

Charlotte Business Journal

Interviews Dr. James Canton

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Dr. James Canton heads the Institute for Global Futures, a San Francisco-based think tank that analyzes the future of technology. Dubbed the “Digital Guru” by CNN, he is the author of “Technofutures: How Leading-Edge Technology Will Transform Business in the 21st Century” (Hay House, \$23).

Recently, he was the keynote speaker at the Metrolina Entrepreneurial Council’s FutureTech conference, where staff writer Rick Rothacker asked him a few questions.

Q. How did you become a futurist?

A. I kind of stumbled into it. I found myself at Apple Computer in 1979 helping design the first PC. At that time no one was studying how people used computers. I knew we needed somebody standing between the marketplace and industry. That’s been the mission of my work.

Q. What is the coolest new thing you see on the horizon?

A. Real-time virtual reality. You will be able to not just walk-through an environment but navigate the rapids of the Grand Canyon, feel water on your face, wind in your hair and interact and talk to people. We will suspend disbelief. Also the use of nanotechnology (molecular manufacturing) to create new forms of energy and food. The only difference between steak and sawdust is atoms. If we develop the ability to manipulate matter at the atomic level we can create anything. We could end hunger, attack cancer. The building blocks of the next century are bits, atoms, genes and photons. Companies that understand that will be the winners.

Q. How will the economic slowdown effect technology?

A. Don’t be fooled by the dot-crash. That was just a blip on the screen technology isn’t stopping.

Q. What do you think of Charlotte’s economy?

A. I think Charlotte clearly has a head’s up about optical electronics, wireless and software (technology). My sense is there is a lot of networking going on here, and the talent base here attracts a lot of companies.

Q. What will your next book be about?

A. The future of e-business.