

Convergence and Divergence - Future Trends. MTN Conference 2007.

[youtube:http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=AjWgsIVATuo]

Life in 2010 - Home and Work

Press cyber-interview - Dr Patrick Dixon 28 January 2000

Just to know a little more about you: where do you work, in London?

I work virtually - wherever I am, most of my office is there - car, plane, train, home. My job is to live in the year 2010 and to see tomorrow as history.

When did you create Global Change?

Global Change was created as a Trend Analysis company three years ago.

Who are your clients?

Clients range from Andersen Consulting to Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, UBS, Credit Suisse, World Bank, SwissAir, Swiss Exchange. I am also a lecturer at business schools.

Can we say that you are a futurologist?

Yes I am considered an authority on the future, particularly on e-business, e-commerce and the digital society. That's why these multinationals bring me in.

Does it mean that you are advising the companies about the future of their activities as a market researcher?

No! market research can't tell you the future - only what your clients think today - and when it comes to major shifts in society or technology, clients are usually wrong."

All the computer industry seems to have only 1 word in mind: convergence of IT. And of course Internet in the center of this convergence. What is your opinion about this?

It's not a word - it's a reality. In front of me is a 92 inch video wall which is the window of my "physical" office. On that wall right now as I write is digital TV which allows me not only 40 channels but also web surfing (with video adverts), purchases and e-mail - just using a TV remote control. On this same screen I can videoconference with up to nine different board members of a multinational, each in a separate country, each appearing life size, virtually in my office. We can all see and hear each other, share documents and collaborate.

On my desk is my dataphone, which combines normal mobile phone with e-mail, fax, web surfing, secure transaction capability, keyboard, diary and word processor. I have edited pages on my website using this device, while on a car or train, and uploaded them directly. My entire global business runs from this device wherever I am in the world. It's missing videoconferencing - but within the next two years the transmission speed for data using similar phones will increase from 10,000 bits to 2 million bits per second. That means true videoconferencing with a mobile becomes a reality.

Computers and machines are always smaller and more powerful. Do you think that in the future, this trend will continue (everything in one machine)?

Forget the all-powerful machine. Forget the old-style net. Think about a wireless connected world where every electrical device can talk to every other. In front of me is a tiny electrical device, the size of a grain of rice, which fits inside a needle. It's the world's first injectable PC complete with microprocessor, memory, operating system, radio transmitter and receiver. It needs no batteries and will last a hundred years. It's powered by radio waves in the air, 1.5 million were made last year - in Switzerland, by Datamars. Although the device has a tiny memory, it only needs to store one thing: my identity. I walk into a room and the room sees me enter, and gets my e-mail. I walk to my car which unlocks and knows already my destination - because the information is in cyber and the car is also wired online. OK - I have not yet wired my house to respond to the device, but my home already allows total control of all electrical

devices using a PC and existing power cables.

And forget about sitting at a PC. That's a late twentieth century nonsense. Speech recognition is improving rapidly. So long as my computer network can hear me, I have control - the computer could be the other side of the world. And sitting at screens? Why bother when you can have data on walls, in watches, phones or in your glasses?

Do you think that the companies are aware of what the consumers really need or have you the feeling that sometimes they experiment without really knowing?

Most companies do market research and plan with that - but land up with the wrong products and services. To see over the horizon you need techno-vision. As I say, market research is as blind as your clients - except for the short term.

DNA Computing, moleculo-electronics.... Is it science-fiction or soon reality ?

DNA computing is not needed yet but real progress is already being made in combining chips and living creatures. Rats have already been trained to move objects or fill their food trays just by thinking, using chips connected to their brains. We will one day be able to transfer thoughts and emotions directly from one brain to another, or allow for example, a dog to provide sight signals from its brain direct to a blind person.

In Japan, there are a lot of projects to make machines more "human" (See for example the success of the dog Aibo, from Sony...). Is it for you a fashion or something that will lasts?

All computer systems need to become more human. Twenty years ago I was involved in an artificial intelligence project - one aim was to replace the physician so well that the other person was unable to tell when the switch had been made (using simulated text chat systems).

There is also the big dream to realise "clever" machines. For example in house automation (the fridge who orders food etc...). Your impression?

Lots of things can be done - but are they useful? The only way is to live with the technology. For example, a computer in my house controls lighting and other devices around the house. Useful? In practical terms, no, unless you want to simulate life at home when the house is empty. We have an intelligent waste disposal in our kitchen - a bar code reader re-orders automatically anything it "sees" thrown away. Useful? Yes, very, but even more useful was taking the bar-code reader to the food store to collect hundreds of codes of items we order regularly to make a big shopping list.

A shortened version of this interview appeared in 24 Heures Switzerland

