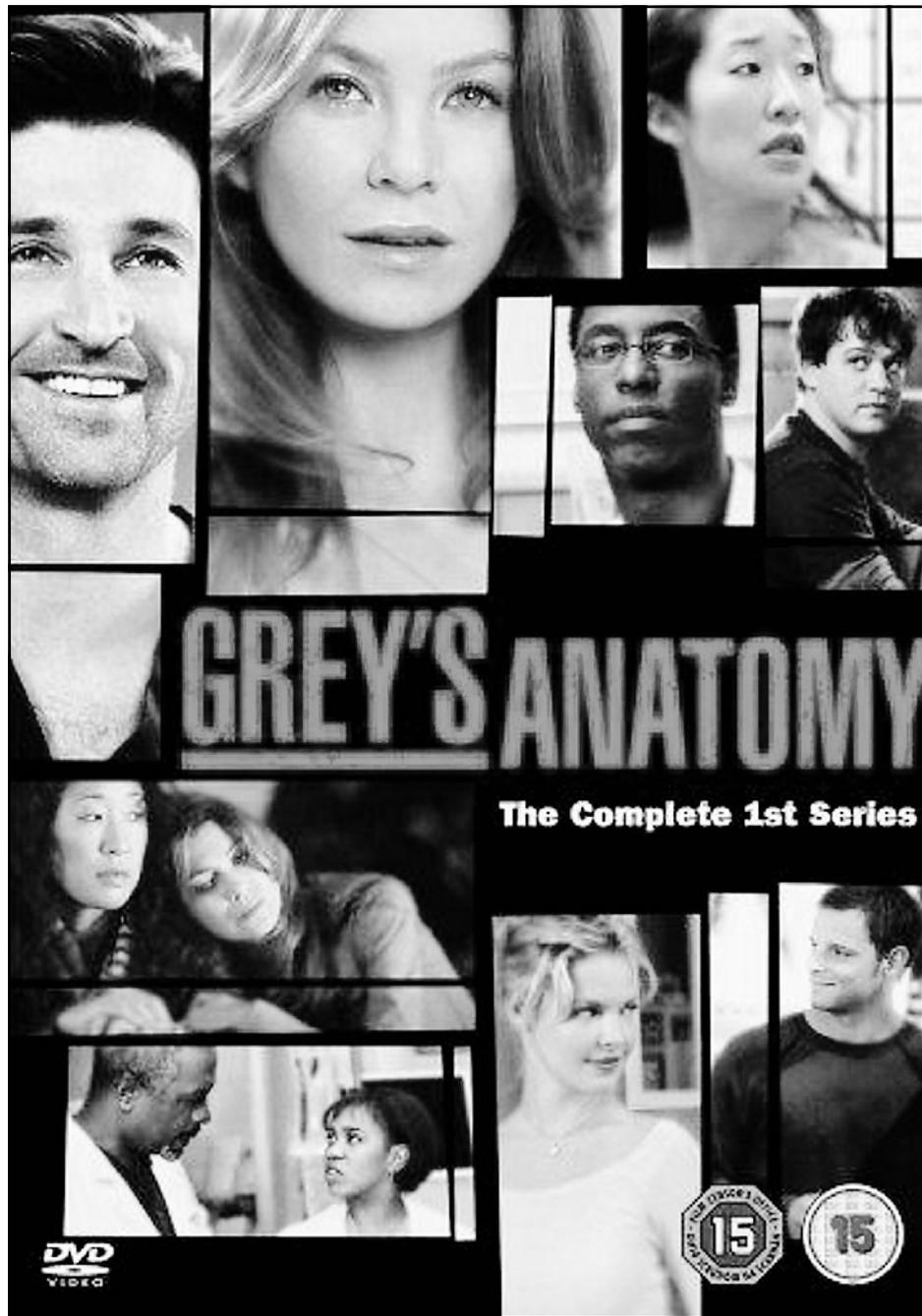


how technology will change all our lives

TV revolution



HIT: Fans of U.S. TV shows like *Grey's Anatomy* are already downloading the latest episode on the internet — and by 2020, even the technophobes of today will be doing it

model, although Panasonic has stuck to standard definition resolution again this year. Expect to pay upwards of €1,500 for good HD-ready plasma from the likes of Pioneer, Hitachi and Sony.

Meanwhile, large screen LCD TVs are only just being introduced with the HD-ready logo. Models below about 27-inch screen size are still slipping through the HD-compatible net but larger models from Philips, Sagem and JVC all get the HD thumbs up between €1,000 and €2,000.

Then there's the cost of getting actual HD content. Existing set-top boxes such as a Sky Plus box will not work with HDTV. Sky are offering high-definition services and the necessary HD set-top box and have an added monthly charge on top of existing subscription costs, while they also charge a one-off fee for the set-top box.

On the upside, all commercial HD is digital, so you would never get a snowy or washed out image from a weak signal, effects from signal interference, such as herringbone

patterns, or vertical rolling. So, no more smacking the side of the TV in a blind rage when snow appears.

Also, the two new pre-recorded disc formats support HDTV resolutions, namely HD DVD and Blu-ray. Players for both systems are expected to be backward-compatible with DVDs, however the two formats are not compatible with each other; more on that particular battle later in the week.

Dolby Digital 5.1 sound is broadcast along with standard HDTV video signals, allowing full surround sound capabilities (standard television signals broadcast basic stereo audio signals), which means that you can have a home cinema with surround sound for all TV, not just DVDs. The drum intro to the *EastEnders* theme will never sound the same again.

As HDTV is digital information, it's possible to copy it and package it into small,

easily transferable chunks — this is how those irritating co-workers of yours got to see the second season of *Lost/Prison Break/Greys Anatomy/House* before you. Viewers who see these shows first in the States can rip (copy) their TV shows, using either their PC or a device called Tivo that operates in much the same way as Sky Plus.

These HDTV shows, of DVD quality, are then transferable over the net using peer to peer programs — these allow you to connect to another person's PC and upload content from a designated file on their hard drive. Don't shake your heads technophobes — you too will be doing this by 2020!

A 45-minute episode of *Lost* takes up just 350mb of space, a tiny amount when you consider that you could fit two on standard 700mb blank CD disc.

Still a legal grey area, this is the modern equivalent of borrowing a video tape recording of that episode of *Thirtysomething* you missed back in the 1990s.

But that's not all — ABC and other U.S. networks have started selling their top TV shows in iTunes, allowing Irish video iPod users to download their favourite shows months before they hit our shores.

Life in 2020

By then, many people will have a TV set in every room and the communal viewing of a particular show will be a thing of the past; everyone will watch what they want when they want. Discussing last night's TV with work colleagues at the water cooler will be a thing of the past, a relic of the *Glenroe* era.

Instead, people will swap gossip about the latest episode of *Desperate Housewives* they have seen that has just been released in the U.S. By then, the TV producers may well be making the bulk of their money from selling each show to individuals over the internet, rather than to broadcasters.

Broadcasters like RTÉ, who currently buy up these series, may choose not to bid for them any more. In fact, RTÉ may find its present role redundant and have to localise more and more in order to provide a unique and relevant service for its licence fee.

By 2020, our 24-hour society will mean that there is no longer a prime time, or a watershed, and advertisers will have to find new ways to implant ads in the shows themselves as viewers will be able to cut out ad breaks altogether.

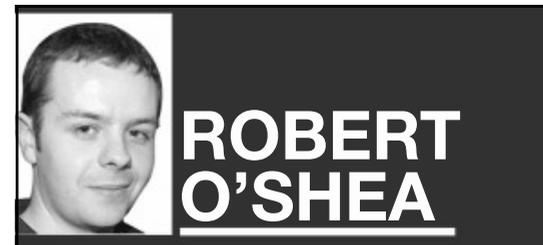
That annoying trend of product placement will become standard in all shows, perhaps reaching the apocalyptic stage witnessed in *The Truman Show*.

In the new TV world, Mrs Doyle will repeatedly offer Barry's Tea, Fr Jack will demand Jameson brand whiskey, and Bishop Brennan will insist that Dougal shop at Aldi, with hilarious consequences.

But whereas the communal aspect of watching TV may disappear, so will its control over our free time.

HDTV will mean that you can watch your favourite show when you want, not when the broadcaster decides.

Theoretically, you'll have more time to spend with your family, more time to get fit, read a book, do work, homework, whatever; but all that is in theory. Chances are that this will mean that the average family will watch even more TV and argue even more about what show to watch — but hey, at least it'll look gorgeous.



Visa queuing survey didn't allow for idiots

SO BORIS finally stepped out on Clare soil.

Last week, news emerged that on the previous Friday, former President Yeltsin of Russia was doing a spot of fishing off the west coast of the country.

It is almost exactly 12 years since Albert Reynolds and a host of Irish dignitaries and Cabinet members were left looking like a bunch of muppets while standing beside a red carpet on a Shannon runway for over an hour.

Should they have waited 60 minutes for Boris to be "woken up by his bodyguards"? Is this an acceptable timeframe in diplomatic circles to hang about for a flustered Head of State?

If I was the leader of this country at that time, I would have hung around for five minutes max. Then I may, or may not, have left a note explaining that I'd waited long enough.

I am an impatient person. I lift the kettle before it has clicked, I press the close-door button on a lift several times and I don't like long grass.

It was therefore interesting to see a survey done by Visa on queuing in Ireland, the results of which were published last week.

It said that, on average, the Irish spend 17 minutes queuing a day and that after an 11-minute wait, people start to get impatient. It takes 29 minutes, apparently, before there is a threat of physical outburst from the person waiting.

The survey also includes the top 10 irritants about waiting, including jumping the queue, leaving a queue to pick up an extra item and idle chat with counter staff.

Surprise, surprise, considering who was sponsoring the survey, there was no mention of someone paying for a small purchase with their flexible friend.

Now, while I find all

the above exasperating, what I find by far the most annoying thing about queuing is — and stop me if I'm going off on some sort of an ideological limb here — that by the time you reach the top of the queue, you have to give someone money.

I'm all for standing around aimlessly with a benign look on my face and shuffling forward a couple of feet every once in a while. That sounds like a good lifeplan to me. But whenever I hand over of my hard-earned money to someone else, something inside of me dies.

Two other things I hate about queues. The first has to do with when you are trying to squeeze past a checkout queue in a supermarket. Men will actually push their trolley sideways, to make more room. A woman will never do this. I swear, never once has a woman done this for me. No, a woman will just stand there with a forward-facing squaw look that says: "You like the look of that checkout further down mister, do you?"

The second thing involves holding something cold. I usually only enter a shop intending to buy one thing but find my hands full soon enough. If I've bought ice-cream and I reckon that the queue at the checkout will be more than three minutes, then I jettison the tub in the collected baskets underneath the counter, my dessert needs unfulfilled for another day.

Milk, however, can by the time you get to the checkout, reach frostbite levels in your grip.

Then the checkout person asks if you have 13c so you can get a tenner change, and as you pull the coins from your pocket, they cascade through your frozen fingers.

Meanwhile, at the back of the queue, someone is thinking: "I know what they forgot to put on that survey: Idiots".

TOMORROW We look at music in the digital age — from myspace to ipod and itunes and last.fm