corner convenience

This is where we are, at the counter of your local convenience store — the corner bodega, kiosk, liquor store, small grocer. We could be at the independent certainly. Increasingly we’d find ourselves at any of a number of global chain stores — 7-Eleven, Express Mart, AMPM, A-Z Mart, Get Go, Get n Go, Stop’n’Go, QuickCheck, QuickStop, Kwik Shop, One Stop, Stop 24, T/24, Minisstop, R-kioski, Circle K, Kroger, Wawa, Relay, Zabka, Lawson, All Days, In & Out, Convenio, Everyday, Spar.

Just call it Corner Convenience.

Let’s ask ourselves — what makes these stores convenient? It didn’t take long to get here so we’d have to say that location for most of us would be synonymous with convenience.

Next might be the hours the Corner Convenience keeps. This measure of convenience often appears as a kind of subtitle to the store name. “Open 24 hours”, “Open Day & Night”, “Day and Night Liquors”, “We Never Close”.

They are off of every exit on any highway. Around every corner of most neighborhoods. They say they never close. It’s 1:14am. You need gasoline. Turn right.

 Summon the image of a weary, pimply-faced 20 year-old Guatemalan immigrant seen safely time-locked into his protected cash register cage in a small beach town in Southern California. We’re free to wander the store — a few aisles of chips, meat jerky, king size candy bars, breath fresheners, throat lozenges, bubble gum, rotissing hotdogs, magazines. Behind two epic walls of built-in refrigerators — bottles of bottled water with excruciatingly meaningless packaging variations, whole milk, low-fat milk, half-and-half, Florida orange juice, orange drink, things to drink, junky pep drinks, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Monster, Fancy Woodchuck Cider nestled by a small scrun of chilly, perspiring white wines, and then a formidable flank of a regional workmen’s after work favorites including 24oz Budweiser Clamato and its variations. Locked safe in the after hours attendant’s cage — ciggies, flavored cigerretos, Zip-Zag papers, condoms, herbal supplement packets for endurance and fortitude, lighters, batteries, laser pointers, analogics three varieties of aspirin, and some flavorful cough suppressants.

The attendant-cashier idly scrolls through text messages — or electronic mail, or news from home, or considers a death-blow of a move in the Words with Friends game he’s playing with a cousin in Arizona, or updates his Facebook profile photo, or Tweets that he’s bored to 740 followers..it’s hard to tell from behind the 3/4 inch bullet proof. And I don’t really care if he’s amazingly sending digitally encoded radio transmissions to outer space — Facebook profile photo, or Tweets that he’s bored to 740 followers..it’s hard to tell from behind the 3/4 inch bullet proof. And I don’t really care if he’s amazingly sending digitally encoded radio transmissions to outer space — or electronic mail, or news from home, or considers a death-blow of a move in the Words with Friends game he’s playing with a cousin in Arizona, or updates his Facebook profile photo, or Tweets that he’s bored to 740 followers..it’s hard to tell from behind the 3/4 inch bullet proof. And I don’t really care if he’s amazingly sending digitally encoded radio transmissions to outer space — but certainly not all — soaks in it? Is Henry Ford, godfather of industrialization, doing an exuberant, boastful Running Man in his maustrumum? “I done done it! I done done it! I done toldya! I done toldya! You know you waaaant it! You know you neeed it!”

 We have at our finger tips the things no one would have taken for granted 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, 5000 years ago. There it all is. Fire, for chrissake — and disposable? In any color you would like, or with your favorite sports team printed on it? Are you kidding me? Flick and fire. Flick and fire.

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Have an achy head? No leeches at hand? Don’t feel like chewing on the bark of a Slippery Elm? Well — have some acectyilsalicylic suspended in a dissolving capsule that you swallow. Nothing to swallow it with? Have some fresh, filtered water, brought to you by truck and ship and conveniently packaged in a dubious plastic bottle.

Feeling randy, but not ready to start a family? Pick your variety, shape, size, texture, degree-of-package-salaciousnessesomond. Concerned about performance? Have a grab-bag of herbal fortiitude. Need to make a phone call to anywhere? Get a disposable cell phone, talk for 120 minutes then throw it out.

It’s all right there. Selection, variety, color — sure, we expect that. But do we stop to marvel at the epic travels in space, time, refinement, iteration, industrialization these mundane, ordinary conveniences have made? Convenience is the name of the awards ceremony at which capitalism admires itself. Convenience is the final measure of mass production’s success. It is the asymptotic long-tail of industrialization, a tail whose zero is 99c, 3 for 1, buy-one-get-one-free. Industrialization is found in the rush-dash coupon books that litter our recycling bins. It is the baroque, oddly seductive sales circulars encouraging us to tramp down to our local shop and get a dozen eggs, a flank of beefsteak or a case of birdwurst. We find industrialization tucked into the ad supplements of old-fashioned newspapers — the paper newspapers — reminding us that we might need a ream of sustainably farm-harvested non-toxic bleached white paper for our $99 laser light powered printing press.

How do we applaud convenience? Does it represent success insofar as much of the world — though certainly not all — soaks in it? Is Henry Ford, godfather of industrialization, doing an exuberant, boastful Running Man in his maustrumum? “I done done it! I done done it! I done toldya! I done toldya! You know you waaaant it! You know you neeed it!”

If it is success, it is a conflicted one. No proper post-disciplinary, post-modern Industrial Designer truly *wants* their work to end up in the Corner Convenience. That is unless they have fully embraced this sparkly, polished Muzak-filled museum of over-produced, barely distinguished things. They must make peace with the fine folks in brand marketing, the high priests of endless variation and spell-casters of seduction. (We shouldn’t dismiss the Industrial Designer’s dream for another sort of Corner Convenience, albeit of a different register. The convenience store that embraces the mass industrialized infamy of the considered and crafted — Design Within Reach.)

What we have produced for your consideration is a kind of program guide to the counter of your Corner Convenience. A simple, small reminder of the travels that all great things make in this era of mass-convenience and massive, world-scale industrialization. It is with irony that we have made this by re-purposing the newspaper printing press. We are now able to quite conveniently make such a thing — a newspaper, for chrissake — through the foresight and disciplined hard work of the people, presses and algorithms of Newspaper Club. These algorithms marshaled unused resources and put them to work in a way that lets the four of us make and print 100 newspapers cheap as chips. Do not confuse convenience with that which is owed you. Do not act entitled to convenience. Revel in it. Designers, refine it and have the humility to acknowledge what it is, truly. For now, picture the 40-something, father to a few and set to task to create with his colleagues a newspaper on the topic of Convenience. Thus he goes to his Corner Convenience, armed with a 4x6 index card’s list of 10 things of convenience to buy as props so as to consider these conveniences in their physical form. He’s a familiar and regular, yet anonymous patron to his local old Corner Convenience. This time though, rather than a quart of late-night milk he runs through a list on an index card: “I’ll take those eye glasses, the 3-pack of colorful Bic lighters, a map, um...condom — no, that one there, in the purple packet...no just one ell be fine — flashlight, Bic crist pen...and a watch.” One would rightly think he has slipped his moorings to become the neighborhood apocolyptic, prepping for the trending #2012 topic that foressees The End to it all. And of what would that end be? What would we have no more? For some it would be life — for surely there will be the floods and famines and fires. Mostly though, it’d be an end to Convenience.
Aspirin - First commercial appearance: 1915 (as a powder)

Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, lived sometime between 460 BC and 377 BC and left historical records of pain relief treatments, including the use of powder made from the bark and leaves of the willow tree to help heal headaches, pains and fevers. By 1829, scientists had discovered that the compound salicin was the active ingredient in willow plants which provided pain relief. As part of war reparations specified in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles following Germany's surrender after World War I, Aspirin (along with Heroin) lost its status as a registered trademark in France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, where it became a generic name. A mix of Aspirin and Coca-Cola, which supposedly takes one into a state of euphoria, alters perceptions and can lead to arrest for driving under the influence, is a hoax. Aspirin can however be used to remove perspiration stains from white T-shirts or to revive a dead car battery.

The first recorded lighter was invented by the German chemist Johann Wolfgang Döbereiner in 1823, often referred to as Döbereiner's lamp. This lighter worked by a reaction of hydrogen to platinum sponge, which gave off a great amount of heat. The device was very large and highly dangerous and fell out of production by the end of the 19th century. Matches were used by soldiers to find their way in the dark, but the intense initial flare gave away their position too easily, and many lives were lost as a result. The patenting of ferrocerium (often misidentified as flint) by Carl Auer von Welsbach in 1903 has made modern lighters possible. When scratched, it produces a large spark and is suitably inexpensive for use in disposable items. Using von Welsbach's ferrocerium, Ronson were able to develop practical and easy to use lighters. In 1910 Ronson released the first Pist-O-Liter and in 1913 the company developed its first permanent match, the "Wonderlite". Five million Bic lighters are sold globally every day.
The AA battery size was standardized by the American National Standards Institute in 1947 and actually refers to the physical dimensions of the battery: cylindrical, measuring 1.987" (50mm) in height with a diameter of 0.571" (14.5mm).

Amongst battery professionals the AA battery is also called an R6. Other common names for AA batteries: U7 (in Britain until the 1980’s), Penlight / Mignon / MN1500 / MX1500 / Type 316 (Soviet Union / Russia), UM 3 (JIS), #5 (China), 6135-99-052-0009 (NSN) (carbon-zinc), 6135-99-195-6708 (NSN) (alkaline), Finger Battery, "Paluszek” (Poland). Around three billion batteries are sold annually in the U.S. averaging about 32 per family or ten per person. Battery life may be extended by storing the batteries at a low temperature, such as a freezer or refrigerator, which slows the chemical reaction within. Such storage can extend the life of alkaline batteries by as much as 5%. Many Battery chemicals are corrosive, poisonous or both. If leakage occurs the chemicals released can be dangerous.

First commercial appearance: 1904

Although the flashlight is a relatively simple device, its invention did not occur until the late 19th century, following the invention of the electric battery and the filament bulb.

Whilst Joseph Swan and Thomas Edison are credited with the invention of the incandescent light bulb, there are at least 22 prior inventors. Edison’s version was able to outstrip the others because of a combination of three factors: an effective incandescent material, a higher vacuum than others were able to achieve (by use of the Sprengel pump) and a high resistance that made power distribution from a centralized source economically viable.

Over the first three-quarters of the 19th century many experimenters worked with various combinations of platinum or indium wires, carbon rods, and evacuated or semi-evacuated enclosures, including Humphry Davy, Warren De La Rue and Heinrich Gobel.

Conrad Hubert received a US patent in 1903 (number 737,107 issued August 26th) for a flashlight with an on/off switch in the now familiar cylindrical casing, containing the lamp and batteries.

Early portable electric lights were called ‘flashlights’ not through design, but as a result of their poor flickering performance.

According to a 1916 Eveready brochure "101 uses for an Eveready", by 1916 the flashlight was an essential personal item: “The light that does not flicker in a draught, extinguish in the wind, and is controlled instantly by a finger. It’s the light everyone needs”

By 1964, improvements in efficiency and production of incandescent lamps had reduced the cost of providing a given quantity of light by a factor of thirty, compared with the cost at introduction of Edison’s lighting system.

In order to focus the beam of light emitted by the bulb into a directional beam, a reflector is used with an approximately parabolic shape. This reflects the light emerging in all directions from the bulb into an approximately parallel beam.
convenience cinema

We begin with a wide external shot. The bell rings as the front door opens. The protagonist enters and heads towards the liquor shelves. The clerk looks up at the convex mirror suspiciously before shifting his gaze to the grainy CCTV screen. Wandering the tight aisles, our hero casually picks up snack foods, then heads back towards the clerk. Pleasantries are exchanged. He absent-mindedly picks up a couple of small items and places them on the counter. The clerk opens the register and places change next to the bagged items. Something is discussed. The story moves along...
First commercial appearance: 1855 (rubber), 1920 (latex), 1994 (polyurethane)

The oldest claimed representation of condom use is a painting in the French cave Grotte des Combarrelles; the paintings in this cave are 12,000–15,000 years old. Allegedly, the name "condom" was coined when Charles II was given oiled sheep intestines to use as condoms by a Dr. Condom, however, some believe the name "condom" came from the Latin word "condus" which means "vessel". In the 1700s, in addition to the linen sheaths already used, condoms made from animal intestines became available. They were quite expensive and the unfortunate result was that they were often reused.

The first rubber condom was produced in 1855. The earliest rubber condoms had a seam and were as thick as a bicycle inner tube. In the fifties, two improvements were made to the condom: lubrication (Durex introduces the first lubricated condom) and the reservoir tip. The female condom has been available in Europe since 1992 and was approved in 1993 by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

First commercial appearance: 1945

The story begins in 1888 when John Loud, an American leather tanner, patented a roller-ball-tip marking pen. The major problem was the ink - if the ink was thin the pens leaked, and if it was too thick, they clogged.

The next stage of development came almost fifty years after Loud's patent, with an improved version invented in Hungary in 1935 by László Biró and his brother, Georg.

László noticed that the ink used in newspaper printing dried quickly, leaving the paper free from smudges. He tried using the same ink in a fountain pen but found that it would not flow into the tip, as it was too viscous.

Unfortunately, the pens were a spectacular failure. The Biró brothers returned to their laboratory and devised a new design.

Marcel Bich, a French manufacturer of penholders and pen cases, was appalled at the poor quality and high cost of the ballpoint pens he had seen. He went to the Biró brothers and arranged to pay them a royalty on their patent. Marcel Bich studied the detailed construction of every ballpoint pen on the market for the following two years, often working with a microscope. By 1952 Bich was ready to introduce his new wonder: the "Ballpoint Bic" which had finally become a practical writing instrument.

Bich invested heavily in advertising, hiring poster designer Raymond Savignac, who named the writing instrument the "Atomic pen", a name it kept throughout the 1950s and 1960s in France.

In 1959 Bich brought the pen to the American market. Although sold at a higher price at first, the Bic pen was soon selling at 19 cents with the slogan "writes first time, every time." In 1965 the French ministry of education began allowing the use of ballpoint pens in classrooms.

The Bic Cristal is the most widely sold pen in the world, and in 2004 the one hundred billionth Bic was manufactured.
First commercial appearance: 1727 (modern style of glasses, held by temples passing over the ears)

Around 1000AD, the first vision aid was invented (inventor unknown) called a reading stone, which was a glass sphere that was laid on top of the material to be read, thus magnifying the letters. Around 1284 in Italy, Salvino D’Armate is credited with inventing the first wearable eye glasses. Sunglasses, in the form of flat panes of smoky quartz, were used in China in the 12th century. Similarly, the Inuit have used snow goggles for eye protection. Despite the increasing popularity of contact lenses and laser corrective eye surgery, glasses remain very common, as their technology has improved. For instance, it is now possible to purchase frames made of special memory metal alloys that return to their correct shape after being bent. The illusion of three dimensions on a two dimensional surface can be created by providing each eye with different visual information. 3D glasses create the illusion of three dimensions by filtering out the light not intended for that eye, resulting in each eye receiving a different image.

First commercial appearance: 1890

Cartography has been an integral part of the human story for a long time, perhaps up to 8,000 years. From cave paintings to ancient maps of Babylon, Greece, and Asia, through the Age of Exploration, and on into the 21st century, people have created and used maps as the essential tools to help them define, explain, and navigate their way through the world.

Mapping represented a significant step forward in the intellectual development of human beings and it serves as a record of the advancement of knowledge of the human race, which could be passed from members of one generation to those that follow in the development of culture.

The oldest preserved maps are found in Babylonian clay tablets from around 2300 BC.

Cartography received it’s greatest advances in ancient Greece, reaching it’s culmination with Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy) around AD 100. His ‘World Map’ depicted the Old World from around 60 degrees North to 30 degrees South. He also wrote a monumental work known as the Geographike Hyphygesis (Guide to Geography), which remained an authoritative reference on World geography until the Renaissance.

The invention of printing allowed more widely available maps to be produced at the start of the 15th century, produced by carving the images into wooden blocks.

Maps became increasingly accurate and factual during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries with the application of increasingly rigorous scientific methods, many countries also undertook national mapping programs. Nonetheless, much of the world was poorly known until the widespread use of aerial photography following World War 1.

Road maps are perhaps the most widely used maps today, and form a subset of navigational maps, which also include aeronautical and nautical charts, railroad network maps, hiking and cycle trails.
Watches evolved from portable spring driven clocks, which first appeared in the 15th century. Portable timepieces were made possible by the invention of the mainspring, a spiral torsion spring of metal ribbon that is the power source for timekeeping devices.

The first timepieces to be worn, made in 16th century Europe, were transitional in size between clocks and watches. These ‘clock-watches’ were fastened to clothing or worn on a chain around the neck. They were heavy drum shaped cylindrical brass boxes several inches in diameter, engraved and ornamented. They had only an hour hand. They usually had to be wound twice a day.

Patek Phillipe created the first wristwatch in 1868. For civilians the wristwatches did not yet become popular among men. At the beginning of the century wristwatches were mostly worn by women.

In 1904, Brazilian aviator Alberto Santos Dumont asked his friend Louis Cartier to come up with an alternative that would allow him to keep both hands on the controls while timing his performances during flight. Cartier and his master watchmaker, Edmond Jaeger soon came up with the first prototype for a man’s wristwatch called the Santos wristwatch.

In 1959 Seiko gave an order to Epson (a daughter company of Seiko) to start developing a quartz wristwatch. The project was codenamed 59A and by the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, Seiko had a working prototype of a portable quartz watch which took part in time measurements throughout the event.

The first quartz watch to enter production was the Seiko 35 SQ Astron, which hit the shelves on December 25, 1969. One particularly interesting decision made by Seiko at that time was to not patent the whole movement of the quartz wristwatch, thus allowing other manufacturers to benefit from the Seiko technology. This played a major role in the popularity and quick development of the quartz watch, which in less than a decade was dominant in the watch market, nearly ending almost 100 years of mechanical wristwatch heritage.

The first transparent plastic film was produced in 1889, made from highly flammable nitrocellulose (celluloid), now commonly known as “nitrate film”. Why 35 mm? Legend has it that when Edison was asked by his workers how wide to cut the film (which was manufactured by the Eastman company), he held up his thumb and forefinger and said “About this wide”... More probable, however, is that the 35 mm width was derived by just slitting in half the readily available 70 mm wide Eastman roll film (unperforated, used for still-pictures). The plethora of formats in the early decades of the 20th century was due to the fierce competition between manufacturers; everybody wanted to design their own format just to make sure someone else’s films couldn’t be used in their cameras or projectors. Due to film photography’s long history of widespread use, there are now around one trillion pictures on photographic film or photographic paper in the world, enough to cover an area of around ten thousand square kilometres (4000 square miles), about half the size of Wales.

First commercial appearance: 1889

First commercial appearance: 1868
Produced by:

Julian Bleecker
Nick Foster
Rhys Newman
Nicolas Nova