2007+

10 Trends: Predictions & Provocations
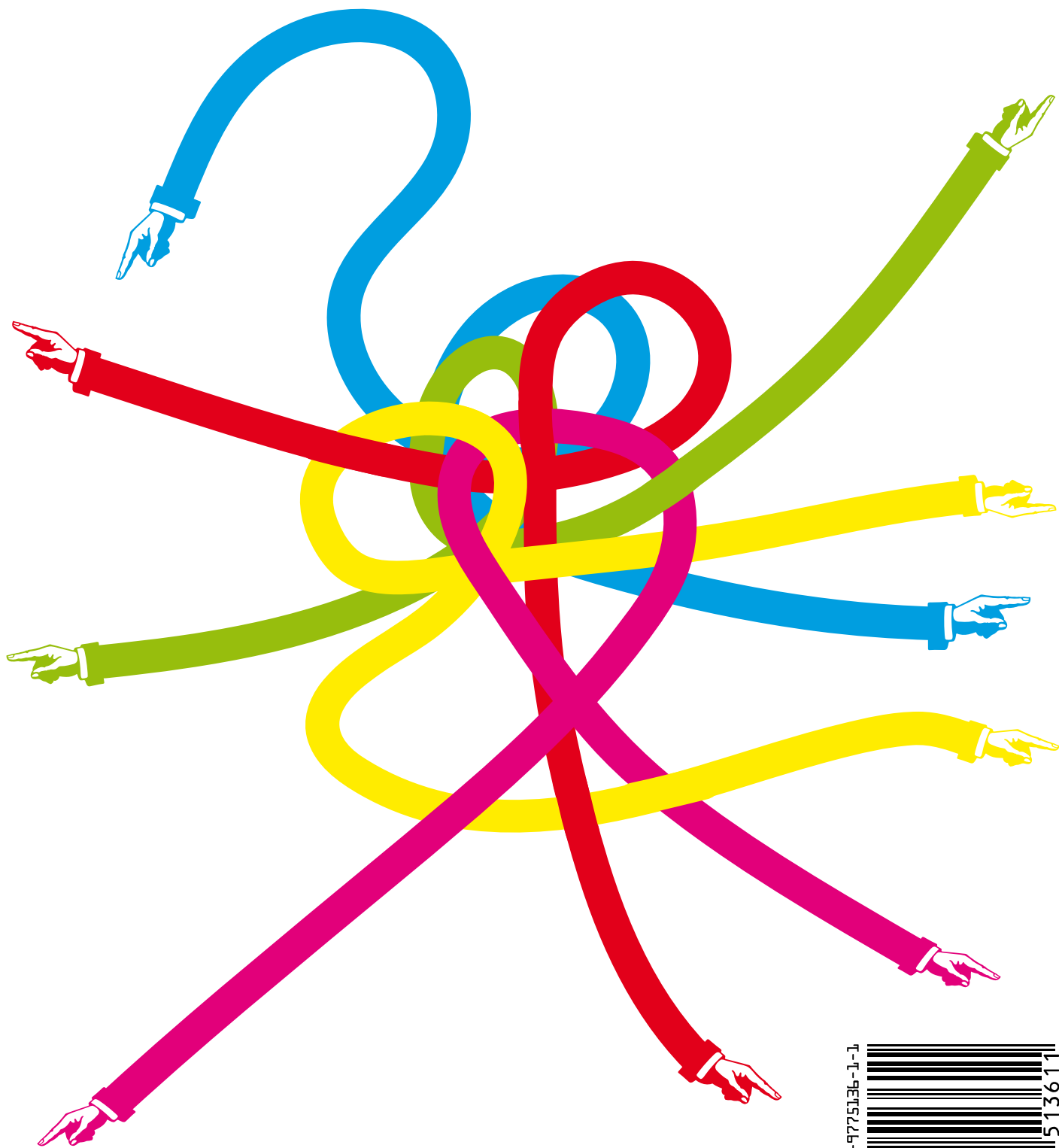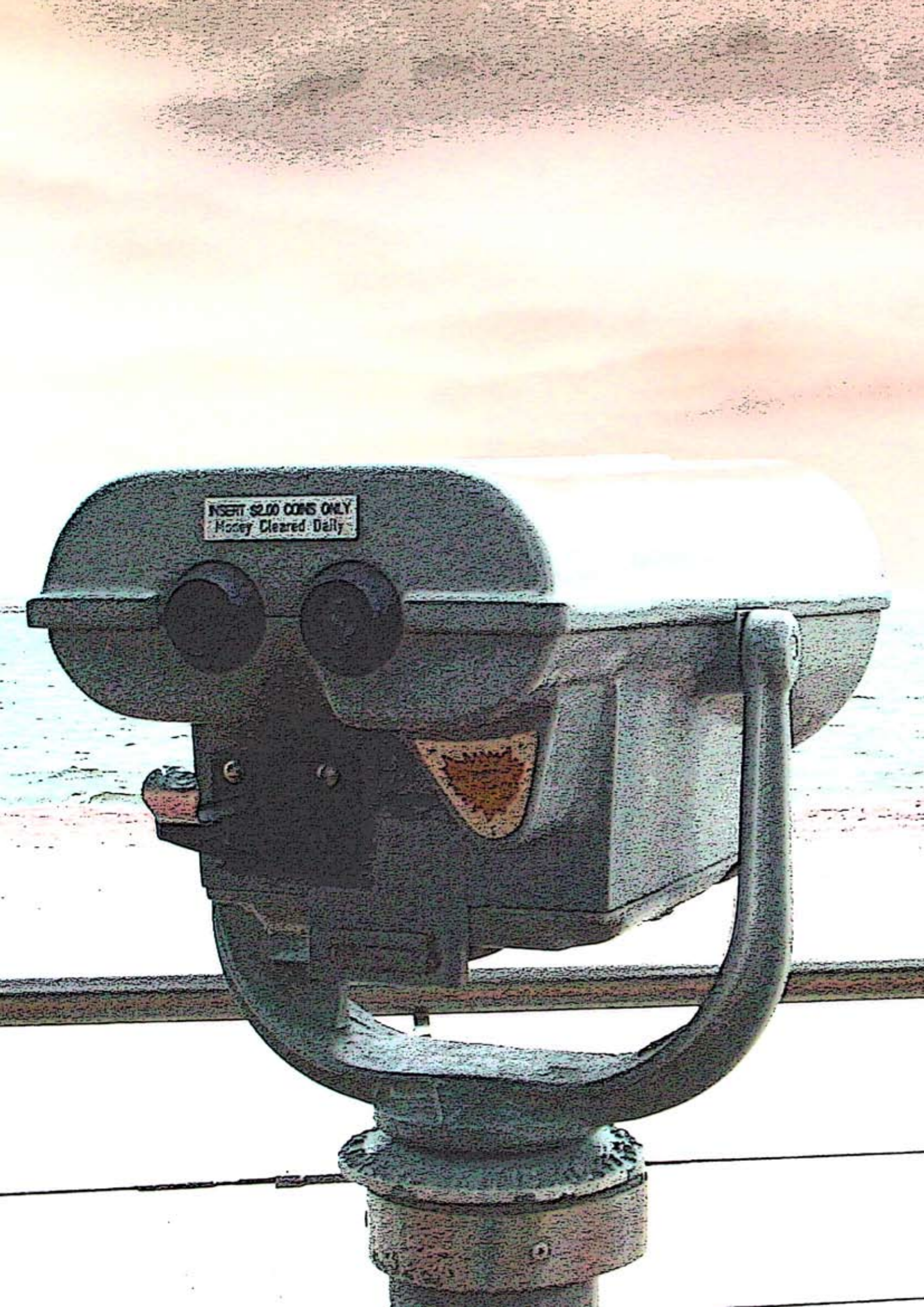
Contents

Introduction

Doom and gloom is a growth industry. Just scan the shelves of your local bookstore and you'll be assailed by titles such as; The Long Emergency: Surviving the converging catastrophes of the twenty-first century, Is it just me or is everything sh*t? and my own particular favourite, How to Survive a Robot Uprising.

But is life really getting worse? There are indeed many things to worry about. Melting ice caps, influenza pandemics, the erosion of privacy, terrorism – even high interest rates that would make second homes unaffordable. We're all agreed then, right? Wrong. A lawyer in his seventies recently accused me – in the nicest possible way - of living on another planet. Where was this anxiety that I was talking about? Where is evidence of life speeding up and how could I compare a fear of terrorism with the threat of total nuclear annihilation which he had lived through during the nineteen fifties and sixties? Fair point.

Life is not a single experience and even people living in the same street will view events in totally different ways. In other worlds, we don't see things are they are, we see them as we are. If you have grown up through a world war - or heaven forbid, two – our current anxieties are a sideshow compared to what you would have endured. More importantly, we have become paralysed by future possibilities. We have become so afraid of worst-case scenarios that we have all but forgotten present realities. The air we breathe is now considerably cleaner today than it was fifty or one hundred years ago but many people think the opposite. Equally, serious crime and acts of serious sexual violence against children are at the lowest level for years but we choose not to believe it.

So what is all this 'miserablism' about? It seems to me when it comes to the future, it's safer – and lazier - to be a pessimist. Optimism takes work, it requires commitment. Our parents made sacrifices and remained optimistic because they believed there was a world worth fighting for. So do yourself a favour in 2007. Learn from the elders and the youngsters. They get it. We don't. And if you don't like the way some things are heading do something about it. Get involved. Get angry in the nicest possible way.

Above all remember in times like these that there have always been times like these.

Richard Watson, 1 January 2007
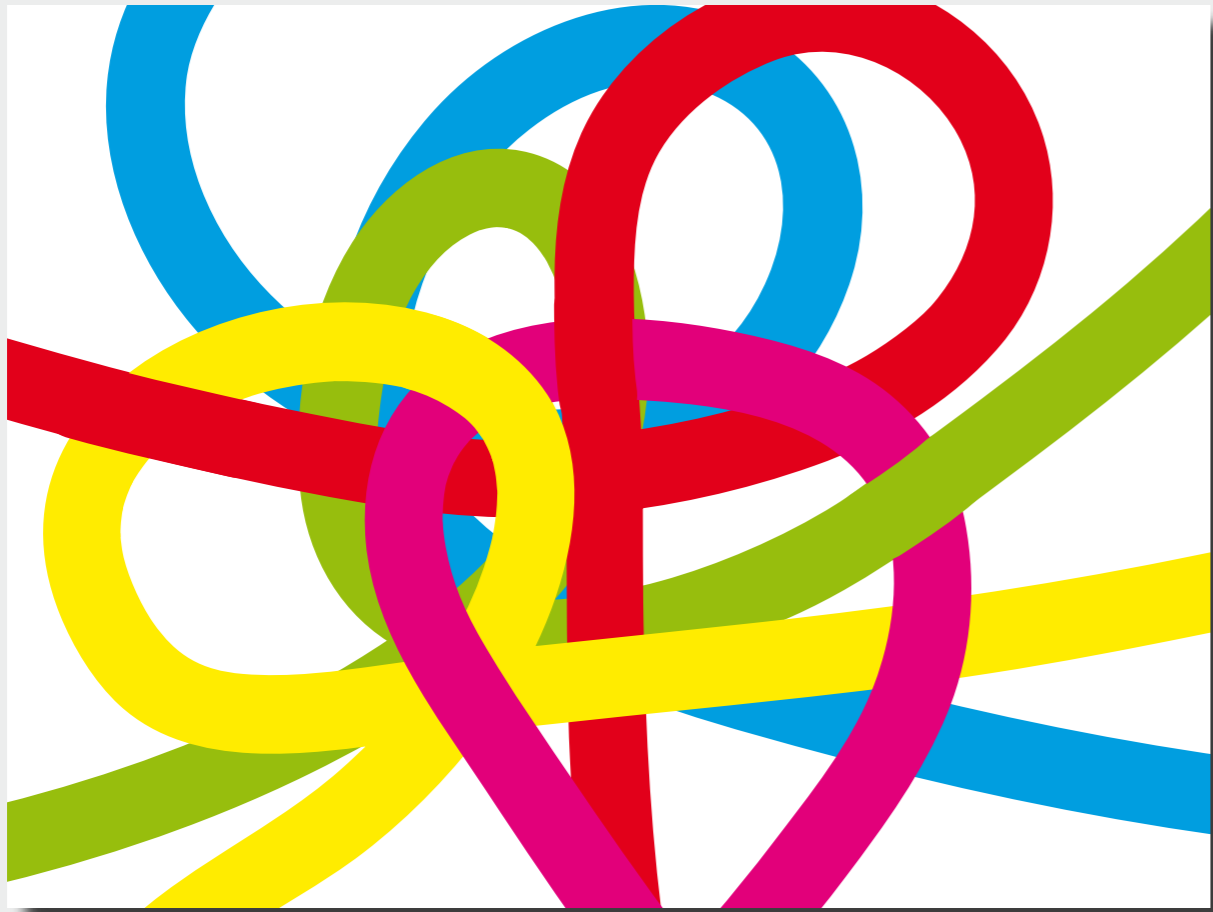
Ten Trends for 2007+

1. Simplicity

A trend that's sweeping through the technology industry is simplicity. The idea is starting to make its presence felt in other areas too. Business tends to make things complicated because it's easier that way. Hence many products are over-engineered and feature a myriad of functions that most ordinary people will never need or use. A recent survey by the Consumer Electronics Association in the US found that 87% of people (customers) cite ease of use as the most important feature of any new product. Another survey claims that 50% of the products that are returned as 'faulty' are in fact in perfect working order – it's just that people don't have the time to figure them out. So what's the solution? Making products simple is actually very complicated. First you need to make your company simple. This means simplifying not only structure and process, but also culture and mission. A good example of a company that's been 'simplified' is Philips. The company now runs just seventy businesses instead of five hundred and there are five divisions instead of fifty. There's even a Simplicity Advisory Board to ensure that things are made simple but not simpler.

Implications

Life is complicated enough already so anyone that makes peoples' lives more complicated will not be thanked. This applies to the makers of products but it also applies to the providers of services including government.

Opportunities

Stripped down versions of existing products. For example, who really needs a washing machine that can wash your clothes 136 different ways? Also communicating in plain English. If your mother can't understand instructions from Ikea, neither can anyone else.

Threats

It is always easier to add than to take away. Every organisation should therefore appoint a Head of No to offset the excesses of the yes men.

Links

Too Much Information, Too Much Choice, Speeding up, Time famine.

2. My way

Ever since Henry Ford invented mass production, companies have pursued a strategy of standardisation. Given globalisation, you'd think that standardisation would be intensifying but you'd be wrong. First, consumer markets are fragmenting. In the 1970s, the US population was typically segmented into 40 lifestyle groups. Nowadays, the number has increased to 66. This diversity comes in many forms; lifestyle, beliefs, values, income, ethnicity, family structures and so on, but all of these groups have one thing in common – they dislike homogenisation. A second problem is that standardisation stifles innovation. Making things the same reduces points of difference and leads towards commoditisation. Mass customisation and localisation, on the other hand, encourage experimentation, which drives innovation. Local customisation is also very difficult for competitors to track, let alone copy. As a result, retailers are starting to customise store formats, products and even service offers according to local, even individual, tastes.

Equally, manufacturers are formulating specific products for specific regions or groups. For example, Coca-Coca has created four different canned coffee drinks for the Japanese market, each one targeting a particular region, while Wal-Mart varies selections of canned chilli peppers according to store location. Too much localisation or customisation can obviously breed logistical chaos and dilute the brand so changes are usually clustered using local geographic or lifestyle data. So what, apart from customer fragmentation, is driving this trend? The answer is information. Customer data can pinpoint not only who is buying what, but also when and why. For instance, data can identify need-states based on the time of day, so an inner city store can change both the mood of the store (lighting and music for instance) and the products on sale according to specific time segments. This is hardly rocket science, but companies are finding that localising stores or changing what gets sold when can result in significant sales increases.

Implications

The days of averaging out demand to create a single, universally acceptable product are long gone. These days it's coffee ten different ways with a local twist on the side. Furthermore, the more markets globalise the greater will be the demand for individualised and localised products.

Opportunities

Allowing individual stores or groups of stores to customise their offers based upon local tastes and demand. Also allowing customers to design it or personalise it their way.

Threats

Logistical chaos. Conflict with the need for simplicity.

Links

Personalisation, customisation, mass-customisation, co-creation, localisation, tribalism.

3. Self-reliance

Companies (and governments) are telling people to do it for themselves. The theory is that this will save you and me time and money, although the reality is that more often than not this DIY trend is actually saving the company (or the government) money. Thus we have self check-in at airports and hotels. You can book your own tickets online and even calculate your own tax assessment. Customer service costs money too and is notoriously difficult to do well. So why not ask people to do that for themselves too? Customers can then no longer complain about lousy service. Other examples of the burgeoning self-service industry include scanning your own products, cleaning your own shopping trolley and slicing your own bread in supermarkets and assembling your own furniture.

However, this particular trend is about to turn around and bite companies and governments on the bottom. People are now getting so used to doing it for themselves – and so used to how dreadful the experience can be when they don't – that some of them are unplugging themselves and really doing everything for themselves. Examples of this include people that are bypassing doctors and hospitals to treat themselves (thanks to information openly available on the Internet), people that are moving to semi-remote locations to escape the rat race and people that have given up on the mainstream media preferring to create their own information and entertainment instead.

Implications

People are still anxious about everything from the economy to climate and terrorism. One survival mechanism is self-sufficiency: ensuring that you are not reliant on anything or anyone else for the basic things you need. This principle also applies to countries so expect a rise in protectionism and anti-free trade as the West tries to defend itself against the growth of countries like China and India.

Opportunities

Products and services that reduce the amount of work to be done but leave enough undone so that people feel they've achieved something by themselves. Also products, technologies and brands that deliver empowerment.

Threats

Self –reliance can mean the erosion of trust. At the extreme this links with anti-government activism and the 'back to the woods' survivalist movement in the US.

Links

Pay as you go, user pays, downshifting, work-life balance, F.U.D. products.

4. Carbon

Are you leading a carbon neutral life? The desire to be green (or, at least, to be seen as green) is trickling down from countries, through companies and organisations to individuals. First organisations like the National Football League in the US jumped on the bandwagon by saying that they would plant trees to counter emissions from Superbowl XL. In the UK HSBC bank is playing the tree planting game and even Bristol City Council says it will plant trees along its bus routes to counter emissions from buses. We've seen rock bands planting trees to offset concert emissions and Hollywood is getting in on the act too with celebrities like Brad and Leonardo queuing up to declare themselves carbon-neutral. There's even a car finance company operating in Australia that links your loan rate to how green your new car is and plants trees to soak up any likely emissions. Also in the US, eight US States have begun a federal action against five of the largest power companies in the US for not cutting carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions and pollution trading is set to be one of the fastest growing markets of the future worth US $35 billion by 2008 according to the UN.

That's right, there is a market for trading pollution whereby one company can buy and sell the right to pollute the earth's atmosphere. Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch and Morgan Stanley are all active in this new market. But is an exchange for polluters and non-polluters a good idea? You'd think not. According to one think tank the existence of this market stifles energy innovation and promotes the idea of pollution. Still, something needs to be done and fast. We currently release 300% more CO_2 than our oceans can absorb. India's CO_2 emissions are likely to rise by 70% by 2025 and between now and 2030 emissions from China will probably equal that of the rest of the industrialised world.

Implications

Governments will jump onto this faster than you can say tax break and farmers will be encouraged to grow trees purely to trade carbon credits.

Opportunities

Green energy schemes, land use projects, individualised carbon footprints and local carbon audits.

Threats

The BRIC nations, especially China, refusing to enter into agreements.

Links

Carbon footprints, green energy, sustainability, climate change

5. Water

It takes 11,000 litres of water to make a hamburger and 83,000 to make a medium-sized family car. The average person uses 135 litres every day, most of which is wasted. Water, or more precisely the lack of it, will be everywhere in the future. The scarcity of H2O is being caused by growing populations in countries like India and China, but it's also being caused by consumerism and development in regions like North America and Europe. Urbanisation and climate change are also major factors and in many cases the problem won't be a lack of water but water in the wrong places. In China some areas are already taking legal action against other regions whom they accuse of stealing 'their' rain through cloud seeding, while in other countries the problem is too much rain rather than not enough. The pollution of rivers and lakes will move center stage and local dams will become global issues and peoples' attitudes and behavior towards water will change significantly. Every industry from agriculture to fashion will come into the spotlight with regard to water use and customers will select one product or brand over another based upon the company's water policy.

Implications

A water crisis has the potential to dwarf any forthcoming energy crisis. Countries, companies and individuals will come under increasing scrutiny and legislation regarding the amount of water they are consuming - and especially the amount they are wasting. So goodbye green grass and hello water metering, Astroturf and grey water recycling.

Opportunities

The good news is this is all solvable through prudent use. We will see major engineering projects aimed at reducing leaks in old pipe networks and we will see new desalination plants. Also water grids and 'water futures' markets to distribute water nationally and internationally and the creation of new 'waterless' products.

Threats

Only 2.5% of the world's water is fresh so water will be the new oil. Water will shape foreign policy and wars will be fought to obtain access to supplies. There will be fights about who owns underground aquifers. A long drought, possibly caused by El Nino, could also devastate continents such as Australia and Africa.

Links

Urbanisation, globalisation, privatisation, sustainability, health, pollution.

6. Open

A recent issue of Business 2.0 magazine printed a list called 50 People Who Matter Now. In number one place was you. This is cheeky and provocative in equal measure but it's also 100% correct. Not so long ago, companies created departments to create innovation. But the result was often that innovation was turned into a state secret. The only people who knew what was going on - and therefore the only people who could really contribute - were the Chosen Ones inside the innovation department. Not surprisingly, this approach limited both the quantity and quality of ideas so companies started searching for new ways of developing new ideas. One new idea is distributed or open source innovation in which customers (or anyone else for that matter) are the co-creators of the products and services that they consume. The idea began in software when developers posted code on the Internet and asked other programmers to fix the bugs. This was networked innovation and the original motive was altruistic because the final product was often given away for free. Then some bright sparks started to apply the principle of asking you and me to invent or develop all manner of products. There are now open source encyclopedias, open source cola recipes, open source newspapers, open source computer games and open source beer. There's even an open source Hollywood film script. The open idea is even making its presence felt in the pharmaceuticals industry with sufferers grouping together to fund everything from information databases to biotech start-ups.

Implications

The customer really is in charge now. And it's not just customers that companies need to connect with either. Employees, ex-employees and even people that actively reject your products are now all part of the innovation process.

Opportunities

The creation of networks to hold conversations and exchange ideas with customers – especially enthusiasts that are using products and services in strange or unusual ways.

Threats

To have a good idea you need lots of ideas, but there is a danger of being flooded with so many suggestions that companies become paralyzed. There is also the emerging issue of who owns the intellectual property surrounding co-created content and ideas.

Links

Innovation networks, social networks, the wisdom of crowds, user-generated content, customer co-creation, distributed innovation, Web 2.0.

7. Private equity

According to The Economist magazine there was a 60% growth in the use of the words private equity in the financial media between April 2003 and April 2005. Looking back over the past decade the phrase has seen a 1,000% increase in useage. So what's going on? The answer, in a nutshell, is that short-term institutional thinking (pension companies and such like) is undervaluing assets. More specifically, certain public companies need to be re-structured but senior executives are afraid of making any substantial decisions that will pay back over the longer term because the share price of their company will suffer in the short-term. In many cases things have also become very comfortable which is the last thing you need for innovation and change and public companies are being strangled by legislation and compliance. In other words, there is a significant disconnect between what a company is theoretically worth and how much it is being valued at by public equity markets. A solution, and a very profitable one, is private equity that taps into what is effectively the almost unlimited amount of low-cost credit that is currently available. Of course, for people with long memories this is essentially the same as asset stripping, which was in vogue in the 1970s and early 1980s. The difference is that the asset-strippers came a cropper due to high interest rates which, of course, we don't have – yet. So for the moment private equity has its place in the sun, along with financial engineers some of whom have built empires on foundations of sand.

Implications

Expect more public companies and 'public' assets to come under the private equity spell. Also expect major problems due to the networked nature of private equity deals.

Opportunities

Whilst there are downsides (like job losses) there is also the opportunity to radically reshape companies and even entire markets.

Threats

High interest rates. Also private equity firms poaching the best staff from public companies which makes the public companies even weaker.

Links

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), interest rates, cascading failure, networked risk.

8. Low cost

Markets used to consist of a broad range of offers ranging from the cheap and nasty at the one end through 'everyday' to luxury. Mass markets generally sat somewhere in the middle. Not any more. As people have become richer markets have started to polarize between the top and bottom segments. In other words the middle market has all but disappeared, with people either trading up to premium products or happily accepting low cost (value driven) products that have become increasingly well made. In other words, metaphorically speaking, everyone is either flying with a low-cost airline or upgrading to business class. Actually that is highly misleading because in many cases people buy into both segments depending on what mood they are in or who's paying. Hence people will buy $20 T-shirts one minute and $500 jeans the next. However the strangest thing is perhaps the fact that next to nobody is complaining about the ultimate price we all pay for the availability of low cost goods. Shoes at £5 a pair have to come from somewhere and one wonders what the factory conditions and the environmental damage behind such products really are. Or perhaps we don't – it just looks like a bargain and ethical concerns take a back seat to convenience.

Implications

Is low-cost simply a temporary condition brought about by globalisation? What will happen when resources start to run out or wages and conditions start to equalise across the world? Will we all be flying low-cost with oil at $150 a barrel?

Opportunities

Focussing on the bottom or top ends of a market and avoiding the middle.

Threats

Resource scarcity, protectionism, collapse of one or more major producer or consumer countries. Also, can a single brand stretch from one end of a market to another?

Links

Globalisation, China, India, sustainability, ethics.

9. Luxury

As low cost services spread across the world, so too does the appeal of the opposite: high-cost, high touch exclusivity and personal pampering. To use the travel analogy once again, for some people low cost fares leave extra cash to splash out on expensive hotels. But as more travellers get used to luxury, the more of it they want, which leaves people with something of a dilemma: How to set themselves apart from everyone else when almost everyone else seems to have exactly the same idea? The thirst for luxury travel and other premium services is also creating what I'd call a convergence of expectations. What I mean by this is that people are getting used to being treated well and expect it all the time – no matter what they're paying. For example, travelers to developing countries are beginning to expect first world conditions – even in the middle of nowhere – and seem to be incapable of suffering any form of temporary hardship. On a more mundane level convergence of expectations means that customers flying business or visiting a Lexus showroom expect exactly the same speed of service and quality of coffee that they get in a top restaurant or hotel. After all, if Starbuck's can keep me happy for $3.50 by giving me a decent cup of coffee in a china mug why can't everyone else?

Implications

Customers will become increasingly demanding. They will benchmark quality and levels of service against the best in the world, not merely best in class or best locally.

Opportunities

Learning from world-class organisations, not simply the people in your industry or the people down the road. Also partnering with other companies when customer expectations fall outside your ability to deliver.

Threats

Customers will be less constrained by location in the future so if banks aren't delivering superior service locally customers may move their banking to another country.

Links

Customer service, personalisation exclusivity.

10. Meaning

Back in 1943 Abraham Maslow produced a paper called A Theory of Human Motivation in which he contended that once an individual's basic biological needs (food, water, sleep etc) have been met he/she would seek to satisfy a number of progressively higher needs. These range from safety through love and belonging to status and self-esteem. At the very top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs was actualisation. Now I'm no psychologist but it occurs to me that one of the things that might be going on right now is that more and more of us have reached the peak of this pyramid and we are now searching for something more meaningful. For example, most people of a certain age (in certain countries) have now got enough stuff and buying even more stuff (no matter how new or wonderful) just doesn't have the same effect that it once did. Hence people are shifting away from buying products towards seeking experiences. This explains everything from the boom in 'holidays that help' to the interest in spirituality. As I say, I am no psychologist and perhaps this is way off target but the more I speak to people the more I think it's true. There's even a theory that the reason we are all in so much of a hurry is that we are in a rush to find happiness – and when we don't find it we just run faster.

Implications

Money, increasingly, won't make the world go around. This has profound consequences for companies that think they can buy your enthusiasm and governments that think that tax cuts will keep voters happy.

Opportunities

Added value is a dead end concept because the value is often fleeting and insubstantial.
What people really want is added meaning, things that make a difference in some way.

Threats

Most companies just don't get it and neither do the media. More glossy supplements about the lifestyles of the rich and famous? No thanks.

Links

Simplicity, work-life balance, downshifting.

Trend Blend 2007+

Market deregulation

Democracy 2.0

Virtual currencies — Single global currency

Embedded intelligence

Pessimism Psychological neoteny Global voting Micro-payment

Loneliness e-voting

Road pricing Road booking Outsourcing Nationalism Contactless payment

Depression Emotionally aware machines Nanotech Biotech Compliance Documentaries

Liberalism (opens in 2008) Ethics Artificial intelligence Generational change

High speed link Web 2.0 Distributed manufacturing Conservatism Debt Cloning

Digital cash Individualism Fertility Humans 2.0

Time starved (need for speed) Urbanisation Fantasy Anxiety Fear

Stored value cards Luxury travel Health Corporate social responsibility

Speeding up Work/Life balance Corporate power Simplicity Robotics

Guilty pleasures Luxury goods Too much choice Speed retail Escapism Nostalgia

Premiumisation Private equity Happiness Globalisation Long-tails Free agents

Pay-as-you-go Indulgence Always-on Reality Power shift eastwards Ageing

Pre-pay Wisdom of crowds Too much information Forgetting

Social networks Sensory experiences Time compression Aggregated customisation Search for meaning (Mon – Fri only)

Private currencies NGO power Geospatial web Labour migration Farmaceuticals

Exhibitionism Fragmentation Place shifting Carbon trading Natural Trust + transparency

Voyeurism Identity solutions Resource scarcity Fair trade Skills shortages

Boredom Low cost travel Religion

User-filtered Remote monitoring VoIP Water scarcity Blurring of sectors

User-created On-demand Personalisation Location tagging Car sharing Voter antipathy

Online medical records Climate change

Telemedicine Bio-simulations Mass customisation Extended financial families Emission taxes Car politics Activism Flat tax systems

Death of cheques Open innovation Story telling

Customised treatments Smart vending Services Localisation Sustainability Fuel cells Third spaces Self-serve

RFID Device convergence Pop-up retail Discipline convergence Slow food Slowing down Local transport

Constant partial attention Blended families Food miles Self-reliance Authenticity

Hydrogen power Alternative technologies

River of consciousness Seasonal

Regional Convenience

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"There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come"

Victor Hugo

Ten ideas that will change the world

1.	Emotionally aware machines
2.	The wisdom of crowds
3.	Long tails
4.	Pessimism
5.	Numbers
6.	Continuous partial attention
7.	Memory recovery and removal
8.	The architecture of sleep
9.	Aggregated customisation
10.	Too much choice

1. Emotionally aware machines

A Cambridge (UK) scientist has developed a prototype computer that can 'read' users' minds by capturing and then interpreting facial expressions - such as concentration, anger or confusion. In experiments using actors the computer was accurate 85% of the time although this dropped to 65% with 'ordinary people'. The technology raises a number of privacy-related issues, not least the collection of highly sensitive personal data. Toyota is allegedly already working with Professor Peter Robertson, the inventor, to link the emotional state of drivers with various safety controls and mood sensitive features in cars. Other customers might include insurance companies wanting to crack down on dishonest claims, banks targeting identity fraud, teachers trying to teach (does the student really understand?) or governments wanting to identify terrorists or social security cheats. In the future, car companies or local councils could even tailor road maps or directional signage to the level of aggression of individual drivers. What intrigues me most, however, is whether you could link mood sensitivity to products like radios and televisions so that they tune into 'happy' music or programmes depending on your mood. There is also the fascinating possibility of online retailers tailoring their home pages, product offerings and even product descriptions to the emotional state of their customers.

2. The wisdom of crowds

There are always lots of hot business trends around but here's a relatively new one – collective wisdom. The idea is simple: the wisdom of a large group of people is nearly always greater than that of any single member. The theory is especially hot in Internet circles – where obviously it's very easy to access the collective intelligence of users – but it's also emerging as a hot forecasting tool in financial markets. The idea is as old as the hills, but it's re-emerged due to technological developments (e.g. convergence and social networks) and a book called The Wisdom of Crowds by James Surowiecki. Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank and Hewlett-Packard are all using group wisdom to predict everything from next quarter sales figures to future economic indicators. Group prediction can even be played for fun on various websites like www. ideosphere.com and www. longbets.org. Is this a future trend or just a short-term management fad? What do you all think?

3. Long tails

The longtail effect has long been used by statisticians to describe 'power-law' distributions, such as the use of certain words in the English language (words occurring frequently followed by a slowly trailing 'demand' curve). But following an article in Wired magazine the phrase has become the buzzword of choice in management consultancies and venture capital firms. The reason for this is that longtails explain the fragmentation of consumer markets and the shift from mass to niche marketing. For example, due to the aggregating effect of the Internet, it is now possible to make money selling obscure products and services. Traditionally, a book retailer would focus on big sellers because it did not have enough physical space to stock every book ever published. But now, Amazon makes 30% of sales on book titles outside its top 130,000 sellers. Another example of a business making money from low-volume products is i-Tunes. What does this mean for business? One implication is a shift away from 'hits'. Another is a move away from researching what people want – just put it out there and find out. This in turn means moving away from conventional marketing and media advertising to investment in intelligent filtering (ie 'collaborative filtering' software). From a cultural point of view, the trend is also interesting because we may also be witnessing a shift away from 'shared culture' (which is hit dependant) to a more individualised culture that is not.
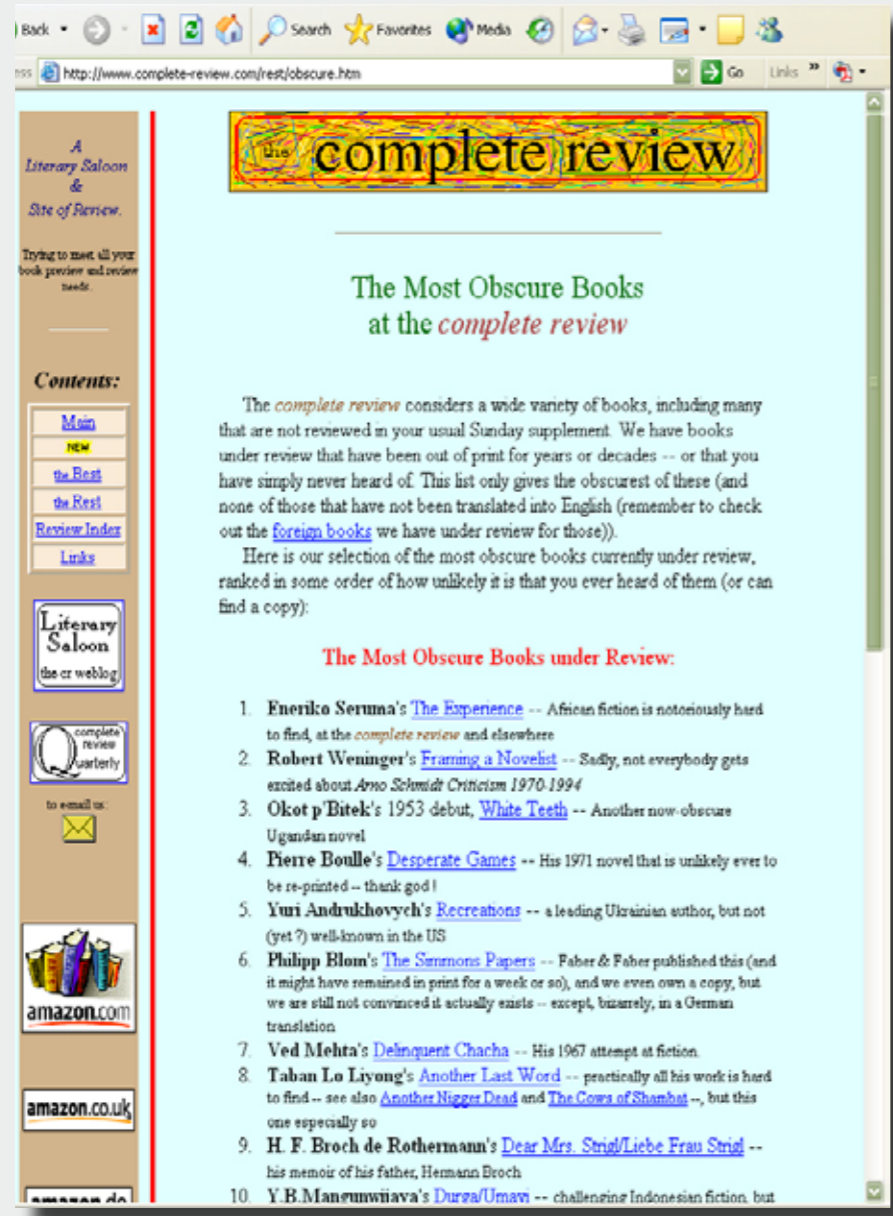
4. Pessimism

According to James Lovelock (propounder of the Gaia theory), billions of us are about to die and by the end of the century there will only be a few breeding pairs of humans left - probably in the arctic where weather conditions remains tolerable. James is clearly a glass-half-empty kind of guy but he's not alone. Anxiety about impending doom and disaster is as old as human civilisation, but whereas ancient disasters were thought of in purely natural terms, most modern mayhem is expected to be man made. There is, seemingly, more disaster around the corner and it's all our fault. Look at your carbon footprint and weep. We are morally bankrupt and we are destroying the planet and ourselves in the process. This is great news for the other species according to the new Malthusians, who argue that the earth is overpopulated and the only solution is a radical reduction of the human population. Rubbish. This is speciesism. Humans have unique qualities and, regardless of this, the human population will stabilise and then fall into natural decline around the year 2050. Moreover, this moralising intellectual pessimism takes no account of our natural curiosity and imagination - the very things that will solve many, if not all, of our current problems. On balance I believe people are good. Our natural aspiration is to improve our circumstances.

Fifty years ago, a sociological study found there was a direct correlation between how society viewed the individual and prevailing political beliefs. Our current political attitude is one of fatalism. People are bad and must be stopped. Behind every door is a potential abuser, so society should impose censorship and surveillance. Individuals and groups should be protected by legislation. We already have hate crimes so how long before we have thought crimes? One of the consequences of this negativity will be that people will retreat into their own private lives and homes; they will become more selfish, more protective and more self-indulgent. In the UK, any adult employee that could come into contact with children now has to be screened by the police. Guilty before proven otherwise. So the question really isn't whether human life will survive but whether our humanity will.
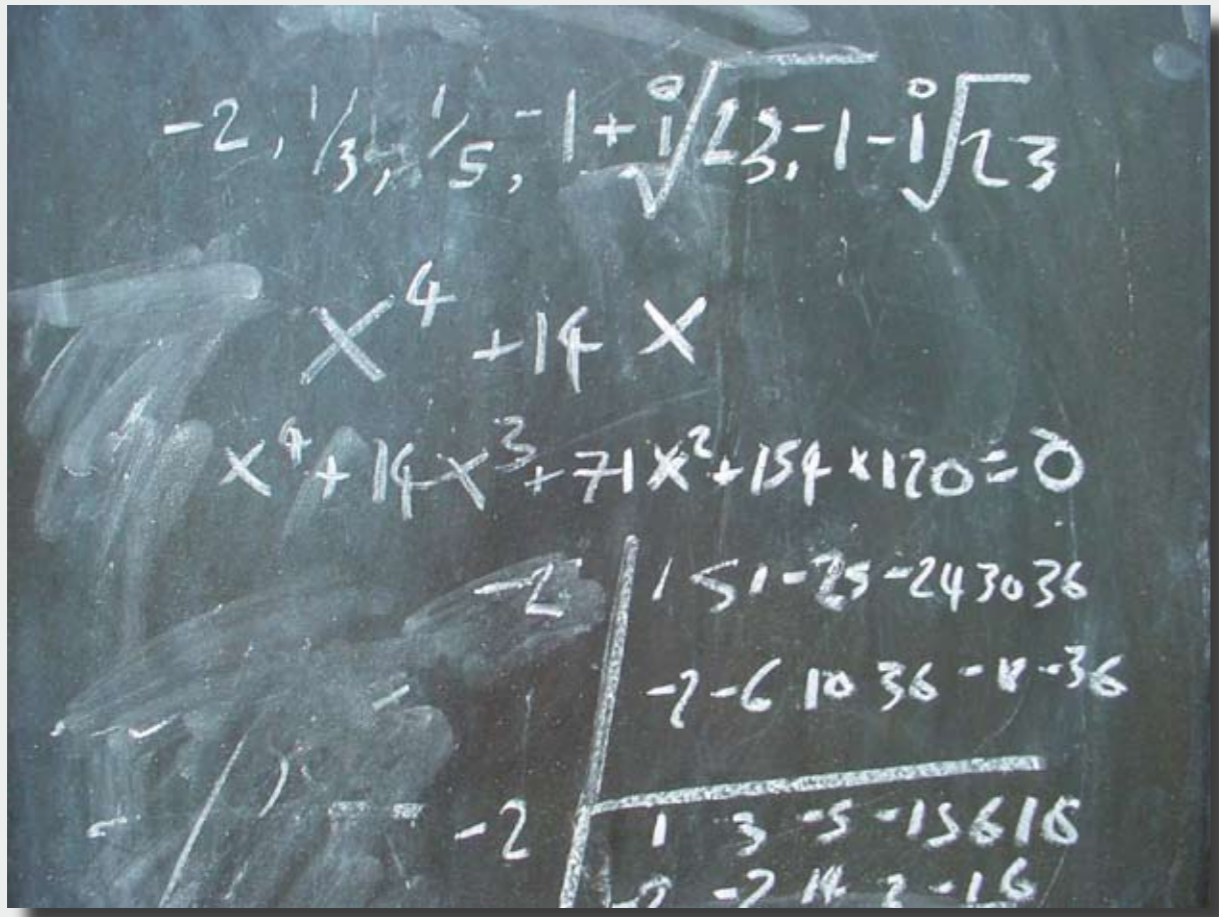
5. Numbers

The physical world is becoming digitised and raw data is being linked and turned into predictive models. Once upon a time our habits, values, conversations, buying habits and whereabouts remained hidden. Now they live forever in vast digital databases that, thanks to some smart mathematics, can be analysed to predict future behaviour or outcomes. For example, a company called Enologix uses algorithms to help winemakers produce wine that will score highly with the influential wine critic Robert Parker. The upside of this brave new world is that there is a whole universe of uninvented businesses waiting to be discovered. Products and services will become more tailored to our needs and things we need will seemingly pop out of nowhere as if by magic. Information (e.g. news) will be personalised too so that we can read about what we want to read about and avoid everything else. The downside is that data capture and data-mining erodes our privacy. The US National Security Agency (NSA) already uses mathematical algorithms to trawl phone calls and Internet traffic looking for links and patterns to identify potential terrorists. Research firms like AC Nielsen monitor blogs on behalf of multi-national corporations to see what people are talking about. As a result, we are being turned into a series of profiles and models to help companies hire the right employees, help governments get re-elected and help banks to sell more loans. Information feeds range from security cameras to book purchases and flight records and we are powerless to stop it - unless of course we take our lives offline, but that too is probably a trigger for a visit by the NSA. And think twice about that future MBA or accountancy qualification. One of the most sought-after qualifications in the future will be a degree in theoretical mathematics.

6. Continuous partial attention

Interruption science is the study of why people get distracted and how best to interrupt people. For example, in the late 1980s NASA needed to find ways to deliver important information to busy astronauts. This might seem trivial but if an important communication is not distracting enough it may get ignored, while anything too distracting could ruin a multi-million dollar experiment. In other words, the timing and style of delivery of communications is vitally important. Text-based communications, NASA found, were routinely ignored while visually based communications seem to get through. So what's the relevance of this to people with their feet firmly planted on earth? The simple answer is that many of us suffer from too much information thanks to faster computers and connectedness. We are constantly subjected to a torrent of interruptions ranging from e-mail to mobile phone calls. Indeed, a recent survey found that employees spend on average eleven minutes on a task before being distracted by something else. Furthermore, every time an employee was interrupted it took almost half an hour for them to return to the original task and 40% wandered off somewhere else. In other words, information is no longer power. Getting and keeping someone's attention is.

We are so busy watching everything and multi-tasking that we are unable to focus on or finish anything except after hours or at home. Given that computers and the Internet are largely to blame for this, it's not surprising that computer and software companies are taking the issue very seriously. Part of the problem is that our memory tends to be visual and computers only allow the display of limited amounts of information on a screen. Some people solve this problem by sticking low-fi post-it notes around the sides of their screen. Another way might be to say no – unsubscribe and unplug parts of your life. If this isn't for you then technology may once again come to the rescue by changing the way that information is delivered. For example, if a computer could understand when you were busy (via a camera, microphone or keypad monitor) it could rank e-mails in order of importance and then deliver them at the most appropriate moments. Information could also become more glanceable in the same way that aircraft instruments are laid out.

7. Memory recovery and removal

The science of memory recovery and preservation is set to be a growth industry given the increasing number of people aged sixty-plus who are losing their capacity for recollection. Conversely, the removal of long-term memories for younger people is receiving an increasing amount of interest to assist with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For example, 49% of rape victims suffer from some kind of PTSD as do 17% of people involved in serious car accidents and 14% of people who suddenly lose a member of their immediate family. Add to this an increase in war and terrorism related PTSD (in both soldiers and civilians) and you can perhaps understand why venture capital is flowing into this area. So how does memory work and how can it be removed? From a purely biological (evolutionary) point of view, memory is used for future survival. In other words, our brains are programmed to remember good and bad experiences so that we can repeat or avoid the same experience. Moreover, if an experience is repeated often enough it passes from short to long-term storage. One way of removing unwanted memories is to administer drugs immediately after a dramatic event (which is perhaps something some people do already by drinking to forget). Another way is to turn on or off certain genes that are involved with the consolidation of memories or even to administer an electric shock just after a person has been forced to recall a traumatic incident.

8. The architecture of sleep

There is a quiet revolution going on in the science of sleep. In the US, 70 million people have trouble getting a proper night's sleep and US $50 billion is lost every year due to sleeplessness. Add to this 100,000 automobile accidents caused by tiredness and you can see why getting a good night's sleep is keeping lots of people awake. Conversely, the demands of our 24-hour societies mean that people are also looking for ways to keep people awake. One of the most successful drugs aimed at the latter is Modafinil, which was launched in 1998 and now has sales of US $575 million per year. This is intended to treat serious medical conditions like sleep apnoea but it is increasingly being used as a stimulant much in the same way as coffee, alcohol, cigarettes or even cocaine. Not surprisingly the US military is interested in Modafinil (and newer drugs like CX717) because it can keep combat troops awake for 48-hours while other drugs can provide sleep on demand. What about the other side of the sleep equation? The term 'sleep architecture' refers to the fact that humans have several sleep states each with its own brain state. Understanding each of these will be key to advances in the control of sleep and awakeness in the future. For example, it is highly likely that drugs will be developed that will give people condensed doses of 'super-sleep'. There could even be pills to provide the equivalent 2, 4, 6 or 8-hour doses of quality sleep that would free us from the need for genuine sleep. But what are the longer-term consequences of a society where sleep is available 24/7 or where people work or play for 22-hours and sleep for just two? Or how about a technology that could remove the need for sleep completely?

9. Aggregated customisation

A new business called DayJet – based in the US – is about to launch a new airline that allows business travellers to fly direct to regional airports, avoiding time-consuming connections at big airports and also avoiding unwanted overnight stays in small towns and cities. Not that exciting? What's interesting is how DayJet plans to do this. The airline has ordered 200 six-seater micro-jets at a cost of US $1.3 million each. This means airliner style performance at a fraction of the cost. But that's still not the interesting bit. The airline has no set routes and no fixed prices. Instead the airline will aggregate demand 'on the fly' linking small groups of people that want to go to the same place at roughly the same time. Routes and pricing will fluctuate in real time as demand comes and goes and customers will be offered a series of different prices depending on how flexible they are willing to be (give a little, gain a lot). What's really fascinating about this idea is how the business model combines some of the hottest trends that are around – all of which will affect everyone in some shape or form in coming years. What are the trends? First there's mass customisation. This allows customers to order a customised version of a standardised product. Second, there's dynamic pricing. This is where the cost of a product or service changes depending on demand or supply. Finally, there are social networks – how the Internet pulls people together that have similar interests or needs.

10. Too much choice

In the film Moscow on the Hudson, Robin Williams plays a Russian defector living with a family in New York City. As a goodwill gesture, he volunteers to do the shopping – but passes out alongside the coffee aisle because the choice is too overwhelming. The average supermarket in the US now sells 30,000 items. Typically this will include 26 types of Colgate toothpaste (the company had just 2 in 1970) and 724 types of fruit and vegetables (including 93 organic items). But why is this happening? To some extent the reason is that retailers are responding to customer demand. However, whilst choice can be liberating, it can also induce paralysis. For example, in a study, people entering a supermarket were offered 6 jams to taste. On another occasion people were offered 24. Both groups were given a $1 off coupon to spend on the jam. 30% of those tasting 6 jams bought a jar, but only 3% of those tasting 24 did - apparently the decision making process was just too difficult. Similarly, when people were asked to react to a discounted Sony product in a shop window, they reacted with enthusiasm. But when a second, discounted product, was put alongside the enthusiasm waned. If this endless segmentation of choice continues, perhaps we will see more people outsourcing choice to various editors, curators, sifters and filters.

Innovation timeline 1900-2050

Hybrid car · Wearable computers

Self-cleaning windows · Digital mirrors · Space factories · Artificial brain

Virtual keyboard · Face transplants · Virtual reality windows · Space mining

Fuel cell bike · Synthetic bacteria · Compulsory biometric ID · Web 4.0

Birth control patch · Plastic bones · Single global currency

Artificial liver · GPS clothing · Video wallpaper · Self-driving cars

Viagra · Robotic surgery · Gene based diets · Robotic insects

Web-TV · Road reservation system · VR enhancing drugs · Global flat tax system

Pentium processor · Artificial eyes · Offshore prisons · Fuel cell phones

World Wide Web · Robotic soldiers · Prison countries · Virtual protest marches

HTML · Sleep hotels · Hydrogen fuel stations

HD-TV · Just in time shopping · Global voting

DVD · Dream machines · 3D printers · Self-cleaning houses

Kevlar · Prozac · Face recognition doors · Nanobotic toothpaste

Test tube baby · Disposable contact lens · Human memory downloads

Microprocessor · DNA computer · Memory enhancement in humans · Man on Mars · Global ID card

IVF · Laser printer · 3-D gaming · E-newspapers · Individual pollution credits · Brain transplants

Cat scanner · Space shuttle · Disposable camera · 150GB memory stick · Sleep surrogates

Space station · Hepatitis B vaccine · Intelligent cosmetics · Nano pills · Warp drive · Quiet paint · Rounjin Z-0001

Word processor · Reputation trading · Stress control clothing

Pong · Cellular phone · Synthetic skin · MySpace

VCR · Magnetic resonance imaging · Skype · Moon village · Silent villages

Heart transplant · CD-ROM · Youtube · Disposable phone · Virtual holidays

The Pill · Internet · VisiCalc · Apple Macintosh · Robocops

Plate tectonics · Artificial heart · Apple Lisa · Flickr

DNA · Barcodes · IBM PC · GPS · Oceanic thermal

Aqualung · ATM · Liposuction · Netscape

Credit card · Astroturf · Walkman · Goggle · Sintered Armo

Nylon · Acrylic paint · MS-DOS · Fast Company magazine · Global ID card

E=MC2 · Electronic computer · Video game console · Compact disc · Wired magazine · Dustmotes

Cubism · Liquid paper · Moon landing · ebay · Labots

Transatlantic flight · Nuclear fission · Silicon chip · Email · Post-It note · Camcorder

Hydrofoil · Jet Engine · Tupperware · Computer mouse · Dot matrix printer · Yahoo · Smart band

Traffic lights · Photocopier · Carbon dating · Starbucks · Amazon · Child care robo

Quartz crystal clock · Colour TV · Cassette tape · AOL

Tabloid newspaper · Assembly lines · Microwave oven · Artificial printer

Tape recorder · Chocolate chip biscuits · Frisbee · Gore-tex

Helicopter · Television · Hearing aid · Velcro · Floppy disc · Home computing

Aeroplane · Lego · Instant coffee · Polaroid camera · Dot matrix printer · Fax machine

Safety razor · Plastics · Fluorescent lighting · Superglue · Silly putty · Helio-Beryllium

Automobile · Band-Aid · Atom bomb · Satellites · Laser · Gravity tube

Sonar · Parking meters · Mr Potato head · Hovercraft

Cornflakes · Spindryer · Penicillin · Nuclear power · Pocket calculator

Bra · Cats eyes · Ballpoint pen · Jacuzzi

Vacuum cleaner · Vegemite · Sliced bread · Radar · Jet airliner · Barbie · Radial tyres

1900 · 1950 · 2007 · 2050

Black Hole of History
(things that are disappearing)

Freedom of speech
Multi-culturalism
Horlicks
Impotency
Adulthood
Sony Walkman
Black & White television
Oil
Original thinking
Lunch
Breakfast
National currencies
Kippers
Manners
Hobbies
Cheques
Moon landings
Moustaches
Normal
Wrinkles
Presumption of innocence
International law
Habius Corpus
Public intellectuals
No
Exam failure
Red ink
Metrosexuals
Marriage
Intimacy
Privacy
Secrets
Good night's sleep
Conceptual albums
Music singles
Squeaks
Patience
Thank you letters
Manufacturing

Prime time
Icebergs
Union membership
Tobacconists
Originality
Time
Typewriters
Turnips
Careers
Sitting down for dinner
Public services
Careers
Retirement
Abstinence
Proper summers
Proper winters
Gollywogs
World War One
Getting lost
Trust
Public spaces
Monogamy
Political parties
Anonymity
Rainforests
Polio
Parental discipline
The public domain
Doctor's surgeries
Dial-up
Hosepipes
Low cost travel
Xanadu
Shangri-La
Utopia

Eccentricity
Affordable housing
Armchairs
Dining tables
Atkins diet
South Beach diet
Public beaches
Healthy appetites
Normal sized clothing
Bank managers
Tony Blair
Books
Newspapers
Camera film
Audiocassettes
VHS recorders
Car radios
Fax machines
Church of England
Vimto
Tizer
Discomfort
Tap water
Instant coffee
Public roads
Long term thinking
Spelling
Resilience
Stoics
No fault accidents
Hope
Milkman
Newspaper delivery
Innocence
Humility
God
Golden Syrup
Liquid paper
Theatre
Receptionists
Secretaries

Glossary of the future

Ideas are constrained by language so here is a list of new words, phrases and expressions that go some way to explaining the future.

Vanillacide

A word used to explain what happens when a good idea is workshopped to death, or when everyone has an equal say in a suggestion with the result that it is watered down to please everyone. Hence vanilla flavoured ideas that offend nobody.

Laser shopping

A term used to describe value shoppers that enter a retail store to buy a specific product, often having compared prices online before so doing.

Celebritante

The first sighting of a nobody who is destined to become a somebody thanks to the media.

Tummy surfing

Surfing the Internet whilst balancing a laptop on your belly. The practice usually involves a Wi-Fi connection and is often combined with watching TV or lying in bed.

Abandonware

Software that companies choose to stop selling and give away for free. The best examples are classic video games from the dawn of Internet time. Of course playing old games on new computers can be a problem, which is where programs called emulators come in.

Folksonomy

Informally collaborating with a group of people (usually people you don't know via the Internet) to categorise information with tags or key words.

Reverse mentoring

In the US Procter & Gamble is using reverse mentoring to help senior staff (especially men) understand the problems facing newly recruited women.

Godcasting

A term coined by a vicar in the small Suffolk village of Wrentham (UK) who started using his i-Pod to deliver parish sermons to his flock via their MP3 players.

Cyber Mondays

A term used to explain the fact that some retailers experience a rush of online activity on Mondays, especially Mondays that occur after holiday weekends. The reason for this is that many people have faster Internet connections at work and therefore shopping from the office is much faster than shopping from home.

Droplifting

The placing of 'art' inside shops without the knowledge or permission of the shop owner. Droplifting, or reverse shoplifting, started in 1989 when the Barbie Liberation Front exchanged the voiceboxes of Barbie Dolls and GI Joe's and put the results back on shelf.

Digiscoping

The taking of photographs (usually of nature) using a digital camera connected to a telescope.

Playlist anxiety

A mental state whereby you worry unnecessarily about what other people will make of you based on what's on your iPod.

Vlogging

Vlogging (video blogging) is a short film made by someone with the skill to operate a video camera and usually very little else. At worst they make Reality TV look interesting.

Theranostics

The science (business) of using diagnostic tests (biomarkers in particular) to personalise drug prescriptions for patients.

Podsnatching

The stealing of valuable data or moving of illegal digital material from one place to another. A recent case involved an employee stealing an entire database. Employers say they are 'hip to the concept' which means they have got absolutely no idea what's going on.

Dataspill

The loss of personal records such as credit card numbers or social security records. For example, a few years ago the DSW Shoe Warehouse in the US 'lost' the credit card numbers of 1,500,000 customers

Splogs

What you get when you cross spam with a blog. They can look like real blogs but are actually fake postings and general gibberish intended to make Google and other search engines link to them - which in turns allows the splogs to display real ads.

iPod weddings

Remember the DJ at the last wedding you went to? Exactly. These days the glitterati at the wedding party bring their own wedding tunes on their iPods.

Slideloading

The downloading of full-length music tracks onto a mobile phone.

Google goggles

A term I just invented to describe the fact that if you don't appear on Page 1 of Google rankings you may as well not exist.

Bluespamming

The targeting of people in specific locations with location related sales messages. So, for example, if you've got a Bluetooth phone you might receive a special offer when you enter an airport or get a message from Coca-Cola when you walk past one of their vending machines.

DNA tourists

Tracing where your family came from by looking at registrars of births, marriages and deaths is so last year. If you want to find out where your ancestors came from several thousand years ago you need the services of a company like DNAPrint who will track you back to ancient civilisations and migration patterns.

Google Hackers

People that trawl Google to find information that is supposed to be secret but isn't. For example, it's possible to find petrol station web cams that have been accidentally linked to the Internet and office photocopiers that actually give you the option to print.

Boomerang migration

The term used to describe the reverse trend of people returning to their native countries because there's now more opportunity back home.

Otaku

Japanese term meaning obsessive fans or geeks. Otaku are important because they represent the spearhead of a revolution where communities of amateurs are becoming responsible for innovation rather than internal R&D and NPD departments.

Onna-otaku

Japanese she-nerds - women that love gadgets, read comics like Boy's Love and play with action figures.

Cord cutters

People that have dropped their fixed phone line at home in favour of mobile only services.

Fertility Tourists

Couples that travel to other countries (primarily in Eastern Europe) to shop for cheaper IVF treatments or to choose the sex of their child.

Podjacking

The voyeuristic practice of listening to what's on other people's iPods.

Voice lift

Surgery intended to make a person sound younger – or at least look the same age as their face.

Statistics

Society & culture

There were 77 serious accidents involving humans and robots in the UK last year

In 1990 12% of new homes in the UK were apartments. Now the figure is 50%

In 1998 there were approximately 12 pro-terrorism websites worldwide. The figure is now around 4,700

In the mid-1950s 9% of adults in the US were single. The figure is now 44%

Government & politics

33% of Spaniards think that General Franco was correct to overthrow the Republican government in the 1930s

50% of Latin Americans would accept a dictator if the result was a higher standard of living

33% of French citizens describe themselves as "racist" or "a bit racist"

71% of 13-17 year olds have "about the same" political views as their parents

Science & Technology

In 2004 there were 610,000 robots in domestic service globally. By 2007 this figure is expected to be 6,100,000

70% of the antibiotics used in the US are used on animals

Over 60% of the world's population has never heard a ring tone

Media & Communications

Almost 80% of 16-18 year olds in the US cannot name the 4 largest TV networks

67% of people claim they would be 'lost' without a computer versus 46% without a TV

25% of kids aged between 6-months and 2-years in the US have a TV beside their bed

17% of Sony PlayStation owners in the US are aged 50+

In 1892 there were 14 evening newspapers in London. Now there is just 1

Money & Financial Services

10 million households in the US don't have a bank account

31% of African-American families in the US have either nil or negative net worth

There was a 60% increase in the use of the term 'private equity' in the financial media between April '03 and '05

Healthcare & Well-being

75% of doctors practising in the UK were born somewhere else

40% of teenage girls and 17% of teenage boys in the UK have thought about having plastic surgery

90% of drugs don't work for 30% of people

50% of pharmaceutical products launched in the US now come from companies than are less than ten years old

Transport & Automotive

40% of new cars sold in the UK during 2003 were silver

70% of new cars sold in the US in 2007 will offer iPod connectivity

Worldwide 3,000 people are killed every day by automobiles

China will account for 37% of the increase in new car sales between 2002-2012

Sales of Aston Martins and Ferraris increased by roughly 100% in Australia during 2006

Food & Drink

15% of 13-15 year olds in the UK have their own fridge

Ikea is the 19th most visited food retailer in the world

By 2020 almost 75% of people in the UK will be overweight

The average home contains over 1,000 recipes but only uses 7

The market for organic food in the US is worth around US $30 billion

30% of food in Britain is eaten outside the home compared to 20% 15 years ago

Travel & Tourism

More people have visited a Disney theme park than live in China

Tourism is the first, second or third largest industry in 29 American states

China is now the largest domestic tourist market in the world

25% of Americans never take a vacation

Retail & Leisure

Wal-Mart hires 600,000 employees every year. Staff turnover is 44%

There was a 307% increase in the number of music CDs sold by Starbucks in 2005

10% of the world's population has now shopped online

Work & Business

In 2001 US companies spent more on civil litigation than R&D

The amount of information held by a large corporation doubles annually

China uses 55% of the world's cement

40% of people have experienced verbal abuse at work

The number of people working more than 48 hours per week has increased by over 50% over the last five years

For sources go to http://brainmail.nowandnext.com

References & sources

One frequently asked question is where do you come up with this stuff? The answer is lots of newspapers and magazines plus a few websites. Some of the best are listed below.

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Wired
www.wired.com

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> " You needn't worry about the world coming to an end today. It is already tomorrow in Australia"
>
> C. M. Schulz