



Fundraising

A Futurizon Report

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The world is changing fast, technologically, economically, politically and demographically. Get used to it, because the change is accelerating and won't start levelling off for decades. People often underestimate how fast technologies come and go. Remember the filofax, your first PC, your first satellite receiver. All of those were just 15 years ago. Email and the web only started taking off in the mainstream 10 years ago. Most people only got their first digital camera, blackberry, ipod, memory sticks, broadband and satnav system in the last 5 years. Some people still haven't got all these yet while some are on their 3rd or 4th generation! All of the change of the last 20 years will be replicated in the next 10, and the 5 years after that.

Demographic change is just as significant. Migration is a global phenomenon, as is ageing. A brain drain is affecting the UK even as immigration increase the population – some of the brightest are leaving and some highly skilled immigrants are already going back home. And all the while, intergenerational conflict is brewing as the young are starting to realise the implications of the pensions problem.

The web has reached critical mass, so activities that depended on there being enough customer base using it is now viable. And it is becoming mobile. In the future, smart sensor networks will provide huge data on what is happening and immerse people in information everywhere they go. But not just any information. Stuff that the computer knows they are interested in. Highly targeted marketing and content will be aimed at every type of customer. Smart posters, information beacons and sensor will pick out those that might be willing to contribute and persuade them in very personalised ways. Even cash will be digitised and all the sorts of cash blended together. Disappearance of coins will certainly make it trickier to do street collections.

People's memory sticks will swap files with each other via radio, so you just need to walk past some strangers to collect radio shows that you missed, but this also allows information about good causes to be spread organically to anyone who might be interested. Micro-payment kit built into their phones will enable them to donate right away – with cash, loyalty points, air miles or any other form of electronic cash.

All of this technology will fit easily into a lapel pin by 2020, as electronics continues to shrink. Digital jewellery will broadcast people's own data as well as receiving it. People's ego badges will swap personal data, enabling social and business networking, even political networking. Digital bubbles will link all a person's gadgetry to the rest of the world via a single intelligent filter, holding back junk and letting relevant stuff through. We won't need laptops to see the information either. The future will use video visors and eventually active contact lenses to create a fully 3d wraparound display on which any form of imagery can be overlaid onto a person's field of view, all through the day.

The future will see the real and virtual worlds merging. Today, Second Life and Facebook are things that live on the computer monitor, mostly anyway. Tomorrow, these sorts of applications will be a constant overlay in the field of view, populating streets with virtual people, avatars, virtual plants and animals, and even virtual collectors. A collector with a dog already earns twice as much as one without. In the future they can have a whole range of virtual creatures with them to attract your attention.

Games and entertainment will mix seamlessly with emails, tourist information and virtual architecture, dramatically changing how we see the world. Look at this change as a whole new channel to market, with many new ways of persuading people to part with money. Group activities, selling virtual goods, customising virtual appearances for red nose day by using digital noses – there is no limit except imagination. Any kind of current real world activity can find some sort of equivalent in virtual worlds, usually with much easier methods to add bells and whistles.

Virtual environments will not always be just video and audio either. By 2020, the sensation of touch will make them very realistic. Also, new headsets are just coming on to the market that can recognise facial expressions, gestures, and

even thoughts. As this develops, we will interact in ever more exciting ways with both the real and imaginary worlds we inhabit. And by blending them into dual environments, we get much more capability than exists today when they are separate.

People will customise their appearances in these dual worlds. When you look at someone, you will see not just their physical appearance, but how they want to be seen in the digital overlays, what affiliations they have (or at least the ones they want to be public), and maybe they will be willing to stop and share information about a charity they support.

TV will blend into all this too. Boundaries between TV and the web will evaporate, as will the boundaries with magazines and brochures. These can all merge into the virtual world and into people's field of view, anywhere.

But with all this technology, computers and machines will do lots more for us, so that will force us to focus more on what makes us human. Interpersonal, human contact skills will dominate the economy, and this will also mean we will see women rising in importance and the glass ceilings inverting. Empathy and emotions will play a much bigger part. Let's call it the Care Economy. It certainly won't be a utopia, there will still be lots of problems, some that don't even exist yet. But, if we get it all right, we will live in a much more human world, where people can see others' needs more easily and respond more easily to them if they care. Maybe if we are lucky, we won't need so many charities to pick up the pieces.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian Pearson graduated in 1981 in Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics from [Queens University, Belfast](#). After four years in Shorts Missile Systems, he joined BT Laboratories as a performance analyst, and later worked in network design, computer evolution, cybernetics, and mobile systems. From 1991 until 2007, he was BT's Futurologist, tracking and predicting new developments throughout information technology, considering both technological and social implications. He now does exactly the same things for Futurizon, a small futures institute. As a futurologist and consultant, he lectures widely on his futures views. In between conferences, he writes on topics such as machine consciousness, human evolution, women's issues, ageing, social trends and advanced computing technology.

He has received many awards for his papers, written several books and has made well over 400 TV and radio appearances. He is a Chartered Fellow of the British Computer Society, the World Academy of Art and Science, the Royal Society of Arts, the Institute of Nanotechnology and the World Innovation Foundation. He was recently awarded an Honorary Doctor of Science degree by the University of Westminster.