



future news

a newsletter from the *futures* foundation

Vol 9 No 10 November 2004

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Ripe plums, rising rivers and white coats: how will baby boomers navigate the information maze?

When we look ahead to the future, we can be sure of only two things - it will be better than we expected when we get there and it will be quite unexpected in many of the small details, Colin Benjamin told an audience at the Adelaide Town Hall last month.

"Let me take a moment to look backwards to the South Australia of the baby boomers from the year 2020," he said. "Let me ask you a few questions as if I was coming back to you, and see how you would answer me as a returning septuagenarian with my 50-year-old friends."

"Where do I register to take part in Veterans for South Australia -- returning professionals contributing to the State's Oral History Archive? What resources are available for the "sandwich generation" to make their visit safe and secure while they are contributing? Where do I get my biomedical, psychosocial check-up, while I am here to adjust my biotechnical implants and replace my hip-protectors with their built in bio-information circuits and lifestyle support systems? If I need to get a briefing on new services for visiting baby boomers, how do I establish my eligibility, if I have mislaid my portable services system link? (My memory chip is on the blink and needs an upgrade.)

"How do I get my mobilevan tracer adjusted so that I have point to point pickup anywhere in Adelaide while I am visiting, that knows where I am at any point of time and takes me to where I am supposed to be? What are the new experiences

that I will be able to enjoy in regions of the State on a "trial before I go, learn to love it basis" in a Simulated City Experience Centre linked to my learning and living unit for visiting boomers? What will the 'Elderhostel' be offering to international and local boomers who want to be able to plug in their home computers on local media and information channels that are targeted directly to the interests of boomerland? Who will be rewarded for being more innovative, creative and entrepreneurial (ICEbreaking teams) developing a constant stream of new and interesting services to the boomers' parents and kids? What protection and public security will give us back our privacy and sense of 'personal freedom' to veg out, be different and choose to live or die at our own pace and in our own spaces?

"A futurist does not try to predict the future, only to raise awareness of the issues that may be worth thinking about before it is too late to prepare for that future.

"The Arabs have a critical view of people who talk about the future and claim to be able to answer all of these questions. They say: '*He who looks to predict the future is either insane or irreligious. Either way he should be treated with extreme caution.*'"

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THE FUTURE THAT IS NOT

"The future does not exist. It is largely created through the things people do and don't do. The more conscious we are of what we do and don't do, the better our future will be."

-- Charles Brass, Chairman, The Futures Foundation

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Our mission: "to engage all Australians in creating better futures"

the *futures* foundation ABN 68 067 598 707 Phone 13 007 CREATE E info@futuresfoundation.org.au www.futuresfoundation.org.au

Editor: jan.leemartin@futuresfoundation.org.au

Ripe plums, rising rivers and white coats: Colin Benjamin's scenarios

When we try to answer questions about the future, there are three types of answers, says Colin Benjamin. "*Ripe Plums* are the low hanging fruit that tell you what is already available to the baby boomers of Japan and Florida and will be marketed to us all as soon as people come to pick the plums and take the solutions to market. *Rising Rivers* are the self-evident trends that come from the effluence of time. If it's raining excessively at the head of the river it is likely to flood the cities in a day or so. We know who the boomers are because they are the people who have been the 'pig in the python' of demography between 1946 and 1966 and have not stopped demanding more than their fair share of everything ever since they hit the scene. *White Coat* scenarios are the sort that get you your own private room and a straightjacket with your own private psychiatrist for suggesting that today's unknown will become tomorrow's expectations." He offered a brief taste of some of the scenarios that will face the boomer generation walking through the information maze that is emerging.

RIPE PLUMS

- People will be seeking information on their "biological age" basis rather than on their chronological age. They will have a biometric profile than can adjust their day-to-day environment to meet their DNA degradation rates, oxidative stress, hormone levels, range of legitimate excitability, body part capabilities, bone densities and life-enjoyment triggers - (natural anti-depressants targeted to their brain patterns).
- International visiting programs and surrogate family/care teams who want to benefit "living fossils" – people with real world experiences that have not been manufactured in the media and cyber worlds and who are willing to share narratives with people three generations below their chronoage.
- Protein and genetically engineered food monitoring systems that identify preferred and desired health and nutrition combos for boomers and their carers to get "meals on deals" from service providers who compete on boomer satisfaction units rather than on cost of service contracts.

RISING RIVERS

- Smaller household sizes without parents and their families in close proximity will face isolation, loneliness and increasing instability and volatility so that health, education and community service teams will become like today's bankers, who come to the home at any time of day or night based on remote telecommunications networks that have been pre-programmed to respond to emergencies and changes in patterns of expectations.
- Financial institutions will have Personal Service Executives who have the powers that used to be given to the Public Trustee to be the personal Concierge Service for the boomer clientele including, insurance, income annuities, certificates of deposit (CDs) and portfolio investment management programs and will win their business by simplifying the tax and travel arrangements that 'imprison' babyboomers in the information maze.
- Religious and Spiritual Experience Centres will have sprung up in Adelaide's former City of Churches realm which will coalesce into "learning and living

centres" that address the wide range of curiosity and experience seeking behaviours of the increasingly time rich boomers. They will help manage the matrix of meanings in the media menagerie and finally, get you thinking and challenging conventional wisdom.

" the boomers are ... the people who have been the 'pig in the python' of demography between 1946 and 1966"

WHITE COATS

- Anti-biotic gene therapy and gene modification – evidence based dentistry with mouth modification to make dentures a living memory rather than a living hell, alternatives to painful surgery putting an end to periodontal disease, and regenerative tooth replacement drawn on reptile and animal gene insertion.
- Animal assisted and horticultural induced therapies that are targeted to the genetic makeup of the person, the tribe and the preferred communities of interest including diagnosis, detection, and treatment through food that identifies odours in mouth and body responses as early signs of cancer, mental illness etc.
- Astoxanthins and Cracksins being introduced to the babyboom nutrition chains. Astoxanthins are powerful anti-oxidants that are stronger than vitamins and can address body part variation like cancer and degeneration. Cracksins, now in the early stage of development, monitor and stimulate required antibodies and learning cells that can restore cell functions and maybe eliminate the worst features of Parkinson's and motor neuron diseases. These will not only prolong life but make it more meaningful and enjoyable because memory loss will be reduced and learning a living will have increased.

Finally, let me give some pointers to the future in the information maze. There will be five **M**s to remember:

- M**eaningful Lives that are full of personal respect and recognition,
- M**iracles of Immediacy that deliver instant access to superior services & support,
- M**aterial wellbeing with above average incomes and lifestyles in the early baby boom years of retirement and then increasing contracted support services in later life,
- M**ore mobility and means of meeting unexpected experiences and unintended emergencies for family and friends, with dignity and personal recognition, and
- M**edical technology that is both more costly all the time and more personal and effective, taking up an increasing share of household expenditures. Robotics will become increasingly matched by sets of personal health and well-being volunteers who have been through the information maze – just like the SIS volunteers at the turn of the century. *ff*

"THE FUTURE DOES NOT EXIST"

"People react in quite predictable ways when I engage them in conversation about creating the future," says Futures Foundation chairman, Charles Brass. "Only a small number, unfortunately, are excited about the possibilities. Many more can't get beyond thoughts of a crystal ball or asking me to tell them next week's Lotto numbers. I respond by pointing out the number of highly paid professionals whose job it is to try and create the future – from the Federal Treasurer through economists, stockbrokers and financial advisers to corporate strategic planners, property developers and urban planners.

Some are so consumed by their day-to-day lives that they don't even want to think about the future. I usually point these people to the expanding category of 'personal growth' books. Some people are convinced either that the future is pre-determined (perhaps by the Creator) or that it is infinitely unknowable – either way they don't believe it is worth investing any time or effort thinking about it. In many ways these are the most difficult attitudes to confront: whichever way they see things, these people are convinced they are right. The child who gets cancer is either doomed from conception, or exquisitely unlucky. Either way, they believe, there is nothing to be gained through thinking about it in advance.

In the face of these attitudes, what sense does it make to talk about creating the future? I offer two answers to that question. The first is somewhat wistful, almost pious; and the second is simple and pragmatic.

First, I simply don't want to believe that I live in a world in which I cannot contribute to creating my future. Even if it is true that I can't, I want to try anyway.

Second, even the most diehard skeptics have to acknowledge some capacity to create the future. Looking before you step on to the road, and getting a university degree, are both pretty well guaranteed to improve your chances of future success. What I do is work with individuals, organizations and communities who are prepared to invest time and effort in improving their chances of future success. Two small case studies help explain how creating the future works in practice.

The first concerns a not-for-profit organization that began with a mission to help a particular constituency. After operating in one state and growing to 30 employees, it was approached by a Federal Government agency to expand nationally. But despite its success, the organization was not functioning as effectively as it once had. It had seen increasing staff turnover, including some terminations following heated performance reviews. The CEO, who had been the inspiration behind the organization since its inception, was not enjoying his role as much as he once did. A series of conversations with all staff ensued. It became clear that while every staff member had joined the organization as part of their commitment to making a difference in the world, they had quite different interpretations of what this commitment meant in practice. Those who had been in the business longest,

particularly the CEO, enjoyed the thrill of forging new ground; others wanted to focus on their existing constituency. The challenge was to create a future which could nurture both types of commitment, and simultaneously allow the organization to continue its growth.

The company restructured so each of the operating divisions effectively became separate companies run by existing staff, linked to a central business development entity through cross directorships. In the context of the overall brand identity, each employee can now see their own direct contribution to the success of their business.

"even the most diehard skeptics have to acknowledge some capacity to create the future."

The second case study concerns a strip shopping centre in a suburban community. Like other centres, this one was not doing very well. More than 15% of the shops were empty; businesses came and went and those who stayed struggled to survive. It was clear to everyone that demographic and other social change (such as 24 hour shopping along major transport routes and the departure of local bank branches) was reducing local patronage. Over the years surveys had been carried out among the local population, and these had consistently shown a sentimental interest in the local shops which had never been translated into a sustainable volume of business.

It was clear after a number of community consultation sessions that any proposal to create the future for this shopping strip needed to provide a greater incentive than sentimentality to encourage locals to use the local strip. One important factor which emerged very early was the realization that over half of the traders in the strip were not local people, and had no particular connection to the area. While this was not a problem in itself, it did mean both that these people were quicker to leave when times got tough, and were not as willing to invest in the local amenity. As well, over two thirds of the landlords were not locals.

A number of initiatives emerged from the various consultations, but underpinning them all was the creation of a community corporation which issued shares to local residents and is using the money raised to buy the freehold of the buildings in the shopping strip. Not only will this ensure that local people make investment decisions about the future of the strip, but locals will receive dividends on their investments, as well as shareholder discounts. The future of the shopping strip will now be in the hands of those with the greatest stake in its viability.

In both case studies, creating the future involved taking the time to critique the present, creating a vision for a preferred future and then devising actions designed to bring that preferred future into being. Or, as management guru, Peter Drucker, once put it: "The best way to predict the future is to create it." *ff*

WHERE WILL IT ALL END?

Where will it all end? laments the Margaret Rutherford character, reclining in an armchair and fanning herself. Where, indeed, we might ask, in today's world of predatory capitalism.

Companies were first formed to act as merchants, making and trading goods and services. Today, as Kenichi Ohmae points out in *The Mind of the Strategist*, major companies have moved from being businesses to being financiers. In other words, when organisations became conglomerates, their focus shifted from making buggy whips or forklifts and moved to maximising returns on capital. They moved from manufacturing and marketing into the money business.

Being in the money business puts a lot of pressure on board and management to deliver the kinds of profits expected by the markets. And what kinds of profits are those? Bigger ones, of course.

If that sounds a bit frivolous for such a serious topic, it's no accident. It's the kind of bitter black humour -- familiar to futurists - that comes as a result of our longstanding failure to share the simple truths that we see so clearly. Are we wrong? Or is this truth blazingly self-evident? To spell it out:

If the market continues to demand constantly increasing profits, companies will continue to do everything they can to deliver constantly increasing profits. We know this is not sustainable, and I'm sure they do, but that won't stop them trying.

With pressure on profits, first step is to cut costs by eliminating waste. That's fine. There are some excellent ways to cut waste and resource use so that you can increase profits as you reduce your impact on the planet. And cutting costs by increasing efficiency is just good management.

The next step is more tricky, because now companies pull into their sights all those activities that are not directly aimed at delivering short term profits to the financial bottom line. When these are sliced and chopped and bled to death, they release profits into the short-term results, but that makes it harder to make any longer-term profits, let alone bigger ones.

So what happens next? Now people and processes behind the front line, that support and sustain the people and processes creating profitability, come under attack. And when there's nothing left to cut, the "creative accounting" begins.

We've seen sales booked falsely through internal book-keeping; we've seen stock overstated; now we're seeing inter-company trades of wholesale telephone time and other creative initiatives. Sooner or later it has to hit the wall. Doesn't it? We've even seen it happen, with WorldCom and Enron and many more. Haven't we? How can investors fail to see this?

I think I'll collapse into my armchair. Anyone got a fan?

Jan Lee Martin

Fraud as "financial heroin"

Qwest last week paid the US Securities and Exchange Commission \$250 million to settle a 56-page complaint that described a pervasive culture of fraud at Qwest, with executives allegedly using every means possible to meet "outrageously optimistic revenue projections," reports *Corporate Reform Weekly*.

"This was definitely orchestrated from the top down," said SEC assistant regional director Mary Brady. She said the fraud was "directed by Qwest's senior management".

According to the complaint, Qwest claimed \$3.8 billion in "spurious" revenue and hid \$231 million in expenses.

Some of the tricks Qwest used included:

- **Swapping or selling fiber-capacity to other companies and booking revenues that they wouldn't actually receive for years, if it all. Employees referred to these deals as Qwest's "financial heroin" -- used to pump up earnings, but harder and harder to get the same high over time;**
- **Swapping telecommunications capacity with other companies. These were actually sham transactions intended solely to give a boost to earnings. These transactions were known internally as SLUTS - 'simultaneous, legally unrelated transactions';**
- **Backdating contracts to fit revenue into the previous quarter; and**
- **Inflating the earnings of the company's directory business (Qwest Dex) by \$60 million from 2000 and 2001 and improperly recognizing \$112 million from its wireless subsidiary between 2000 and 2002.**

The SEC complaint singles out former Qwest CEO Joseph Nacchio, former COO Afshin Mohebbi, and former CFO Robert Woodruff, but identifies them only by title. The SEC has not announced any action against any of them personally.

The \$250 million fine is the second biggest in SEC history behind the \$750 WorldCom settlement. It will go to defrauded shareholders through a special fund. Also as part of the settlement, the company will hire a chief compliance officer to report to a committee of outside directors.

For more, see: "Qwest, SEC settle fraud case," by Tom McGhee of the *Denver Post Staff*: www.denverpost.com/Stories/0,1413,36~26430~2484314,00.html.

Ethics at work: the critical bifurcation

If deeply ethical behaviour were to be the norm in Australian companies in 2025, what would have happened to create this change, and what effect would it have?

Helen Trinca, editor of the *Australian Financial Review's* BOSS magazine, was asked this question in a discussion with Jan Lee Martin and Margot Brodie of the Futures Foundation. All three women are closely observing the attitudes and behaviour of younger generations as they begin their professional careers. They wonder what role models these young people will have, and what incentives to choose one path or the other. (Note the shared assumption that deeply ethical behaviour is not now the norm.)

"I think corporations face similar challenges to all of us - how to maintain integrity and ethics in an era when we are under such pressure to succeed in tangible, measurable ways," Helen Trinca said.

"That's what's so very hard about creating an environment where we put ethical behaviour ahead of everything else: there's often a real crunch point around cold hard cash and being true to ourselves."

That, of course, is a crunch point that young people encounter, often early in their careers. Ethicists argue that they should have the opportunity to learn the principles by which such ethical choices can be made.

"Individual, powerful role models can really shape behaviour in workplaces so that at the overt, social level some things are just not acceptable," said Helen Trinca. "So if we want change, I guess the first thing is for the leaders, the influencers in organisations to have the personal courage to look at these issues carefully.

"At the macro level I think we need a more realistic debate about the role of companies in our society. I'm a supporter of government -- I think governments are the honest brokers between the various forces in our society, the different, competing interests and institutions -- and we need to recognise the limitations of corporations to move into that role. I think there's a better chance of better behaviour all round when there's real recognition in the culture that we are citizens, not just consumers or workers.

"The debate on ethics is fascinating: at one level, it seems really simple and clear and then you dig down into regular business practice -- something like negotiating a deal -- and you realise instantly that you're in the field of white lies and exaggeration and misrepresentation. It's tricky and confronting." (See story on spin, p6.)

The whole topic of ethics in corporate life is something of a passion for Margot Brodie, who has been collecting input from a distinguished group of Australian thinkers for the Millennium Project's 2005 survey of future ethical issues (see panel, p6).

"In most organisations, ethics is just a word in the corporate mission statement," she said. "Typically the success of today's senior managers is measured in increases in profits and share price. I believe it is critical to attribute equal value to organisational ethics when reward for performance

is considered. This ethical success rating should be quantified by the organisation's customers and employees.

"It is essential to Australia's future prosperity that ethics gets off the page and into the hearts and minds of young people entering the workforce.

"The most likely cause for such a change will be the growing competition for young talent, with an emerging workforce that has shown evidence of social conscience, and that recognises the imperatives of responsible behaviour by corporations. Meanwhile, it would make a useful first step for the subject of ethics to become a regular part of the conversation in the corporate environment."

Jan Lee Martin is more hopeful of a shift towards a future society in which a reputation for integrity is recognised as having tangible value. "The new values of emerging generations will affect organisations on many fronts, as stakeholders increase scrutiny of organisations and their behaviour."

Branding will be increasingly important: "The brand is a handy shortcut to knowing which products and services can be trusted, and in a busy life with a growing array of choices, we need those shortcuts. But the branding of the future will not just be about what a product does, or even what it is. More and more it will be branding that includes information about the whole context of that product or service -- where it comes from, what will happen at the end of its life cycle, who produced it and what they were paid, what its ecological impact may be and so on. That branding will include information about the integrity and social responsibility of the organisation creating the product or service -- about its ethics, its values and its behaviours. The layers of the corporate onion are being peeled away under the growing scrutiny of stakeholders."

Don Tapscott puts it another way. In his book, *The Naked Corporation: How the Age of Transparency Will Revolutionize Business*, he points out that it now takes about eight minutes for an internal email on a hot issue to reach the media. And as citizen distaste for corporate dishonesty grows, there are signs that employees who blow the whistle on unethical and illegal behaviour will receive not only protection, but also honour for making the difficult but ethical choice (at least in some countries).

For example, WorldCom whistleblower Cynthia Cooper, who exposed the largest corporate fraud in US history, will be one of three people to be inducted into the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' (AICPA) Business and Industry Hall of Fame this year. Cooper, a former vice president of internal audit at WorldCom, took her concerns directly to the company's board and helped to expose the \$11 billion accounting fraud. She was also one of Time Magazine's "Persons of the Year" in 2002.

"We are honored to have Cynthia Cooper as one of the inductees," said the president of the AICPA. "She represents all the key virtues of the AICPA and the Hall of Fame, but particularly integrity and leadership."

Will whistleblowers be the role model for the next generation? *ff*

MORE ACTION IN SYDNEY

Long-time associates of the Futures Foundation will know that we invite active participation from members in projects of their own, or shared projects that are consistent with the Foundation's own goals and values. The generous donation of pro bono time, or the trading of professional time through the Futures Foundation, all adds to our visibility and the impact we can have on the future of Australia.

In this context, special thanks are due to two member volunteers -- **Margot Brodie**, who manages to find a generous amount of time in her week, sandwiched between her career in competitive intelligence and the demands of family, to manage the Millennium Project activity, and **Tim Longhurst**, who in addition to redesigning the Futures Foundation website has contributed weeks of pro bono time getting the Sydney office in order, building up relationships on campus with our UTS hosts and developing some major projects planned for 2005.

Both of them bring valuable qualifications and experience, Margot in public relations, corporate communication and competitive intelligence, and Tim with communication and management qualifications and practical IT skills. Both are also working actively to acquire skills and experience in various aspects of futuring, including working with senior futurists as they engage with corporate and community clients. Margot is based in Canberra and commutes regularly to Sydney, while Tim is "in residence" at UTS, where he invites visits from members and students. Tim and Margot join the established team of Charles Brass (chair), Peter Saul, Richard Neville, Noel Winterburn, Jan Lee Martin and others who have all made significant contributions to the Foundation's early development. Anyone else who'd like to be more actively involved is very welcome to call Tim at the Foundation office - 9514 2061 or contact him through the Futures Foundation website at

www.futuresfoundation.org.au.

Got a few million to spare?

Andrew Hornery, of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, is also suffering from a touch of the blacks. In his back page column, SPIKE, on November 4 he noted that Nicole Kidman had been paid \$5 million for four days' work producing a two-minute commercial. And he decided to take a look at what else you could do with a spare few million dollars.

"The World Vision website reveals that with \$60m you could sponsor 125,000 children for a year, providing them with clean water, access to medical care and proper infrastructure," he wrote. "As for \$5m, that would sponsor 10,400 children for a year. Greenpeace has projected

FUTURE ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACING AUSTRALIANS

The Futures Foundation is hosting special celebratory events in Melbourne on 1 December and Sydney on 7 December 2004 to acknowledge the contributions of participants in the global Millennium Project Future Ethical Issues Study. The events will bring together contributors from across Australia, together with Millennium Project Australian node committee representatives and Foundation members.

Taking ethical issues that may arise in the future on to the front page now is the first step towards better understanding and informed decision making, says Margot Brodie, who has been coordinating the Australian part of the study. "Some issues may need years to fully assess and address – others may be far more pressing.

"The Futures Foundation is partnering with the St James Ethics Centre to take the outcomes of the global study and examine them in an Australian context when they become available in 2005. The two organisations are exploring avenues to bring the issues that emerge from the study to the attention of policy makers, and facilitate the process of embedding ethics in decision making."

Australian participants in the future ethical issues study include advanced thinkers recommended by the St James Ethics Centre as being able to provide valuable insights into ethical issues. This eminent group is drawn from an impressive range of organisations and disciplines.

that \$60m would provide solar panels in about 3000 NSW schools. The same amount would protect forests in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands from international logging. A mere \$5m would pay for two patrol boats to combat pirate fishing in the Pacific, protecting reserves of tuna. Or then again, it could be used to make another advertisement about perfume."

But let's be careful with our judgements, here. We don't know what choices Nicole Kidman makes about her finances: that \$5m could already be buying food for starving children. Should we ask, instead, why it is that the marketers see value in spending so much money on a commercial? And who are the customers whose buying decisions are influenced by the glitter and glamour?

Hard to know who qualifies for the honour of throwing the first stone.

TO SPIN OR NOT TO SPIN?

When Peter Lazar and Jan Lee Martin attended the annual conference of the Public Relations Institute in Canberra last month, they were delighted to find a program focussed on truth in communication. Both have spoken many times at this and other conferences to make the case that effective communication depends upon honesty. Now other speakers are taking up the call.

Keynote presenter from the UK, Professor Nicholas O'Shaughnessy (*The Marketing Power of Emotion and Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction*), talked about the power of emotion in communication, and made a strong case for truth and integrity in political and other kinds of communication.

Professor Rodney Tiffen of the University of Sydney, reviewed the history of the term "spin doctor", and pointed out the new intensity of the effort to spin: "What used to be done casually and sporadically and slowly is now done professionally and systematically and immediately. There has never in history been anything to parallel this effort." And, he says, its growth is irreversible. "It is not a realistic solution for professionals to become amateurs again, or for either major party to nobly sacrifice its own electoral self-interest.... the rise of spin is a real problem for democracy -- not so much in election campaigns, where the two sides are roughly matched in their spin resources, but in areas where one side has a huge resource advantage over the other..... Nor should we accept as reliable testimony the howls of protests from journalists about the pernicious influence of spin doctors: the crucial issue is not spin doctor activity, but media passivity."

Annabelle Warren, president of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (NSW) and national vice-president, also took issue with spin. "Has 'spin' become a euphemism for lying for political purpose? Is it an attempt to protect power from accountability?" she asked. She offered a more accurate description: "Who knows what malfeasance is?" she asked the audience of PR professionals. "According to the dictionary, it is the 'evil doing of a public officer'. So, spin is the trivialization of malfeasance. Is it a 'bracket creep' from positioning to deceit?" What can we do about it?

"We need to increase ethical reviews," she said. "We can highlight the role of fact-checking. Most professional PR people have very strong fact checking programs.

"Overall, we must take personal responsibility to ensure we are using truth to build trust, not deceit to maintain power."

A new view in the drugs industry

"When I was with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) I learned about 'orphan' diseases, defined as diseases that fewer than 200,000 people in the US suffer from. I thought it strange when outside the US, some of these diseases are enormous. For instance, there are about 1000 cases of malaria in the US, and 500 or 600 million cases worldwide. You need to take your American eyeglasses off and consider the whole world. I wanted to do something about the fact that these were not orphan diseases at all: these were devastating diseases that had an impact on the economies of entire regions, and on political stability. In addition, the movement of the health industry into lifestyle issues such as impotence, baldness and memory loss was a real signal to me. I did not get my PhD to work on these issues knowing that there were huge diseases out there that very few people were working on."

-- Victoria Hale, founder of the non-profit pharmaceutical company OneWorld Health, in an interview with *New Scientist* (25 09 04)

WHAT THE <BLEEP> WOULD THEY KNOW?

Main media outlets are losing readership to alternative sources, especially among the influential younger set. So where are the Information Age Generations getting their news and information? Alexa.com rates the popularity of all websites on the internet -- over 250 million of them-- using a combination of the number of 'users' and 'page views' over a three-month period to calculate website popularity. One of those popular sites is the Common Dreams News Center (www.commondreams.org), which in turn has identified the top 25 "progressive" websites from the Alexa list. Starting with their own, ranked by Alexa at 5,014, the list continues through Village Voice, AirAmericaRadio.com, Democratic-Underground.com, MichaelMoore.com, Daily Kos, Counter-Punch.org, TruthOut.org, The Nation, MoveOn.org, Fahrenheit 9/11, AlterNet.org, Amnesty International, Planet Out, BuzzFlash.com, ZNet/ZMagazine, Doonesbury, Washington Monthly, Center for American Progress, Human RightsWatch, DemocracyNow!, Workingforchange.com, Greenpeace, TomPaine.com and MotherJones.com.

And then, of course, there's the website of the movie that's exciting the change community: What the <Bleep> Would We Know? (whatthebleep.com). Visiting futurist Steven Ames reports that he saw it (three times) in the movie house of its origin, where it was scheduled to run for three days and instead ran for three months.

Signals in the noise

NEW WORLD ORDERS:

Road testing a new futures model

A new program of post-graduate studies in strategic foresight has been developed by the Australian Foresight Institute at Swinburne University in Melbourne. Founding professor Richard Slaughter describes how the program began and how it learned from other initiatives to develop a "second generation" approach to futuring. He says it is now clear that futures studies has emerged from obscurity and "is moving towards becoming the globally distributed meta-discipline that it has long aspired to be".

Futures 36 2004 www.elsevier.com/locate/futures 1228

Short-termism damages Australia: BCA

A new report from the Business Council of Australia calls on investors to take a longer term view, arguing that insistence on short-term returns is creating a "climate of risk aversion" and undermining executives' ability to deliver extended, stable growth. "Australia is running down its corporate leadership assets as a comparatively faster rate than many of its competitors," said BCA president Hugh Morgan.

Sydney Morning Herald 22 10 04 1229

Scientist says gene therapy wastes time

Gene therapy and in vitro fertilisation treatments have wasted millions of dollars and failed to make people healthier, British scientist Dr Mae-Wan Ho told a Perth university audience. The director of London's Institute of Science in Society said the human genome project was wasting time and money. Meanwhile Sir Martin Evans, who first isolated stem cells, is worried about the future of the research he began.

West Australian, SMH 05 10 04/11 11 04 1230

School reform

The vital topic of educating children is being hijacked by political spectacle, according to several new books on school reform. For example, the recent test-driven "No Child Left Behind" initiative in the US "appears to be dangerously ignorant and misguided -- a political spectacle" according to W. James Popham of UCLA, who says many students will receive a far worse education than they would otherwise.

Future Survey August 2004 1231

The creative culture

Australia is well-positioned to compete in the coming global creative economy, says Richard Florida, author of *The Creative Culture*. In an article in the *Harvard Business Review* about "America's Looming Creativity Crisis" he lists 25 countries according to the percentage of workers engaged in creative jobs as part of the general workforce. While the US wasn't even in the top ten, Australia rated No. 3 after Ireland and Belgium. New Zealand is No. 5. At the same time, an article in the *New York Times* (03 05 04) reports that the US has already started to lose its worldwide dominance in critical areas of science and innovation. Indicators used to make this assessment included trends in registration of patents (moving to Asia), published research in physics, awarding of Nobel prizes (to Europe and Asia), and falling doctoral degrees (new US doctorates in the sciences peaked in 1998). Harold A. Linstone, long-time editor of *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, adds that authors contributing to the journal from outside North America grew from 36% in 1969-1998 to 57% in the 1999-2003 period, while the percentage of non-North American subscribers rose from 49% in 1974 to 71% in 2004.

Harvard Business Review, NY Times, Future Survey 1232

Religious conflicts in Europe

What is happening in Europe? Muslim schools set ablaze in tolerant Holland, eight mosques attacked by arsonists; churches damaged in Utrecht, Amersfort and Rotterdam in what appear to be tit-for-tat attacks. A report on anti-Semitism in France quotes 123 racist attacks in the first nine months of 2004 as well as 166 anti-Semitic attacks and 584 threats. Meanwhile two Muslim girls have been expelled from a French school for wearing headscarves and Sikh boys are fighting the controversial ruling against wearing turbans. Geoff Kitney writing from Europe for the *Australian Financial Review*, notes the rise of a new conservatism, accompanied by the rising political clout of Christianity. "Even in Europe... signs of a revival of church influence are unmistakable."

Reuters, AP, AFR October 04 1233

Don't label me

While Muslim and Sikh citizens in France fight for the right to identify themselves, Australian market researchers have been warned not to label modern men as "metrosexuals", American college students are refusing to be classified as male or female, creating an issue for administrators in the provision of toilets, and gender change surgery is causing headaches to sporting administrators.

Sydney Morning Herald, World 21 10 04/27 03 04 1234