

COMPUTERWORLD

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Future shock

Five futurists describe the technological changes coming our way and their social impact.

By Computerworld Staff, Framingham |

The next convergence

Biotechnology, nanotechnology and IT will come together in amazing ways.

James Canton

CEO, Institute for Global Futures

Book: Technofutures, The Extreme Future

You're the CEO of a company in the age of Internet 3.

There are 2.5 billion people connected to the internet, an increase from about 1 billion today. And people aren't just connected — they have pervasive, wireless broadband access.

You understand that IT is your ticket to competitive advantage in virtually all areas of business. So, you tap into your corporate portal.

“Find me all of my unhappy customers ... and make them happy.”

“Find me the best talent, wherever it is in the world.”

“I'm thinking about developing a new product. Find me new customers who would be interested in this product. Oh, and find out how I can produce and distribute it.”

“I have an idea for a better way to manage currency fluctuations for transnational clients that I want to monetise. Find me customers who will pay me 1% of whatever I save their company via my new idea, and sign customers up ... even before I've developed the idea into anything tangible. Once we come to an agreement, I'll embed my service into their networks, and they'll deposit digital dollars into my account.”

According to James Canton, this will all be possible because of the rapidly accelerating convergence of IT, nanotechnology and biotechnology. This convergence will create networks that are highly collaborative, deeply personalised, intuitive, predictive, self-healing and self-reflective.

Companies will take advantage of these networks to gain competitive advantage in virtually all areas of business, from supply chain to making employees more productive, to customer relations management. “The CIOs of today are the CEOs of tomorrow,” Canton says. “There will not be a business decision that will not be technology driven.”

Canton predicts this nano-bio-IT convergence will lead to embedded devices that will enhance human productivity, such as chips that stream information directly to the cerebral cortex, or embedded devices that enhance human intelligence or memory.

And these advances aren't as far off in the future as you might think, Canton says. Nanotechnology — the

manipulation of matter at the atomic level — is just starting to take off. Governments around the world have begun investing seriously in nanotechnology, Canton says. “We’ve started a global wildfire,” he says.