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Growing up as kid in the 70s, our house had a milk chute which, for those unfamiliar with this, is a small two-way door that allowed the Milkman to deliver fresh milk, saving us the time of driving to the local grocery store to get it. There was a Breadman too, and money would left in an envelope as payment -the 1970s version of "tap" on your debit card. Both are nostalgic conveniences that are coming around again with the rise of e-commerce and the direct-to-home delivery of groceries. The article from today's Globe & Mail <[here](#)> summarizes the launch of Sobeys' home grocery service called **Voila**. Beyond milk and eggs though, the service allows hungry Canadians to fill their fridges and stomachs with all four food groups including wine! (Which any reasonable person would agree should be given its own food grouping).



E-commerce giants like Shopify and Amazon were well underway in the race to capture an ever-increasing market share before Covid-19 arrived, and the virus has only served to accelerate this trend. Getting manufactured products to the end costumer with maximum efficiency is the consumer equivalent of the rise of just-in-time manufacturing that revolutionized the global supply chain in the 1980s. In the case of **Voila**, the convenience of being able to order and receive delivery of exactly what you want and when you want it, is remarkable -particularly when you consider the delivery charge is less than 8 bucks.



The inestimable Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan once opined that *every technology has within itself the seeds of its reversal*. In other words, technology reverses everything, something that is apparent where groceries come to us, not the other way around. Other examples of McLuhan's maxim is in advertising, where we go to the commercial (each time we search for something using Google) more now than commercials come to us. Technology has empowered the end user and the revolution in retailing underway has just begun. Companies that are best able to incorporate technology into their platforms to get their products to consumers most efficiently, will dominate the consumer market going forward. This is how capitalism works, and the Darwinian struggle to deliver the best product at the best price is relentless. The transformation of the retail sector will take forms we don't yet know and can't yet predict. But they will be profound and alter the retail landscape completely. My one prognostication is that we will see the return of the milk chute, only the 21st century version where our houses (or garages) will have a two-way delivery receptacle -one large enough to hold the oversized televisions of today.

The e-commerce companies' fleet of trucks would deliver the product to our homes securely (something that is glaringly missing when merchandise is left unattended on our front steps) where the code for the purchase was known only by the end user and the driver. To deliver the product to the chute, the product code must match the code of the chute itself. Ingenious!

Everything old is new again!

Be safe, be well!

Martin

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