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## Some Good Ideas, and A Question, Arise from Recent Awards Program

 Sep 21, 2006 By: [Lester Craft](#) Innovate Forum


Last week, we offered examples from the *Wall Street Journal's* recent Technology Innovation Awards to illustrate the challenges some startup companies face in finding footing for their great ideas. Today's post gives some views on which of the innovations highlighted in the awards program might prove most useful – and raises a question about the contest's overall winner.

The *Journal* selected 49 winners and runners-up. Three garnered top awards. At least one of the top three – [inhalable insulin](#), developed by Pfizer and Nektar Therapeutics to replace shots for diabetes – undoubtedly will have a huge and positive impact on many lives, all the more so given that the prevalence of diabetes is increasing. Indeed, more than one-fifth of those 60 and older have the condition.

Beyond the top three, it appeared to me that several developments offered particular potential. One, from startup Semprius, is “a process for making large-scale, high-performance electronic circuits that can be applied to any surface.” Arguably, the integrated circuit has been the single-most influential innovation of the past 100 years, making the personal computer and a large array of other devices, processes and innovations (including the Internet) possible. A technology with the potential to put chips in many new places and applications seems pretty darn exciting to me.

So, too, is Seagate's [“perpendicular” method](#) for storing data bits on end in hard drives. Processing power feeds on storage capacity, and much more is possible if both advance more or less in tandem.

Significant progress by the stool's third leg – software – can be harder to achieve, and harder to measure. Even so, it's amazing to me that we've just now reached the point where it's possible to “run diagnostic tests on a system without causing it to crash” – but that capability is exactly what earned Sun Microsystems the top spot in the entire Technology Innovation Award contest for its DTrace software.

I'll leave it up to the software engineers among you to debate the significance of DTrace. For my part – well, no slight to DTrace or its developers intended, but let me just say that I hope the most important innovation of the year turns out to be something more revolutionary than a better way to find bugs in software.

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