



Giving Thanks for the Modern World

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My Thanksgiving turkey is acquired, home, and brining, and it's time for a bit of reflection on gratitude. Naturally, I'm thankful for my family and friends, for modern medicine, and to The Motley Fool for taking me on this year, among many other things. But recently it occurred to me that I should be thankful for something else: the here and now.

I mean, living in the 21st century just rocks, doesn't it?

Yes, yes, we still have war and disease and pollution and famine and lousy sitcoms, though there are signs that we're starting to get a grip on some of those things. On a smaller, more personal scale, though, this is a pretty cool time to be alive.

Knowledge is everywhere

Consider this one small example: Fifteen years ago, if you wanted a particular book, you had a few options. You could try a local bookstore (a Barnes & Noble (NYSE: [BKS](#)) or large independent if you were lucky, a small paperback-focused mall operation if you weren't). If they didn't have the book you wanted, you could ask them to "special order" it for you -- if it was still in print, and if the store did "special orders." Those orders usually took a few weeks and often came with a premium charge over and above the book's cover price, but you usually got your book -- eventually.

Of course, if the book in question was out of print, things got harder. If your local libraries and used bookstores couldn't come up with it, you were usually out of luck.

Now? I can locate almost any English-language book printed in the last hundred years within a few minutes. If Amazon (Nasdaq: [AMZN](#)) or one of its used-book partners doesn't have it, any of several other used-book search services could turn it up -- or I could search more than 10,000 libraries at once using the [WorldCat](#) service. If the book in question is old enough to be out of copyright, I might not need to get the actual physical book at all -- its text might be online. And if all you need is a summary or a particular bit of information, odds are you can get that online, too.

The global flea market

Books make a great example, but of course, nowadays you can find nearly anything for sale, thanks to the Internet. If a quick Web search doesn't turn up a vendor who has what you want, there's eBay (Nasdaq: [EBAY](#)), which has done for the world's flea markets what Amazon and AbeBooks have done for used bookstores: made it easy to find anything you want easily. Whether you're looking for an end table to match the one you inherited from Great-Grandma or just a particular combination of options on your [next used car](#), searches that would have taken months to complete a dozen years ago can now be done in minutes.

It's not just the Internet

While I love the Internet -- don't we all? -- there's more to the 21st century's awesomeness than the Web. Speaking of cars, they're cleaner and more efficient than ever, and getting cleaner every year -- while still being fun to drive and affordable. Twenty years ago, who would have imagined a global brawl between GM (NYSE: [GM](#)) and Toyota (NYSE: [TM](#)) for the mantle of "world's greenest car company"? Computers are plentiful in many areas and available to more people than ever -- including children in the developing world, thanks to projects like [One Laptop per Child](#). Pharmaceutical leaders such as Merck (NYSE: [MRK](#)) and Novartis (NYSE: [NVS](#)) have [medicines in their pipelines](#) that couldn't have been dreamed of two decades ago. Even the Red Sox have finally figured out how to win.

And if you don't like that lousy sitcom, you've got hundreds of other choices -- available instantly, any time. I tell ya, it's a great time to be here.

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