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How do I get into futurology?

Ian Pearson, Futurologist, Feb 2008

I started off in engineering, designing missile systems that would only come into use way off in the future. Then I joined BT, designing telecoms for the far future.

Obviously that means you have to think a bit about what the future is going to be like when you release your product, so that's how I got started. Then I realised that that was the part of the job that was the most fun, so I gradually got rid of the rest of it, and no-one has ever told me to get back to work yet.

Perhaps you are already a trainee futurologist, since you are already thinking about the future or you wouldn't be here reading this, so maybe the question is really how do you become commercial? If you focus on the future 100%, and start off in an area where you are very confident of your analysis, people will quickly recognise your expertise. You can learn about the future very quickly by reading lots of stuff on other futures web sites. There are a great many futures institutes and consultancies around. The best point of call to start is shapingtomorrow.com As well as being a general purpose futures resource, it also has lists of the many consultancies that use futurologists.

It certainly helps to make a good web site of your own, with meaningful titles for your papers, so that people will find you when they Google for articles on the future of something. Once you have been thinking about the future for a while, you will find your field broadening and you will be able to consult to a wide range of industry sectors. That's it. It takes time, but there aren't very many of us, so there is plenty of business to go round, you just need to build a reputation of having some good insights into at least one area of the future and you're flying. In terms of background, we are all different, there is no single route. What we all have in common is the ability to think outside the box, and at a system level. We may have some specialist skill area, but being able to see the whole system is very important, since the future is determined by interactions of a multitude of different forces. If you are starting from scratch, read some of the futures material out there to get a good picture of what is coming, and then start adding your own insights.

An excellent starting point for reading up on general futures ideas and finding other futurologists is www.shapingtomorrow.com.

This is a good all-round futures site - the sort I was going to set up some time myself, but never bothered to, and even if I had, I wouldn't have done it half as well. So it gets my vote.