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Welcome to the May edition of What's Emerging. We have had many comments on the usefulness of our Business Tips so we have created a log of these from all our previous editions and included these on our [website](#).

We now have a new office in Canberra and our phone and address details have changed so please update your records as follows (mobile numbers and email are unchanged):

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Cheers

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Business Tips

[Skype add-ins](#)

Those of you that have been reading this newsletter from the start will know that we are big fans of Skype. We use it all the time to talk within the company for free and also to conduct teleconferences, including international ones. Go to this link to download an article that describes several add in programs for Skype that can improve productivity and collaborations.

[Trendwatching and transparency](#)

Those of you who read our article on the future of shopping in the March edition will be aware that pricing transparency and the ability to check prices on the go will place increasing pressure on companies supplying products and services. This link to the Trendwatching site shows a host of examples of how transparency supplied by the web is changing how the world works.



What's Emerging

[Futures past](#)

A fascinating blog which looks at people's predictions in the early 1900's for the year 2000. Some great images and insights into the way we view the future.

[Super fast cable modems](#)

Comcast has demonstrated a super fast cable modem with speeds of 150mbps. The demo downloaded the Encyclopedia Britannica 2007 and the Merriam-Webster Visual Dictionary in 4 minutes, a process that would have taken a dial up modem two weeks. Comcast believes the modem could be available within a couple of years.

[Bug genome mapping](#)

An effort to genetically map the micro-organisms that inhabit our body in a similar way to the human genome project could bring big changes on how we look at the health of our bodies.

[Future of nanotechnology](#)

A new, easy to read report on the future of nanotechnology has been published and is available free at this link.

[Strategic uranium reserve](#)

China is setting up a uranium reserve to stabilise its plans for nuclear power production, highlighting the Chinese forward views on energy security.

[Shrinking China](#)

More reports that the amount of arable land in China is reducing. A critical issue as demand for crops for biofuels ramps up prices and production needs.

[Print yourself new bones](#)

A process which is like an ink jet printer can be used to scan gaps in broken bones or where cancer has resulted in bone having to be removed and then print a replacement bone graft exactly matched to the gap.

[Solar sail](#)

Researchers in Finland have proposed a 30 km solar sail composed of 100 wires spun up into a whirling disk that would power solar system space travel. The sail would harvest energy from solar winds in space. The energy in solar winds is very low per square metre, hence the need for such a large sail area.

[Universal disaster management](#)

Sahana is a free and open source Disaster Management system. It is an award-winning web based collaboration tool that provides solutions to common coordination problems during a disaster.

[Nano fashion to prevent colds and flu](#)

Fashion designers and fibre scientists at Cornell have taken "functional clothing" to a whole new level. They have designed a garment that can prevent colds and flu and never needs washing, and another that destroys harmful gases and protects the wearer from smog and air pollution. We would not advise you to rush out to order the clothing, currently the cloth costs US\$10,000 a square metre.

[Nano catalysts](#)

Scientists at Georgia Tech have created a new platinum catalyst using nanotechnology that promises to reduce the costs of fuel cells and other catalyst based processes. The new particles promise four times the catalyst activity. With platinum costing huge amounts of money this breakthrough could greatly reduce the cost of new fuel technologies.

[Eye-opening statistics](#)

Photo artist Chris Jordan turns statistics into thought provoking images. His images depicting US consumption, such as two million plastic bottles (equalling five minutes of consumption), help highlight the enormity of everyday resource use and waste produced.

[Bacterial crowd control](#)

A technique to manipulate crowds of bacteria promises big breakthroughs in the area of bio-analysis techniques and portable diagnostic equipment.



What We Are Writing About

This month we have a book recommendation:

[Unmaking the West – 'What If?' Scenarios That Rewrite World History](#), a compilation of Essays with Philip E Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow and Geoffrey Parker, Editors.

Many of us think, consciously or subconsciously, of the current ascendancy of the West as an undisputed fact and one that was inevitable. Philip Tetlock and his fellow editors have assembled a number of essays of counterfactual history that examine whether the rise of the West and its form were inevitable. The value of such counterfactual exercises is that they can help us re-examine our thinking and our assumptions and learn how these influence our forward thinking and ability to see alternative possibilities. When we are thinking about the future we need to understand the past and this does not mean just learning history, it means thinking about the tide of history and significant turning points. We also need to understand the assumptions that underpin our view of turning points and their history.*

Examples from the book include discussing whether the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks at Salamis in 480 BC could have been reversed, either by the death of Themistocles or different tactics by either side. The battle at Salamis is seen as a crucial point in history and is far more important than the death of the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae which is more familiar to people and has been recently celebrated on film. If the Persians had won and Greek society was destroyed there are serious doubts about what would have happened to the fledgling concepts of democracy and rational thought that have underpinned the rise of the West.

Other fascinating questions are explored such as what if Jesus of Nazareth had not been crucified and lived to a ripe old age, what if England had been Catholic instead of Protestant, and what if China had risen further before current times instead of stagnating as it did. Some historians see these exercises as futile daydreaming that cannot be proven or refuted because there is no evidence that can be examined. The wrong kinds of counterfactual exercises certainly fall into that trap. Alternative histories that require a multitude of interlinking changes or a single change which is so unlikely as to be laughable are exercises in fantasy and should be ignored. However carefully constructed counterfactual exercises can make us re-examine our thinking and our assumptions and inform our forward thinking. We heartily recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in history or thinking about the future.

* We use a technique from Cognitive Edge called Future Backwards that can be used to do this within your own organisation to understand how you think about the past and the future. Future Backwards is a facilitated group

process used to discover what entrained patterns of past perception in an organisation are determining its future. It is also used as an alternative to scenario planning to increase the range of perspectives that a group can take on an understanding of their past and of possible futures. The process involves identification of key turning points leading to the current state and possible future states, both good and bad.

