The Electronic Recycling Association \(ERA\)](#) is a non-profit organization founded in 2004 to reduce electronic waste through the recovery, refurbishment and reuse of second hand electronic equipment. With deep community roots, ERA is committed to making necessary IT equipment available to Canadians in need, and has donated thousands of computers to deserving charities, non-profits, care facilities and schools. By offering streamlined and cost effective corporate services, such as equipment pick-ups and comprehensive data removal, ERA has successfully recovered thousands of tons of equipment that may otherwise have ended up in our landfills. ERA makes responsible, secure e-waste management simple.

Author

Kristi Gartner, Marketing and Communications Manager, ERA

[1] Angad Singh, for CNN. 'A New Mass Extinction Could Be Underway - CNN.Com'. *CNN* . N.p., 2015. Web. 23 June 2015.

[2] @JosephStromberg, Follow. 'When Will We Hit Peak Garbage?'. *Smithsonian* . N.p., 2013. Web. 23 June 2015.

[3] Census.gov, 'Historical Income Tables - People - U.S Census Bureau'. N.p., 2015. Web. 23 June 2015.

[4] Pearson, The. '1970'S Computers From The People History Site'. *Thepeoplehistory.com* . N.p., 2015. Web. 23 June 2015.

[5] Deffree, Suzanne. 'Apple II Goes On Sale, June 5, 1977'. *EDN* . N.p., 2015. Web. 23 June 2015.

[6] Theregister.co.uk,. 'PC Sales Shrank Less Than Expected During Back-To-School 2013'. N.p., 2015. Web. 23 June 2015.

Associated Article Image c/o <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/924>

written by some of today's thought-leaders in marketing, sales, leadership
and innovation.

matthew.archer@uwtsd.ac.uk

Sign-up Now

✔ **Unsubscribe any time. We never share your email.**

See our [Privacy Policy](#). All emails sent by [The Art of Productions Inc.](#)



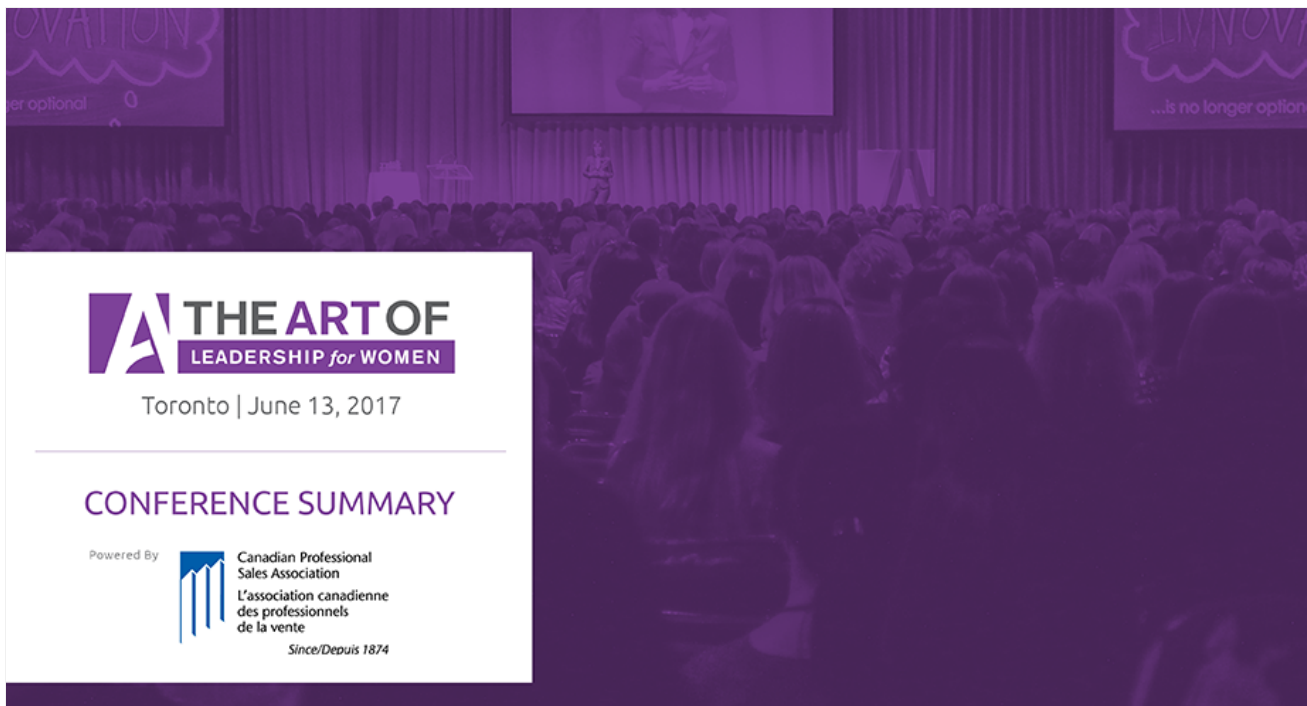
Never miss another issue!

Each issue is full of actionable articles from some of today's thought-leaders in marketing, sales, leadership and innovation. We'd love to send you a free digital copy each time a new issue comes out.

Subscribe For Free ›

Recommended for you





THE ART OF
LEADERSHIP *for WOMEN*

Toronto | June 13, 2017

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Powered By



Canadian Professional
Sales Association
L'association canadienne
des professionnels
de la vente
Since/Depuis 1874





What Did You Think?

ABOUT US

The Art Of provides business professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today's marketplace.

Our national conferences, print magazine, digital content and seminars combine insights from prominent business leaders, internationally renowned speakers and bestselling authors.

SITE MAP

Home Conferences Magazine Training Articles
Videos Speakers About Us Contact

RECENT TWEETS

Happy New Years! [#2018](#) [#TheArtOf](#) on 2/1/18

The Art of Leadership Montreal 2017 - Executive Panel:
<https://t.co/p8Xitl8cDq> via [@YouTube](#) on 14/12/17

Thank you to our partners for being a part of [#TheArtOf](#) : [@teknion](#)
[@corim_mcf](#) [@CCHL_CCLS](#) [@FairmontQueenE...](#)
<https://t.co/nqan27weth> on 29/11/17

Thank you to all our incredible sponsors for making today possible:
[@ADP](#) [@DellEMC_Canada](#) [@NationalBank](#) [@CPSA](#) [@Concordia](#)
[#TheArtOf](#) on 29/11/17

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

THE ART OF LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN - TORONTO

Friday, April 13, 2018 • 8:30am - 5:00pm
Metro Toronto Convention Centre

THE ART OF LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN - VANCOUVER

Monday, June 25, 2018 • 8:30am - 5:00pm
Vancouver Convention Centre

THE ART OF LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN - CALGARY

Tuesday, June 26, 2018 • 8:30am - 5:00pm
Calgary Telus Convention Centre