The Man behind the Enigma

A brief look into Elon Musk and his impact on the world.

Innovation and technological development has seen an exponential rise since the start of the 20th century. From the birth of the personal computer to the design of hybrid engines, the world has seen a plethora of talented men and women become pioneers of the modern era. Names like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Richard Branson are perhaps the most recognised. However one that surely deserves equal or perhaps even more recognition is that of the highly unconventional Elon Musk.

As one types ‘Elon Musk’ into an internet search bar, the top search suggestion usually reads ‘Elon Musk – Tony Stark’. Perhaps it would be hard to describe Musk in two words that would fit him better which is ironic given his penchant for avoiding publicity, quite unlike Mr Stark. As a singular man, he proves to be the largest possible disruption for entire industries at a go. It is baffling how little the general public knows about the man who is at the helm of companies that have set the tone for modern day engineering, that is until his tendency for shunning publicity and advertising comes to the forefront. Musk’s pet projects such as Tesla Motors and SpaceX amongst others, have proven to be absolute game-changers for the typically slow moving auto and aero sectors, despite lacking the tenacious marketing they deserve.

Elon Musk is essentially an entrepreneur, inventor, engineer, and investor. Born on the 28th of June, 1971 in Pretoria, South Africa, he spent much of his childhood in various parts of the country before moving to Canada. He dropped out of a doctoral program in Applied Physics at Stanford University to pursue his entrepreneurial dreams at the age of 24, his key areas of

interests being renewable energy and its applications, as well as modern space technologies. Musk's first major company Zip2 was sold to Compaq, for which Musk earned USD 22 million. Next, Musk formed a company which later went on to become PayPal, along with Peter Thiel, another high profile tech entrepreneur. This highly successful venture went on to be acquired by eBay, for which Musk received over a hundred million dollars.

By now, Musk had become an established name in Silicon Valley and with the requisite financial backing he let his aspirations soar. Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX, was Musk's next sky-high ambition. Within ten years, SpaceX had become the only private space agency to be able to put a satellite in Earth's orbit, and to berth a vehicle with the International Space Station. SpaceX is currently in the process of developing infrastructure to make rockets reusable, and developing the capacity for soft-landing a launch vehicle on barges in the middle of the ocean. However, these developments are not just any haphazard by-products of a talented mind. It is Musk's long term goal to help mankind reach a multi-planetary existence. This, he believes, will start with the colonization of Mars. However, this endeavour, unlike Mars One, is not merely a marketing gimmick, but realises basic challenges that lie on this path.

By joining the Board of Directors as the Chairman of Tesla Motors, Elon Musk spearheaded the company to prove its mettle in a traditionally slow moving industry, as some may remember from Bill Gates' vitriolic war of words with the auto magnates. Tesla first gained widespread attention following its production of the Tesla Roadster, the world's first fully electric sports car. Since then the company has gone on to revolutionise the automotive industry achieving amazing technological advancements. However, noting how electric cars are still a marginalised segment due to lack of infrastructure and R&D, Tesla did something unprecedented when it opened up

all its technology patents for anyone in the industry to use in good faith. A move designed to boost electric car programs across all companies, and speed up development. Tesla is also currently building a facility in Nevada called the ‘Gigafactory’ which will manufacture more Lithium-ion batteries in a single location than the entire world makes today.

Meanwhile, Musk has also been working on a side project called the ‘Hyperloop’, a new mode of transportation claiming to be faster than a commercial aircraft, and ideal for small distances that are prone to high levels of traffic. The blueprints released conceptualise an underground high speed corridor with a network of railways running on a cushion of air. Likewise, rocket designing is a tough and technologically demanding task, which would benefit from the use of gesture control. Funnily enough the interface Tony Stark is shown to be using in Iron Man 3 seemed to fit the bill, so Musk’s team realised the technology, sending a video to Jon Favreau, the director of the Iron Man series.

Rather than being labelled as a real life Tony Stark, Elon Musk could very well be dubbed as the modern day Nikola Tesla, what with his utter disregard for publicity while initiating growth of ground-breaking technologies. However, Musk is certainly a much more influential figure whose views are highly respected. An inspiration to younger generations and future engineers across the world, Musk is the quintessential genius with the utmost regard for the environment as well as the evolution of science. It is highly unlikely that there will be anyone who will make such an impact in today’s technological landscape, nor is anyone else expected to make such vital advancements in the field of sustainable development for the foreseeable future.