

innovation & tech today

RICKY GERVAIS

ENTERTAINMENT IN A
POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

DAVE BAUTISTA IS
BIGGER THAN EVER

RALPH MACCHIO –
COBRA KAI NEVER DIES

PARIS HILTON TALKS TECH

ASTRONAUT CADY COLEMAN

A NEW WORLD OF VR WITH OCULUS

PHONING IT IN: THE
RISE OF TELEMEDICINE

2020 Year-End Issue

IPW
INTEGRATED PUBLISHING
WORLDWIDE, INC.

\$9.99US \$9.99CAN

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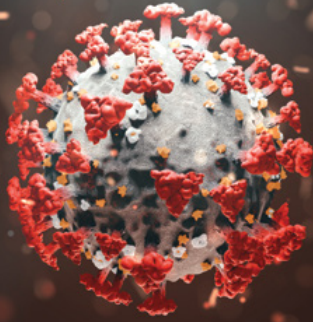


0 71486 26532 0

SINCE LAST ISSUE

EDUCATION / BUSINESS / ENTERTAINMENT / SUSTAINABILITY / GAMING / WEARABLES / HOME AUTOMATION

innovation & tech today



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THE MORE THINGS CHANGE; THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME.

New President, new tech, new gaming content, same old COVID-19. At the end of the summer, Dr. Anthony Fauci predicted a second wave of the virus was inevitable. In fact, *The Washington Post* reported in late October the U.S. hit an all-time high in new coronavirus cases, exceeding 80,000 in a day for the first time.

While the pandemic remains an underlying narrative to everything we do, the surge in responsive technologies during the crisis is a testament to the human spirit to adapt and overcome. In the future, there will be other pandemics, maybe even other bouts with dreaded COVID-19, but we will not stop working, playing, or getting on with the business of living. We will persevere.

Remote work and education venues have exploded over the last six months, making your computer or smart device the perfect virtual band aid for the lack of human interaction. Event schedules were already moved online before the summer issue of *Innovation & Tech Today* hit newsstands, and the first two quarters of 2021 aren't looking any different.

Most experts don't anticipate a return to in-person events until the second half of 2021. Meanwhile, smart home gadgetry, gaming and entertainment tech is on the rise. Although COVID-19 isn't the sole reason, it has certainly been a catalyst for speedier innovation.

Since last issue, *Innovation & Tech Today* has not only covered the many impacts of the pandemic whether it is in industry, the home, or entertainment, we have also highlighted cutting-edge technology to combat the crises, esports, drone tech, and a renewed vigor for space travel as NASA, Boeing, and Lockheed Martin ready us for a return to the moon.

As 2020 comes to an end and the new year brings its own challenges, *Innovation & Tech Today* will continue to inspire positive change by celebrating innovations in science, business, entertainment, sustainability, and STEM.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Patricia Soloveichik/Boeing, NASA, Lockheed Martin, Celestron Telescopes, Arnie Kravitz/Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing, Dave Bautista, Ricky Gervais, Ralph Macchio, Paris Hilton, Danica Smith, Stephen Fertelmes, Charlie Roina, Rich Hardcastle, Britney Ross

This publication is dedicated to the dreamers, the innovators, the collaborators, and the doers – who can't be bothered by those saying it can't be done. Nicholas and Aria, the future is yours!

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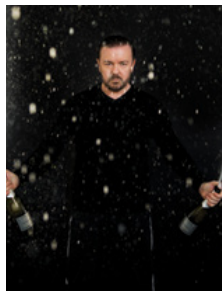
Published by:
INNOVATIVE PROPERTIES WORLDWIDE, INC
620 S Dahlia Circle M103
Denver, CO 80246 | (720) 476-4920
www.innotechtoday.com | info@innotechtoday.com

INNOVATION & TECH TODAY – Issue 30, Year-End 2020. *Innovation & Tech Today* is published quarterly for \$19.95 per year by Innovative Properties Worldwide, 620 S Dahlia Circle M103, Denver, CO 80246.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *INNOVATION & TECH TODAY*, 620 S Dahlia Circle M103, Denver, CO 80246

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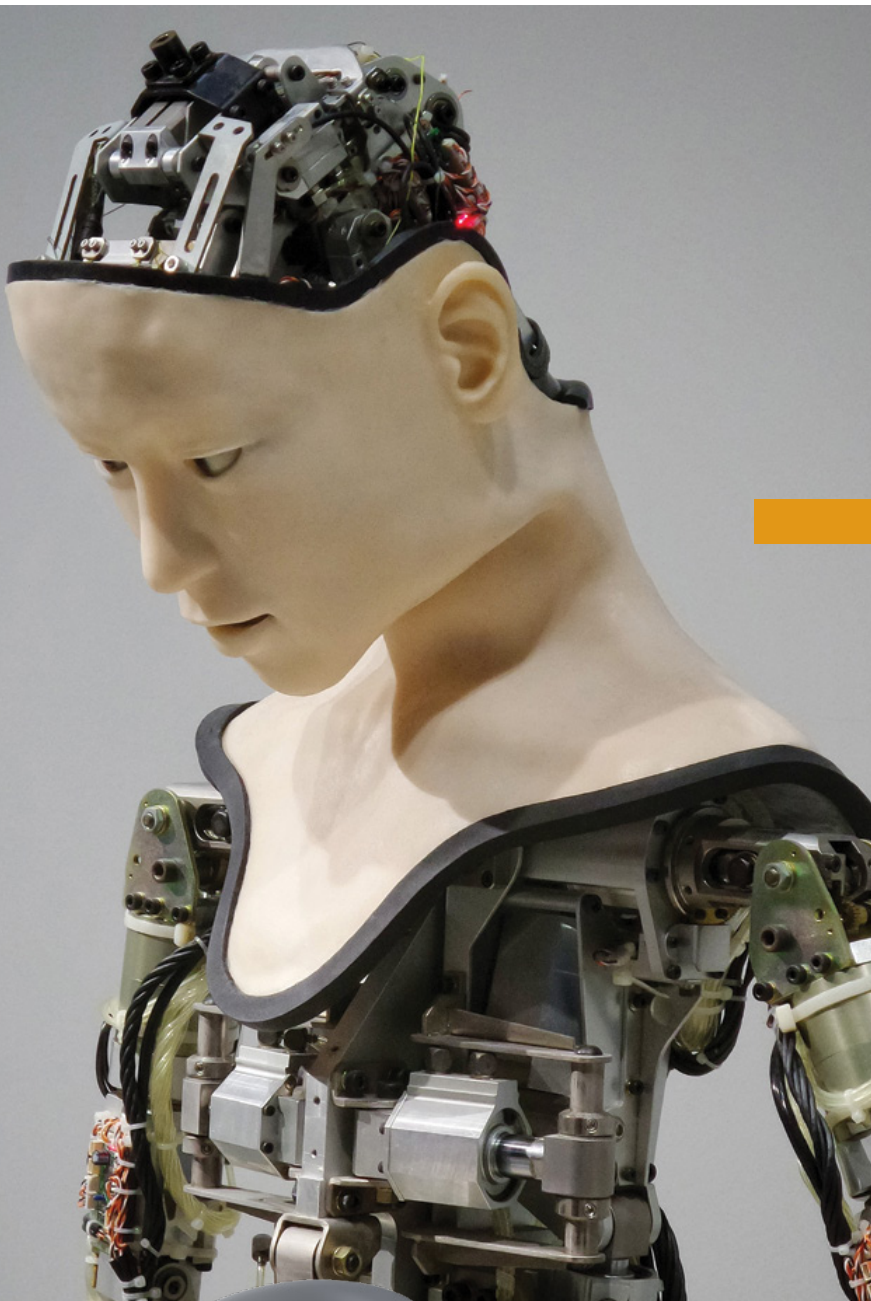
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If You Can't Join 'Em... Stream 'Em

By Jennifer Oladipo
Photos by Rich Hardcastle

This fall, Ricky Gervais was living his best lockdown life. Hollywood was on pause, but the actor and comedian kept in full stride. Binging fans had made his Netflix series *After Life* the most-watched British comedy for the second year in a row while he stayed home writing a third season.

Meanwhile, Gervais also took to Periscope each week, broadcasting a live, online, off-the-cuff talk show where he responds to viewer comments from his den at home as the pandemic postponed his standup tour.

Innovation & Tech Today caught up with Gervais to discuss his embrace of streaming technology as a consumer, filmmaker, and one-man-production studio.

Innovation & Tech Today: How has streaming technology impacted the way you view and create your work, both as an artist and from a business perspective?

Ricky Gervais: It's incredible because, personally, I always wanted to have the final edit. I wanted it to be my thing, no interference, uncompromised. But to get that final edit, I had to go to a smaller channel that would let me. I had to choose fewer viewers, in a way. So, it was HBO, not NBC, or BBC2, not BBC1.

Then Netflix came along and said, "We don't interfere; we've got even deeper pockets." With 160 million subscribers, they're already bigger than the BBC, so it's a no-brainer.

This was all sort of inevitable. Things on YouTube were already getting more views than something on the telly. "Internet" was a dirty word in Hollywood. But now Netflix, iTunes — all of them — they pay the best wages, have the least interference, and get the biggest viewing figures. So, I don't know what's going to compete with that. Everyone's going to get a piece of it, I think.

I&T Today: So, streaming stigma is over?

RG: I still think there's a validation needed for things like this. There are YouTubers who get 50 million hits but still want to get on television, because it's sort of a traditional validation. Their mum doesn't watch them on YouTube.

I sell out stadiums around the world in an hour by tweeting a link. But I then walk around the city and think, "Oh, I wish I had billboards." I don't need them, but I would like them. Everything is technology these days, but there's something nice and analog about those things.

Gervais' Netflix series *After Life* was the most watched British comedy for the second year in a row.



“I also think people have fallen out of love with film stars. They used to be enigmatic. You didn't know what they thought. There was no Twitter.”



***I&T Today:* With your *Supernatural* comedy special forthcoming and *After Life* doing so well, do you still feel that kind of nostalgia about your own work?**

RG: I suppose I think differently about projects now because I know it'll have an audience. It's been 20 years since I wrote a script and wondered if it would get on the telly.

But you can't turn out rubbish. It's not like you think you're invincible. You still have to act like you could lose your cachet. And I think globally now more than I ever did. Not that I pander: If something's set in England, I don't change "tap" to "faucet" or "pavement" to "sidewalk." But I know people around the world are watching. Netflix translates you into 160 different languages and dialects, so, in a way, I can be even more uncompromised. I can do my tiny, silly little thing for a few people, and it goes global.

***I&T Today:* How do you see the future of Hollywood and the film industry post-COVID-19?**

RG: I don't know. Cinema was sort of — not dying, but it had evolved into something else. You only saw real movies at film festivals. They didn't make any money, but they were quite good. And the things at the cinema were just franchises. People running around in rubber costumes for teenagers and strange adults. That was Hollywood; it was all comic-book stuff.

I also think people have fallen out of love with film stars. They used to be enigmatic. You didn't know what they thought. There was no Twitter. Now, someone who gets famous and makes \$10 million a movie and everyone loves them, suddenly they open their mouth, and everyone realizes they're an idiot.

I think they thought they were invincible. They thought, "People love me in that movie where I'm wearing a cape and flying around. They'll definitely love me when I spout my politics and tell working-class people how to vote." It was already designed to go wrong. Add that to the fact that you could watch a movie at home for a couple of quid (a few dollars). It all

came together.

But, yeah, I think it'll carry on in some form. It'll evolve. It's supply and demand, isn't it? If people want it, it'll work. Everyone will have a win. Even Disney now is doing the Netflix model. Everyone borrows, steals, evolves.

***I&T Today:* Is the streaming model better?**

RG: I think it's better for the auteur; I really do. Before, if you did a film, they'd screen-test it and focus-group it because they wanted everyone to like it. Hollywood used to water it down. They made it safe, anodyne.

They made a Hollywood rom-com the same as the Hollywood rom-com that was out last week, and it would stay in the cinema weekend after weekend. Innovation suffered at the cinema because people would go, "That's a bit weird," and they didn't go and see it.

On Netflix, people can take forever to find it. I can do a tweet about my three-year-old comedy special, *Humanity*, and it gets a spike from people that are 15 years old now and didn't watch it

“I love the idea that you’re not beholden to anyone. I’ve never liked interference. I’ve never liked putting my hand up to suggest an idea.”



before. I’m very fascinated by the analytics of the internet and social media, how things trend differently, and this instant global reach.

We’re all broadcasters. That’s the other thing. I can get advertising now for my tweets or my podcasts or my videos. I’m a TV company, you know what I mean? It’s crazy.

I&T Today: It’s fun watching you crack yourself up and also deal with lighting and tech issues on your Periscope show. What is it like to be the talent, producer, and director?

RG: Well, I don’t know what I’m gonna say in advance. I haven’t seen the audience’s questions beforehand, and I don’t know where it’s gonna go, so that’s exciting. But also I sometimes realize the absurdity of it — that I’m arguing with a (person pretending to be) a cat or a dog on social media.

I love the idea that you’re not beholden to anyone. I’ve never liked interference. I’ve never liked putting my hand up to suggest an idea. An idea is the best it’s ever going to be when it’s in

your head, and you’ve got to be in charge to make sure it’s ruined as little as possible. Even if you get a final edit on a film or TV show, there are still 50 people involved, and you have to hand it over.

I have an incredible platform and choice and power. It’s great, perfect for me, in a way.

I&T Today: You’re using this platform and power to talk about mostly dogs and animals. Why?

RG: Because it’s still entertainment and fun. If I went on there for half an hour each week and talked about how we wipe out 10,000 species a year and torture and kill farm animals and sea creatures, people would turn off. It’s too much. So, I make jokes for 25 minutes and say how brilliant dogs are, then say, “Oh, you might want to look at this charity.”

You have to sort of educate people and talk them around and get them on your side. They don’t want to be told what to do by so-called experts or entertainers. You have to do it gently. They’re not bad people; many just don’t know.

I&T Today: Standup has a certain kind of energy you seem able to capture a bit on Periscope.

RG: Yeah. It’s as real as it could possibly be. There’s no facade. I can’t take anything back. It is like riffing, like a warmup thing. Actually, there are a couple of ideas that, if I jot them down, could become standup.

The big thing at the moment is podcasts, but that’s still a little bit like eavesdropping. You still know it’s two people talking to each other and not you. But here, you’re looking down the lens at the person. They’re at home alone, and they can talk back to me. I think that’s what’s really engaging for people. There are 50,000 hardcore people who wait for it to come online, then the show gets another 150,000 over the next few days.

They know I’m real. They know I’m an idiot like one of them. They like scolding me, as well. They say things like, “You’re losing your hair. You’re looking fat today, Rick. You’re looking scruffy with that hole in your shirt.” They don’t get to say that to Tom Cruise. ■