

Re: Where would we be without these important patents?

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Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.econ/2006-03/msg00238.html>

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 - *Date:* Sun, 19 Mar 2006 14:44:49 GMT
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I in no way wish to disparage the brilliant work of Isaac Newton, but it is not clear that the publication of Principia in English in 1729 dramatically accelerated technological development.

Take a look at the "Dateline for Thermodynamics" at <http://www.physics.northwestern.edu/Phyx103/web/thermo-dateline.html> . It is clear that thermodynamics, mechanics, and hydraulics were being developed before and after Newton's time. A timeline of optics, astronomy and celestial mechanics would be similar – important work was done before and after.

My point is this – most technological development is the result of gradual, incremental improvements. In hindsight most breakthroughs, were "obvious," all the ingredients were there, the invention was ripe for picking. This is why the patent system works so well. It encourages the inventor to develop and publish of the little (and big) steps. The little steps aggregate to technological advance. The patent system encourages open competition, and discourages secrecy, to the benefit of society.

Richard

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