

[X-SciTech](#)

Feature Fatigue Hits Gadget Users

May 2, 2006 / 8:52 PM EDT / AP

 Add CBS News on Google

Roland Rust's frustration with products that do too much can be summed up in a seemingly simple gift he received recently - a mouse pad.

Rather than the rubber or plastic square that sits on most desks, this was meant to be a better mousetrap mousepad. It had a clock, calculator, radio, and even a guide on how to use all the gadgets. All of which was too much for Rust.

"That seemed a bit extreme to me," said Rust, a professor of marketing at the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business. "I was astounded."

So astounded that he decided to study what he calls "feature fatigue," often referred to as "feature creep." He and other researchers at the Smith School found consumers are tantalized by those extra gizmos and functions on products they buy, believing they make them more useful. But soon frustration sneaks in, even with the most skilled users. Alienated consumers abandon those products in favor of others that do less better.

It is no longer just the last-night television hucksters (It slices! It dices! It does your taxes!) who are cramming features into their products. With the development of cheap microprocessors that can add functions at little extra cost, Rust says many consumer goods companies are packing gadgets with extra, sometimes unnecessary, uses. And consumers are more than willing to buy them.

"Too many consumers make the mistake of thinking those added features are great just because they are added features," he said.

Rust's research, written with doctoral candidate Debora Viana Thompson and Smith School professor Rebecca Hamilton, was published in February's edition of the Harvard Business Review and last year in the Journal of Marketing Research.



The researchers conducted three studies using undergraduate students in groups ranging from 130 to 190 people. Students were given digital and audio players with varying features, and asked to rate them on factors such as usability and capability. The studies were meant to determine which factors students found important before and after they tried the products.

More students picked the models with the most features, even though they thought the added functions would make them harder to use. When asked whether they wanted to add features, the majority loaded them on. But given another choice after using the souped-up versions, most chose to go back to a simpler model.

Feature fatigue is pervasive, on everything from exercise equipment to televisions. Some prime offenders the Maryland researchers cite are companies that make cell phones and cars, especially luxury models.

Car makers continue to add options on the dashboard that can distract and confuse drivers, Rust said. Cell phones, originally just for phone calls, are available with

cameras, video functions, Web searching, global positioning, MP3 players and more.

There are some examples of companies that resist the temptation to weigh down their products with extras. Apple's iPod, for example, is wildly successful because it is relatively easy to use, Rust said. Google's home page is bare bones and simple to use for browsers who want to do Internet searches. The company's other products are found on other pages.

All those extra tools on cell phones don't necessarily mean the phone is more confusing or less useful, said Laura Marriott, executive director of the Colorado-based Mobile Marketing Association, which represents groups that include wireless device manufacturers and wireless providers.

Adding extra functions can help users find what they are looking for in one phone, Marriott said. New additions and functions are usually tried out first by tech-savvy consumers she labeled "early adopters" and "fast followers," and are then adopted by the majority of cell phone customers.

"We are seeing applications merged into a single device," Marriott said. "They are getting easier to use and more streamlined."

Not all consumers welcome that development. Sachin Agarwal, a 30-year-old MBA student at the Smith School, said that when he shops for a cell phone, he's more interested in how it works as a phone rather than its extra features. He only recently discovered that his phone has a tip calculator.

"The problem is a lot of the time these gadgets are loaded with stuff just for the sake of loading them with stuff," said Agarwal, who was not part of the Rust study and

hasn't taken a course with the professor. "They are not very useful."

Rust says his research has lessons for both industry and consumers. Companies worried about building customer loyalty shouldn't drive them away by making products that are too complex and sow frustration. Allowing consumers to try out all the features of products before they buy can also help.



The same advice is true for consumers. If you are shopping for a television, play around with it in the store to see if you are comfortable with it, he said. And think twice before you buy the one that comes with the built-in toaster oven.

"If you think you want something with lots of features, you ought to think twice about that," Rust said.

By Stephen Manning

© 2006 The Associated Press. All Rights Reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

2026 Summer 3 Piece Shorts Set Clothes Women Custom Workout Sets Zip up Short Sleeve Jacket and Shorts Tracksuit...

Get latest price now

Cognitive Decline After 50 Has Been Linked To a Popular Drink. Do You Drink It?

PAID FEEL GOOD BLOG

Most People Don't Use This Tip for Mice in Spring, But it Works Like Magic

PAID VAMOOSE

12 Things To Cut When Living On Retirement

PAID GREENSPROUT

Amazon Nightmare Comes True: Shoppers Canceling Prime For This Clever Hack

This simple extension tool can save tons of money on Amazon, but most prime members are ignoring it.

MDs: Why Older Adults Are Finally Losing Weight Now

PAID FEEL GOOD BLOG

Chuck Norris Begged Americans To Avoid These 3 Foods Like The Plague

PAID ROUNDHOUSE PROVISIONS

[Watch Now](#)

Chronic Tinnitus is Being Linked To a Common Habit!

PAID TINNITUS RELIEF JOURNAL

[Read More](#)

Smart Way To Repel Mosquitoes In

PAID MOSQUITOES PROTECTOR

7 Retirement Income Strategies Once Your Portfolio Reaches \$1,000,000

PAID FISHER INVESTMENTS

This Game's Realism Is Making Players Uncomfortable

PAID PLAY4FREE

Sleep Apnea is Linked to This Household Item (Stop Using It)

PAID DERILA-ERGO-OFFICIAL.COM

IRS Forgives Millions By May 15th Tax Deadline

Americans with back taxes are urged to check their eligibility for tax relief. The IRS has made the Fresh Start Program available to a larger group of taxpayers.

12 Expenses Retirees Are Quietly Dropping

PAID GREENSPROUT

Cognitive Decline Has Been Tied to This Common Evening Snack. Do You Eat It?

PAID THE MODERN VITALITY REVIEW

Drive Less Than 50 Miles Per Day? Switch To This Car Insurance

Finding car insurance quotes starts with being prepared. Get insurance quotes from top carriers

If Your Feet Look Like This, You Need To See This

PAID TREATMEDY

[Learn More](#)

Chuck Norris Wanted Every American To Know This About His Health

Legendary action star had a very important message for Americans over 60

District Of Columbia Is Cracking Down On Toxic Cookware – Here's The Safe Alternative

Stop cooking your family's meals on scratched, toxic pans. This doctor-recommended alternative offers superior

Catch up with The Daily Report: May 11, 2026

CBS NEWS

Top headlines on The Daily Report: May 11

CBS NEWS

Why Your Rotator Cuff Isn't Healing (It's Not Just Age)

PAID SHOULDER RELIEF NEWS

Dermatologists: The 1 Vitamin You Need If You Have Wrinkles

She stopped using her moisturizer and tried this instead — the results surprised everyone.

PAID ANTI-AGING CENTER [Read More](#)

Why Home Cooks Are Ditching Their Old Knives For This \$69 Japanese Blade

Why these forged knives are impossible to keep in stock

Social Security Changes Coming in 2026 That Impact Everyone

If you're a senior on social security and you don't take advantage of these benefits this month, you'll regret it big

Young Woman Lives in an Old Locomotive - Take a Peek Inside!

PAID TIPS AND TRICKS

This Common Habit Has Been Tied To Memory Decline After 50

PAID BLOGFEELGOOD

Featured

UFO Files Release

Iran War Coverage

NFL Draft Grades

[NBA Playoff Bracket](#)

Follow Us On

[YouTube](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[X](#)

Privacy

[Privacy Policy](#)

[California Notice](#)

[Your Privacy Choices](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Minors' Privacy Policy](#)

More from CBS News

[Newsletters](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[Download Our App](#)

[Brand Studio](#)

[Sitemap](#)

Company

[About Paramount](#)

[Advertise With Paramount](#)

[Join Our Talent Community](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Contact the Ombudsman](#)

