



## IN THIS ISSUE: REVIEWS OF RECENT BOOKS ON TRENDS

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## 1 – THE EXTREME FUTURE

***The Extreme Future: The Top Trends That Will Reshape the World for the Next 5, 10, and 20 Years***  
(James Canton)

Nothing surprising or unfamiliar here. Canton's list of trends includes information technology and networks, biotechnology, nanotechnology, workforce diversity, and globalization. But most of these and other trends cited are either obvious; based on speculation without solid foundation; mere extrapolations instead of analysis; just plain wrong and absurd; or simply align with the general consensus of other trend forecasters (see, for example, "Trends Affecting Business," *Growth Strategies* issue #990, June 2006).

One of the ways to make accurate predictions is to make a lot of them, and we do a bit of that ourselves, so we can't fault Canton on that score. But we can fault his tendency to indulge in wishful thinking. He predicts widespread use of hydrogen-powered cars, nuclear fusion reactors and teleporters, for example, without explaining the enormous hurdles they will have to overcome to become widely available and practical.

As for process and methodology, Canton discusses the "convergence" of trends, but as an analytical tool this is less useful than our own "composite trending," which weighs the relative impact of trends upon each other.

## 2 – MIND SET!

***Mind Set!: Reset Your Thinking and See the Future***  
(John Naisbitt)

One of the grandfathers of trend forecasting (along with the Tofflers – see below!) has written this book on his techniques and latest forecasts. [In writing *Megatrends* (1982) Naisbitt's technique was "content analysis" (trends were those subjects that got the most column inches in newspapers around the country), which wouldn't work so well now!]

A mind set is an established set of values and attitudes, an outlook on or philosophy of life, a frame of mind or disposition. In Naisbitt's formulation, mindsets are cognitive tools, the way we receive information. He lists 11 mindsets that he deems will empower readers to understand the trends that are transforming their lives and the world around them:

1. While many things change, most things stay constant
2. The future is imbedded in the present
3. Focus on the score of the game
4. Understand how powerful it is not to have to be right
5. See the future as a picture puzzle
6. Don't go so far ahead of the parade that people don't know you're in it
7. Resistance to change fails if benefits are real
8. Things that we expect to happen always happen more slowly
9. You don't get results by solving problems but by exploring opportunities
10. Don't add until you subtract
11. Don't forget the ecology of technology

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Our approach to identifying and analyzing trends is not dissimilar, but we call our windows on the present and future “prisms.” They are the perspectives through which each of us views the world. It’s useful to be aware of the existence of prisms, because “where you stand is where you sit” (one’s view of the world is affected by the lens through which it is viewed). Examples of some of our prisms: the economist’s prism (all human behavior can be explained by incentives and disincentives); the balance of power prism (power abhors a vacuum); the demographer’s prism (demography is destiny – see our review of Dent below!), etc.

One of Naisbitt’s prescriptions is in fact to “process information without the constraints of preconceptions.” (This may not be possible, but we take it to mean, “be aware of prisms”!) His mindsets are actually more like observations or rules he has developed over a career of trend watching. Again, our formulations are not dissimilar (for example: the future is not just about change, but about change, continuity and choice; the future will not be determined by one big thing but by many big things; there are rules to evaluating technological forecasts, etc.).

As for the specific trends Naisbitt highlights, there’s nothing surprising or unfamiliar: we’re becoming a visual culture; the Chinese are ascendant and Europe is in decline, but these are long, slow processes; some economic domains are more powerful than nation-states; etc. Some reviews on amazon.com have indeed been scathing, calling the book banal, embarrassingly behind the times, unfocused, confusing, not insightful, sketchy, hardly a revelation, saddening, and garbage.

As for techniques and processes, we revealed ours to readers many years ago (“Become Your Own Futurist,” issue #793). They involve accessing a lot of information from a lot of different sources; using filters to identify which of it is good, useful and relevant; establishing connections and patterns; determining if observed changes are cyclical, structural or superficial; developing a mosaic in which it all fits or doesn’t (Naisbitt’s picture puzzle); altering that mosaic as warranted (subtract before you add). As we have always said, our approach to discerning the future involves the application of common sense to the obvious. But common sense isn’t so common anymore, and determining the obvious is a full-time job reserved to us specialists!

### 3 – THE HUMMER AND THE MINI

#### *The Hummer and the Mini: Navigating the Contradictions of the New Trend Landscape* (Robyn Waters)

As we wrote in these pages over 10 years ago, the future is filled with complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, change, turbulence and therefore, with paradox. Of course seemingly incompatible trends can co-exist. To deal with the future you must perform what Samuel Johnson said was the most difficult thing for the human mind to do: hold contradictory thoughts simultaneously.

*The Hummer and the Mini* lists paradoxes in consumer markets, but analysis and implications

are thin or missing. The author was formerly VP of Trend, Design and Product Development at Target, the “upscale discounter” (okay, a good paradox). But the insight that consumers mix high and low market goods and fashions is not exactly fresh. Neither is individualization, mass customization, or that class is mass. In fact we would have to say the book is rather weak, shallow and trite.

Waters makes a distinction between futurists (who track outside trends and evaluate their impacts on the marketplace), and *trendmasters* like herself (who “look inside the hearts and minds of consumers to figure out what really matters”). She believes that paradox is a reliable tool to get at the “heart of

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things” precisely because every human being is, at heart, a paradox. But her book is devoid of concrete recommendations or strategies for leveraging the existence of paradox for sales, growth or profit.

The ultimate paradox, and the book’s short final chapter, is “The Paradox of Success,” or why ever-higher living standards don’t seem to make us any happier. She hasn’t a clue. But it’s a subject

we have analyzed and been writing about for 20 years (most recently, “The Paradox of Progress,” issue #960, December 2003). Our insight: improvements in income, standard of living and quality of life entail change, and change seems inconsistent with the stability we associate with contentment. How to use this paradox to your advantage? Reassure your customers by staying “up to date” within a framework of stability.

## 4 – THE FUTURE OF MEN

***The Future of Men: The Rise of the Ubersexual and What He Means for Marketing Today***  
(Marian Salzman, Ira Matathia, Ann O’Reilly)

These authors are the team that first created the buzz around “metrosexuals,” the new man in touch with his feminine side. But that was so two-years-ago; there’s been a backlash, and the ascendant male now is an “ubersexual,” whose defining qualities are passion and style. Compared with the metrosexual, the ubersexual is more into relationships than self. He’s more sensual and not at all self-conscious. He dresses for himself more than for others (choosing a consistent personal style over fashion fads). His best friends are male, and he doesn’t consider the women in his life his buddies.

The book’s title is misleading, because the only implication for marketing mentioned is that men can’t be reached and influenced in the same ways as women: they respond to different messages, different channels of communication, and different incentives (!). As one amazon.com reviewer wrote, “I worked with two of the authors at an ad agency,

but was amazed and ultimately annoyed by the stultifying obviousness of many of their observations. If a marketer actually finds this book useful, their company is in a ton of trouble.”

Again, the key insight into this subject was supplied by yours truly 8 years ago (“The New Guy Next Door,” *Growth Strategies* #904, April 1999). In a trends research report commissioned by Just For Men, we created the concept of “situational masculinity” to describe how the new American male role model was the guy who was every bit as masculine – *but only as masculine* – as he needed to be in any and every situation.

In other words, the battle to *prove* manhood is being replaced by an ethic to *utilize* maleness, but only where and when necessary. **The crucial point for marketers and advertisers: masculinity is becoming individually defined.** Marketers can leverage this trend by pursuing individualization and emphasizing self-reliance, self-improvement, flexibility, freedom from stereotype and comfort with change.

## 5 – THE NEXT GREAT BUBBLE BOOM

***The Next Great Bubble Boom: How to Profit from the Greatest Boom in History: 2006 – 2010***  
(Harry S. Dent)

The doubling of the economy and stock market in the 1990s was just a prelude, writes Dent.

We’re in the midst of another great boom, underpinned by high points in demographic and technological cycles. The baby boom generation is in its peak spending years, and technologies such as broadband wireless are reaching critical mass penetrations.

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*Growth Strategies* newsletter was formerly published as *FutureScan*.

By 2010, as a result, the Dow Jones Industrial Average will reach 40,000, and the NASDAQ will advance to 13,500 (possibly to 20,000).

But after the boom will come a great, long bust, lasting from 2010 to 2025, characterized by housing and stock market crashes, 15% unemployment, deflation, and massive social problems. Dent's advice therefore is invest now to take advantage, but to sell everything – stocks, houses, businesses – by 2009 or 2010 at the latest. Even if he's only half right, maintains Dent, these current years still present the investment opportunity of a lifetime.

We have spent a good deal of time and effort in historical cycle analysis ourselves (everything from Kondratieff's waves to Strauss and Howe's *Fourth Turning*), and we often find it quite useful. Unfortunately it is most useful in retrospect – to explain what has already happened. The predictive qualities of cycle analysis are not reliable and valid in any meaningful sense. Dent acknowledges opposing forces that may disrupt his predictions (rising productivity, falling oil and commodity prices, unexpected workforce growth, dramatic growth in international markets), but still sees no way to avoid stock and real estate market crashes.

For someone who is so conversant with demographic trends, we are surprised Dent seems unaware

that recent Census Bureau projections (mid-level projections, not high-end) see total US population growing from 300 million today to 400 million by 2043, due to relatively high birth rates, continuing immigration and rising longevity. This growth of 2.7 million people a year means a continuing high demand for new and existing residential, commercial and industrial structures: houses, stores, schools, shopping centers, offices, etc. We don't see how prices can decline precipitously.

Ditto for equity markets. With so many other factors at play (including liquidity, diversification, financial innovation, etc.), the demographic effect isn't big enough by itself to be determinative. Besides, baby boomers are likely to continue working and spending as they age, and the echo boomers, at 80 million strong, will be doing a lot of spending and investing themselves. Of course we'll have recessions – they are periodically necessary to correct poor allocation of resources – but they are likely to be fewer, shorter and shallower.

But we liked and agree with Dent's last chapter on "The New Millionaire Economy: Creating Wealth by Understanding the Rise in Mass Affluence," including his 12 principles for creating real-time, personalized service businesses for sustainable competitive advantage.

## 6 – REVOLUTIONARY WEALTH

***Revolutionary Wealth: How It Will Be Created and How it Will Change Our Lives***  
(Alvin and Heidi Toffler)

What a shame. Arguably the inventor of the field of "futurism" due to his best sellers *Future Shock* (1970) and *The Third Wave* (1980), Toffler has since gone down the squirrel hole of irrelevancy. This book adds to the list of books he has written since which have become increasingly undecipherable and useless. Even *The Futurist* magazine pans this book as journalism-run-amok, "larded with grandiose

statements, intensifying adjectives, neologisms, and ever-so-cutesy chapter and subchapter titles, often only superficially explained."

The Tofflers' main theme is that "revolutionary wealth" will result from the transition to a knowledge-based economy. Talk about tired! And frankly, we're fed up with the emphasis on "prosumers," which is supposedly what consumers of the future will become when they both produce and consume their own output. Sorry, but this book has no future.