On a blustery, overcast day early this year, P.R. representatives from Sprint and Samsung stopped by the Washington bureau of the Wall Street Journal to meet with the columnist Walter S. Mossberg. The agenda was clear: Sprint had a new music phone designed by Samsung, and the group was hoping for a positive reception from a man who has become to technology what Brooks Atkinson once was to the New York theatre—someone whose judgment can ratify years of effort or sink the show.

Mossberg’s “Personal Technology” column, which anchors the front of the Journal’s Thursday Marketplace section, is particularly powerful when it comes to judging innovation intended for the consumer market. The opening sentence of his inaugural column, sixteen years ago, was “Personal computers are just too hard to use, and it’s not your fault,” a sentence that Mossberg has since described as his “mission statement.”

Mossberg’s influence was felt almost at once. In 1992, he began championing the Internet service provider America Online for its simplicity, calling it far superior to its competitors, CompuServe and Prodigy; his persistent criticism of Prodigy probably hastened its demise. (Steve Case, AOL’s former chairman and C.E.O., says that Mossberg’s column “helped move us from the status of just another wannabe to a potential contender.”)

In 1996, after Mossberg called the handheld Palm Pilot a “breakthrough product”—a comment that Donna Dubinsky, the company’s former C.E.O., calls “a huge thing”—its sales surged. In February, Mossberg praised the site blip.tv for the quality of its Web-based TV shows; according to Dina Kaplan, the company’s co-founder, the Web site had a thirty-five-per-cent jump in viewers in the first twenty-four hours after the column appeared.

Reviews of digital products and advances have become commonplace. The magazine PC, among others, has reviewed products since the eighties, and Wired covers technology with the avidity that the Washington Post brings to politics. David Pogue has been the Times’ technology critic since 2000; Newsweek, Business Week, and Fortune all have regular technology critics. But the digital world inevitably democratizes information. A Web site, for instance, may be devoted to a single product. On January 9th, when, at the annual MacWorld conference, Steve Jobs, the C.E.O. of Apple, offered the first glimpse of Apple’s forthcoming iPhone, a combination cell phone and music player, the blog Engadget.com had more traffic than the Times’ Web site.

Few tech columnists, though, write as clearly about the subject as Mossberg. Nor is it likely that any print journalist in America is so richly compensated by his newspaper. Some journalists, such as Thomas L. Friedman, of the Times, earn more if one factors in speeches and books, but when, recently, Mossberg signed a four-year contract, two Journal sources told me, his annual compensation approached a million dollars. Mossberg refuses to discuss his pay; a friend with
knowledge of the negotiations says that “pay has always been an issue at the Journal,” and that Mossberg doesn’t want to be viewed as a “prima donna.”

A week after Eric Schmidt became the C.E.O. of Google, six years ago, he went to see Mossberg. “He had just written an article about Google,” Schmidt says. “I wanted to get his insights. He was very gracious in saying, ‘This is what works. This is what doesn’t.’ He’s seen everything.” Schmidt says of him, as one might of a wine writer, “He has a good nose.”

I witnessed Mossberg’s “nose” for new products in mid-February, when the representatives from Sprint and Samsung arrived to pitch the new music phone. Mossberg is not an especially daunting presence. He is sixty years old, bald and pudgy, and was wearing a purple open-necked shirt with the sleeves rolled up. The delegation included Sprint’s communications manager for consumer devices, Michelle Leff Mermelstein; a product manager, Jason Cole; and Samsung’s senior public-relations manager, Kim Titus. Mossberg knew Mermelstein better than the others (he considers her one of the best publicists he deals with). They went into an office that looked, at first glance, like a museum. A bookcase held computers from the dawn of the consumer-computing age: a Timex Sinclair 1000, an Atari 800, a Radio Shack TRS 80 Model 100, a Commodore 64, an Apple IIe, and the first Palm Pilot, among others. Also on view were Boston Red Sox souvenirs, framed Mossberg columns, and a Kremlin press pass from Mossberg’s days as a national-security correspondent.

“When we sat down and decided who are we going to show this to first, I said, ‘It’s got to go to Walt, because we’ve got to hear the truth,’” Mermelstein said as the meeting began.

“Remember, though, I’m not a consultant,” Mossberg replied.

“I think what you’re going to see is probably the most exciting out-of-the-box experience of any phone that we have released,” Titus said, handing Mossberg a thin black device with two fronts: a phone on one side, with a small screen, and a music player on the other. Mermelstein described its features.

“How much memory for music?” Mossberg asked.

Titus said, “It will come with a sixty-four-megabyte card.”

“That’s trivially small.”

“It is,” Titus said, adding, “And it’s consistent with our larger up-sell opportunities”—that is, opportunities to buy related products and accessories.

“That may be consistent with your ‘up-sell opportunities,’” Mossberg said, “but if I buy an iPod it’s got a ton of memory inside it. I can hardly fit any music on this.” The iPod Nano has two gigabytes—approximately sixty times the music memory of this device.

“That’s a very fair criticism,” Mermelstein said, adding that customers could buy an extra two-gigabyte memory card for forty dollars. “What’s the battery life?” Mossberg asked.

“Two and a half hours of talk time on the phone.”

“That’s low.”

“It’s about average for something that thin.”

“And how about for playing music?” Mossberg asked.

“About seven hours,” Titus said.

“That’s low,” Mossberg said. (The iPod Nano gets up to twenty-four hours.)

“There’s some other out-of-the-box advantages,” she continued, and pulled out a pack to expand battery life—a seventy-dollar value. But Mossberg was skeptical. “It seems to me you had to do this because the battery is weak,” he said.

He held up the Samsung and said, “I’m treating this as a real music player, so I have to compare it to an iPod.” Then he added that the phone seemed to be “a crippled music player.”

“This is a phone first, with a dynamic music capacity,” Mermelstein said.

“But the iPhone promises to be both,” Mossberg said. And while the Sprint Samsung—called the UpStage—was smaller and cheaper, at a hundred and forty-nine dollars, it costs ninety-nine cents to download a song from Apple, and Sprint was charging two ninety-nine.

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/14/070514fa_fact_auletta?printable=true
“We will be able to offer a comparable price before the end of the year,” Mermelstein said.

“It’s really too bad you can’t do the ninety-nine cents at the same time you introduce the UpStage,” Mossberg said.

I wondered why these visitors hoped for a Mossberg endorsement. He has called the telephone companies “the new Soviet Ministries,” because of their insistence on controlling their customers, and he has written disparagingly about many of their products. (When, last August, a music phone called the Chocolate was introduced by Verizon, Mossberg informed readers that it was “burdened by a ham-handed user interface and other failings that would get its designers fired at Apple.”) And why were P.R. people rather than product designers making the pitch? As Mossberg inspected the phone, he asked his visitors when the phone was to launch. April 1st, he was told.

“What if I wanted to do the first review?”

“We’d love that,” Mermelstein said. “I’d love to give you the first review, because I know that, of all the reviewers, you’d be the most fair.” She said that they planned to exhibit the UpStage at an electronics show in late March.

“I’m not promising you a puff piece,” Mossberg said. “A phone with two sides, two functions, is quite interesting. I’m not sure how well you’ve integrated it all, developed it all. But I like to bring to readers things where people take a risk and do something different.” When, he asked, could he get the UpStage to work with and test? Early March, he was told.

“If I could just pick your brain: What do you think of the candy-bar style?” Mermelstein asked.

“I have nothing against the candy-bar phones,” Mossberg said. There are three types of phones—flip and slide phones, which hide the keys, and a candy bar, where all the features are displayed on one plane.

Afterward, Mermelstein said, “Hearing from Walt helps me position the phone. He handles phones from all the different carriers.” When I spoke later with Mossberg, he said, “I try not to make snap judgments. I never, ever make conclusions about products I’ve never tried. But my initial impression is that it’s a clever out-of-the-box design, which I like to credit.” The question that his test will pose, he added, is the one that consumers will ask: “Is it a supplemental or a real music player?”

Mossberg reviewed the UpStage on March 29th. He wrote that it was far better than the Chocolate, and that “Samsung and Sprint deserve credit for a good try,” and for showing “real creativity” in the design—faint praise. Mossberg went on to say that the UpStage “doesn’t quite cut it,” for the reasons that he had cited in the meeting. He also criticized Sprint for charging too much for songs, and for insisting that consumers who want to synchronize music on the device with a P.C. have to install Sprint music software, rather than using Windows Media Player or Apple iTunes, which most people already use.

The Journal may have an élite business audience, but, as Mossberg puts it, “I write my column for the average person.” He adds, “That’s one of the reasons I write about it as a class war”—techies vs. consumers. Mossberg credits his background for his outlook. His father was a door-to-door salesman of household items like dishes and blankets and, eventually, saved enough to buy a ranch house in the working-class community of Warwick, Rhode Island. His mother stayed home, with three sons: Walt is the eldest; Arthur is a professor at a Rhode Island community college; and Fred is a high-school English teacher. In addition to politics (Mossberg’s father was an F.D.R. Democrat), the fate of the Red Sox was a regular dinner topic, and a picture of Ted Williams on the wall was as prominent as one of John F. Kennedy. Walt went to public school, and in high school he started writing a column with his friend James Woods. By the time Woods gave it up to concentrate on acting, Walt “was mesmerized” by journalism.

Mossberg was the first member of his family to attend college; he chose Brandeis over Brown, believing that it was “less stuffy,” and he majored in politics. He joined protest marches against the war in Vietnam, worked for the college newspaper, and was a campus stringer for the Times; after his sophomore year, he got a summer job as a reporter at the Providence Journal. He had no mechanical ability, but his wife, Edith, whom he met at Brandeis, recalls that when they went to the college library Walt would spend time scanning architecture magazines. Ira Shapiro, a Washington lawyer and a former Clinton White House official, has been Mossberg’s best friend since Brandeis, where they roomed together; he remembers Mossberg as someone perpetually curious about an “extraordinary range of things.”

Mossberg imagined a newspaper job in Washington. After Edith and Walt married, in the summer of 1969, they attended Columbia—Walt was at the journalism school and Edith at Teachers College. When they graduated, in 1970 (with a high lottery number, he was in little danger of being drafted), the Wall Street Journal offered him the national job.
he sought—in Detroit, not Washington.

Detroit, with its huge automotive industry, was then regarded as a plum assignment, and the bureau included Norman Pearlstine, who eventually became the newspaper’s managing editor. Mossberg stayed for three and a half years, and then transferred to Washington as one of two full-time labor reporters. His subsequent assignments included energy, the Pentagon, and a three-and-a-half-year stint as deputy bureau chief; in 1989, he became the national-security correspondent. He was also developing another interest: in 1982, he bought his first computer, a somewhat primitive Timex Sinclair that he hooked up to a black-and-white TV. During the eighties, when the I.B.M. personal computer and then the Mac were born, computers became his hobby.

As a correspondent following Secretary of State James A. Baker, Mossberg found himself virtually living on airplanes. Margaret Tutwiler, then an Assistant Secretary of State, remembers Mossberg in the back of the plane debating with other reporters about whether a Mac was superior to a P.C. Ira Shapiro recalls a time when he didn’t hear from his friend for weeks. One day, Shapiro telephoned and said, “What’s the matter? We don’t talk or see each other anymore.”

“Sorry,” Mossberg said. “I’m very into computers.”

He was also starting to miss being at home while his children—two sons—were growing up. In April of 1990, he made an appointment to see Pearlstine. He had decided what he wanted to do next: he didn’t want to cover national security anymore; he wanted to write a technology column.

Pearlstine liked the idea, despite the problems that he foresaw: the paper had never had an opinion columnist in its news pages, and Mossberg wanted to stay in Washington rather than move to Silicon Valley. “If I live and work among the industry, I will lose my focus as a consumer advocate,” he said. In a seven-page, single-spaced prospectus that Mossberg sent to Pearlstine on May 1, 1991, he wrote:

If it works as I envision it, this column . . . would be the voice, the champion, of the individual person actually faced with buying and using the core hi-tech devices—the customer whom industry calls the “end user.”

When the new job was settled, and Mossberg told Baker and Tutwiler that he was leaving the national-security beat, Baker was baffled. “To this day,” Tutwiler told me, “Jim Baker has never owned or operated a computer, or a BlackBerry, or a cell phone.”

Mossberg’s initial column appeared on October 17, 1991, and quickly became popular. “When we do surveys of readers, we find that he scores very high,” Paul Steiger, who became the Journal’s top editor in 1992, when Pearlstine left the paper, says.

In 1997, Pearlstine, who had become the editor-in-chief of Time Inc., wanted to hire Mossberg for three of the company’s magazines and offered to double his salary, of approximately two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. According to two sources with direct knowledge of the negotiations, the Journal matched the Time Inc. offer.

At the time of these discussions, Mossberg had a heart attack. He was fifty and, he says, “every male in my family when he reached his early fifties has had a heart attack.” Doctors prepared him for a quadruple bypass, and, just days after the operation, Edith Mossberg recalls, “he had to go on the computer and check out the cardiologist and surgeons.” The contract negotiations helped raise Mossberg’s profile. Later that year, Newsweek described him as “arguably the most powerful arbiter of consumer tastes in the computer world today.”

Mossberg’s current contract—the second he has signed since 1997—covers the “Personal Technology” column, on Thursday, and an accompanying video blog; “Mossberg’s Mailbox,” also on Thursday, in which he answers readers’ questions; “Mossberg Solution,” a Wednesday column that he edits but that is now written by Katherine Boehret (a reporter who also works as his assistant); appearances on CNBC to talk about his column; an annual conference, D: All Things Digital, which he and the Journal reporter Kara Swisher started in 2003; and a new D Web site, allthingsd.com, that he and Swisher launched in late April.

Scott Kurnit, the founder and former C.E.O. of About.com, says that the success of the D conference is due partly to the clout of the newspaper—“If the Wall Street Journal says show up at my conference, you have to show up”—but also to the knowledge and the style of Mossberg and Swisher. For the fifth annual D conference, at the end of May, Mossberg persuaded Steve Jobs and Bill Gates to appear together to answer questions. Jerry Yang, one of the co-founders of
Yahoo!, guesses that Gates and Jobs have agreed to participate because in some ways Mossberg is a peer. “He has so much history with so many of us who’ve been around that you really can talk to him about what’s happened in the last ten years,” Yang says. “You feel you’re talking to someone who knows what he’s talking about. And you really have to know what you’re talking about to be able to hang with him.”

On the tenth anniversary of the column, in 2001, Mossberg wrote, “Taken as a whole, consumer technologies have made startling advances, but they still are not as easy to use as they should be.” In a review of Apple’s iMac in January, 1999, he asked why computers have “a tedious ‘boot-up’ process,” instead of an on/off switch, and a spaghetti of wires and cables rather than wireless infrared keyboards and printers. Why, he asked in March, are Sony and Toshiba developing rival high-definition video-disk formats, with the Hollywood studios splitting their support? “It would be like having to buy separate TV sets to watch different networks’ programs,” he wrote. On March 2, 2000, Mossberg urged consumers to boycott the new Sony digital music player (the Music Clip), because it was “designed to satisfy lawyers obsessed with protecting the copyrights of the record labels—including Sony’s own label—even at the expense of simplicity and convenience for consumers.” He went on, “It treats every user like a potential criminal, and tries to impose new controls on music people paid for years ago.”

His reviews of Microsoft products have often been withering. In July, 2001, he wrote of the company’s “bully-boy behavior” in forcing families who upgrade to Windows XP to buy a separate copy of the operating system for each P.C. He drew a contrast between the discounts that Microsoft offered its corporate customers and its refusal to do so for average consumers. Microsoft’s new Vista operating system, he wrote in January, was “a worthy, but largely unexciting, product,” because it was still not easy to use and “hasn’t been given nearly as radical an overhaul as Microsoft just applied to its other big product, Office.” On June 7, 2001, he attacked Internet Explorer Smart Tags, a feature in an early version of Windows XP that allowed Microsoft’s own Web browser to “turn any word on any Web site into a link to Microsoft’s own Web sites and services, or to any other sites Microsoft favors,” and to do this “without the [site] owner’s knowledge or permission.” (Three weeks later, a Microsoft representative phoned Mossberg and said the company was abandoning the Smart Tags feature.) Steve Ballmer, Microsoft’s C.E.O., told me, “I wouldn’t say it’s Walt, but I also wouldn’t say it had nothing to do with Walt. If Walt had had an opinion that was different from what we were hearing from people, we would not have changed what we were doing.”

However, unlike many in Silicon Valley, Mossberg does not seem to have a visceral hostility to Microsoft. When the Justice Department (and later the courts) declared, in 1998, that Microsoft was guilty of monopolistic practices for bundling a free Internet Explorer with its operating system, in order to cripple a rival browser from Netscape, Mossberg wrote that a free browser better served consumers. Two years earlier, he said that Microsoft’s browser was superior to Netscape’s, and he also wrote that Microsoft Word was better than WordPerfect. On October 24, 2002, he abandoned his view that AOL was the best online service, and declared that Microsoft’s MSN now offered “an overall cleaner, fresher look and feel.”

He has usually favored Apple products, however, because he believes that they are designed for average users. When the iMac G5 desktop was introduced, in 2004, he said in his column, “I am writing these words on the most elegant desktop computer I’ve ever used, a computer that is not only uncommonly beautiful but fast and powerful, virus-free, and surprisingly affordable.” He was just as enthusiastic, six years ago, about the iPod. In January, when he wrote about the “radical and gorgeous” iPhone, he described its “brilliant new user interface; the handsomest email program and Web browser I’ve ever seen on a phone; a full-blown iPod music and video player built in; and even a cool new voicemail system.” But he also took care to say that he had had “too brief an encounter” with it “to write a proper review,” and pointed out that it lacked a physical keyboard, “which may put off heavy email users,” that it runs on “the relatively slow EDGE cellular data network,” and that, at $499, it will be expensive.

Mossberg will often be the first critic to get an advance copy of an Apple product, as in March, when he was the first to receive and write about Apple TV, which allows downloaded movies and programs to be viewed on wide-screen TV sets. Bloggers have taken note of this connection. A comment posted in April on Engadget, by Dermot81, read, “Mossberg may be the biggest Apple fanboy on the face of the planet, so I’d take any review he does of an Apple product with a grain of salt.” And Mossberg concedes that he has sometimes gone overboard, as he did on September 28,
2000, when he wrote about the “museum piece” design of Apple’s new Power Mac G4 Cube, downplaying its high price and its lack of removable disks for storing or transferring files. He is swayed by “cool” designs. On being asked what column he would most like to take back, Mossberg cited his “gushy review of the Macintosh Cube.” He added, “I should have said that it was gorgeous, and a noble effort, but that its design was so radical that it couldn’t be offered at a reasonable price and with better specs, and therefore most readers should avoid it.” Mossberg did prefer Microsoft’s mouse to Apple’s, and has pointed out that the iPod Nano scratches too easily.

Mossberg has also been criticized for being too focussed on products rather than on the broader corporate and political issues that affect consumers. Lawrence Lessig, a professor of law at Stanford and the founder of its Center for Internet and Society, says that Mossberg “missed the most basic point” in a piece on copyright protection for digital material, because “nowhere in the piece did he mention ‘fair use.’ ” Yet, Lessig said, “he also wrote an amazing piece about cell phones and how the phone companies were restricting access to the Web. Nobody was thinking about this issue as it applies to the cell phone.” Lessig worries that Mossberg is “kind of random” in his writing about these larger issues. There’s “a lot more to technology questions than how do you make the machine work,” Lessig says. “When I read the piece he wrote about cell phones, I wanted him to write more about this.” And when he read the article about digital rights, he says, he thought it best that Mossberg not write more about the subject. Mossberg says that he has made the conscious choice not to write as often as Lessig would like about broader tech issues. But he has scolded Hollywood for resisting the overhaul of copyright laws, the phone companies for resisting products that they don’t own, and the digital code that makes it impossible or difficult for consumers to make copies of songs or movies they have bought.

Mossberg, aware of possible conflicts, says that he refuses to make paid or unpaid speeches before companies he covers, owns no tech stocks, and serves on no industry advisory boards. At the same time, the digital companies that he writes about pay large fees for their executives to attend the D conference, and it is estimated by a knowledgeable source that Mossberg earns about two hundred thousand dollars from ticket sales. And when Mossberg has a meeting in his office companies try to solicit his opinion. Donna Dubinsky, who pitched both the Palm Pilot and the Treo to Mossberg, is now the C.E.O. of Numenta, Inc., which is developing software modelled on human thinking. “We want his input earlier,” she said, explaining that long before a product is ready for testing her company says to Mossberg, “‘Hey, give us your feedback.’ He almost plays an internal consulting role.” She added, “We view it more as a collaborative relationship.” She paused, as if realizing that this might embarrass Mossberg, and then that he always stresses his freedom to criticize. Such background briefings are common and useful, Mossberg says, because they “help me know whether something is new by knowing what others are doing.”

Mossberg is not shy about expressing his opinions. He helped recruit Kara Swisher from the Washington Post in late 1996, and encouraged her to move to Silicon Valley. When she and Megan Smith, a Google executive, decided to marry, Swisher told me, her mother “was troubled by the idea of a gay wedding.” She and Smith have two children, and she recalls that when she came home with the first baby Mossberg was there, and so was her mother, who “really likes Walt a lot.” Swisher went on, “We were having dinner and she was being difficult—she was arguing with me. I was getting really uncomfortable. Walt took her down like I’ve never seen anybody take anybody down: ‘How dare you talk to her like this? This is an important issue and you have to be supportive no matter what as a parent.’ My mother was just shocked—he was relentless in not letting her off the hook.”

In the future, the most robust competition for critics like Mossberg will come from bloggers and from Web-savvy consumers. According to Technorati, a blog search engine, a hundred and twenty thousand Web logs are created each day, and the number of blogs now exceeds seventy million.

Of the blogs that review products, Engadget, now owned by AOL, has the biggest audience; it gets about eight million unique visitors per month. It also has its own office, six hundred square feet on the top floor of a five-story walkup on Allen Street, on the Lower East Side, which doubles as the apartment of Peter Rojas, its founder. Three P.C.s are on his desk, and one of his windows frames the Empire State Building, several miles uptown. Rojas, who just turned thirty-two, studied at Harvard and got a master’s degree in English literature from the University of Sussex, in England; like Mossberg, he started as a print journalist, freelancing for various publications.
Also like Mossberg, Rojas accepts no gifts and no junkets, and returns the products that he tests. "The only asset you have to differentiate yourself from competitors is your credibility," he says. A corner of his apartment is piled with FedEx boxes. Rojas estimates that he has written more than six thousand posts for Engadget, and another four thousand for his previous blog, Gizmodo. A Mossberg column runs about nine hundred words; posts written by Rojas, three full-time employees, and paid freelancers average between fifty and a hundred and fifty words.

With the reviews he wrote for publications, Rojas says, "you kind of had to water it down and assume the audience didn’t really care about what you write about and you had to ‘hook’ them into the article. What I realized about blogging is you’re not going to read a blog about gadgets unless you’re really interested in gadgets. I assume that our readers know that Sprint and Verizon are CDMA networks, and that T-Mobile and A.T.&T./Cingular are GSM networks." And by "writing up," he adds, "the higher we aim the more it grows, because the audience responds to that." Rojas says that what Mossberg does "is great, because he is able to translate for an audience that may not care, whereas I write for an audience that already cares." Mossberg says that he has respect for Engadget, but, "like so many of the tech or gadget Web sites, it is more of a product-alert system, mostly printing descriptions, albeit with attitude. It really doesn’t do hands-on reviews."

Mossberg says that he doesn’t worry about becoming out of date as a print journalist. "I’ve been on the Web from the beginning of the Web," he says. "The good part about writing about technology is that you never run out of ideas, because it’s changing so fast. The bad part is that it’s changing so fast that there’s a million new products and ideas every day and every week." Inevitably, as Steve Ballmer observes, because of the profusion of information many "pulpits will be smaller than they used to be." But he says of Mossberg, with whom he has sometimes tangled over Microsoft product reviews, "He is the most influential writer on technology from an end-user perspective—let me say, for older people."

Jason Calacanis, who has launched a number of blogs, including Engadget, says that bloggers sometimes refer to Mossberg as “Grandpa,” but he adds, "He’s obviously the most respected man in technology journalism, particularly when it comes to products." Jeff Jarvis, who produces a popular blog called buzzmachine.com, and who is fierce about the democratizing benefits of the Web, says of Mossberg, "He’s had a lot of impact, but he has lots of new competition." Jarvis waved his Treo and said that with this handheld device he can link to Treonauts, a blog that is aimed at creating a community of Treo users. Jarvis insists that the old model is fading, not just because of blogs but because companies are creating “social networks,” so that they can talk with customers directly. "If I were inventing a Mossberg today, I think the role of a journalist like him is to be an enabler of that community," he says.

What differentiates Mossberg from most bloggers, according to Marissa Mayer, a Google vice-president who focusses in particular on the experience of consumers, is that what he writes “is all based on his use of the product”—he’s not racing to be first. Her colleague Eric Schmidt suggests that, while the Internet may yield enormous amounts of information, it is easy to drown in it. So consumers, Schmidt says, “go to brands they trust.” He adds, “Walt is a brand.”

♦

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