

@ Emergent Futures New Around the World | What Are We Writing About

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*Welcome to the March edition of What's Emerging. Each month we have many more links than we can fit in so we have decided to put the spares into a separate document that you can download from our website - see [March Extra Links](#).*

*One link you really must check out is the video clip of the BigDog robotic quadruped - just amazing.*

*We hope you enjoy this edition.*

*Cheers*

*Paul Higgins, Sandy Teagle, Kim Stewart, Anitha Mendonca, Syed Muqthar, and Samantha Kyle-Little*



## Business Tips

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### 10 great windows programs

This blog from zdnet lists 10 useful windows programs that have stood the test of time - most of which we had never heard of before but we are now using. In particular we are regularly using Process Manager, RoboForm, and SnagIt.

### Memory palace

If you have read the Hannibal Lecter books you will know that the good doctor is able to walk through a building in his mind and access patient records. Using a "memory palace" is one way to improve your memory. See the link for tips on how to do it.

### How to save money running a startup (17 really good tips)

Jason Calacanis has written a really good post on saving costs and maximising people's time in a startup business. We do not all have startup businesses in the internet world but some of these tips resonate for all businesses. One of our old favourites is there - getting everyone a double screen. I feel far less productive on the road than in the office now because I use a double screen all the time at home and in the office. The research on time saved also backs it up - Jason claims twenty minutes per person per day or nearly 2 hours per week - if that is correct then work out the payback time on a \$300 screen!!!!



## What's Emerging

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### Supermarket of the future

HELP could be at hand to those who get lost in supermarket aisles searching for all the items on their shopping list. At the giant CeBIT technology show in Hanover, Germany, software maker SAP was showing off a supermarket shopper aide that works through a mobile phone. Instead of putting pen to paper and wandering the aisles, shoppers enter their grocery list onto a mobile phone.

### **At charter school, higher teacher pay**

Would six-figure salaries attract better teachers? A New York City charter school set to open in 2009 in Washington Heights will test one of the most fundamental questions in education: whether significantly higher pay for teachers is the key to improving schools. The school, which will run from fifth to eighth grades, is promising to pay teachers \$125,000, plus a potential bonus based on school wide performance.

### **Your burger on biotech**

If the biotech industry has its way, ordering a hamburger might soon sound something like this: "one charbroiled cloned-beef patty, with genetically modified cheese, lab-grown bacon and vitamin-C-fortified lettuce, on a protein-spiked bun." The burger of the future is delicious, nutritious and contains more engineering than a stealth bomber.

### **Remote microscopy**

Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, have developed a modular, high-magnification microscope attachment for cell phones. The device will enable health workers in remote, rural areas to take high-resolution images of a patient's blood cells using a cell-phone camera, and then transmit the photos to experts at medical centers.

### **New video of BigDog quadruped robot is so stunning it's spooky**

Boston Dynamics keeps working on their BigDog quadruped robot. Its evolution since the [last time we saw it](#) is nothing sort of mind-blowing, and a bit spooky. It looks like an actual biological quadruped. Seeing it climb through rubble, snow, jumping over obstacles like a wild goat, and saving a near-fall on iced ground at the last second (fast forward to the middle of the video) defies belief. You simply must see this - it will challenge the way you think about the future.

### **Massive oil deposit could increase US reserves by 10x**

America is sitting on top of a super massive 200 billion barrel oil field that could potentially make America energy independent and until now has largely gone unnoticed. Thanks to new technology the Bakken Formation in North Dakota could boost America's Oil reserves by an incredible 10 times.

### **Mobile TV next big battleground**

Entertainment services will overtake voice as the major source of global mobile and broadband revenues by 2011. Mobile TV will be the biggest revenue stream to the tune of \$40 billion, according to Ericsson.

### **Chip errors better for computers?**

Krishna Palem is a heretic. In the world of microchips, precision and perfection have always been imperative. Every step of the fabrication process involves testing and retesting and is aimed at ensuring that every chip calculates the exact answer every time. But Palem, a professor of computing at Rice - University, believes that a little error can be a good thing, resulting in significantly less power use.

### **US aerospace and defense sector braces for potential brain drain as cold war workers retire**

The aerospace and defense sector is bracing for a potential brain drain over the next decade as a generation of Cold War scientists and engineers hits retirement age and not enough qualified young Americans seek to take their place. The problem - almost 60 percent of U.S. aerospace workers in 2007 were 45 or older - could affect national security and even close the door on commercial products that start out as military technology, industry officials said. A representative example of the baby boomer retiring problem.

### **A machine that can look into the mind**

Scientists have developed a computerised mind-reading technique which lets them accurately predict the images that people are looking at by using scanners to study brain activity. The breakthrough by American scientists took MRI scanning equipment normally used in hospital diagnosis to observe patterns of brain activity when a subject examined a range of black and white photographs. Then a computer was able to correctly predict in nine out of 10 cases which image people were focused on. Guesswork would have been accurate only eight times in every 1,000 attempts.

### **Automakers criticize fuel cells**

GM and Toyota leaders admit that hydrogen fuel cells have serious problems.

### **Eco-terrorism suspected in house fires - tip of the iceberg?**

Five luxury homes in a subdivision marketed as "built green" near Seattle were destroyed or severely damaged by fire early Monday, and evidence at the scene suggested the fires might have been started by radical environmentalists who viewed the homes as violating rather than complementing the wooded wetlands in which they were built.

### **Oil rises to highest price in inflation adjusted terms**

Capping a relentless rise in recent years, oil prices hit a record high during the day on Monday, then pulled back to close below the record day's highest trading price, \$103.95 a barrel on the [New York Mercantile Exchange](#), broke the record set in April 1980 during the second oil shock. That price, \$39.50 a barrel, equals \$103.76 today, when adjusted for inflation.

### **Comparing supermarket prices on line**

Mysupermarket is an internet company which allows you to compare prices on line of the supermarkets that are registered on the site. The site allows you to compare costs between supermarkets but also suggests cheaper or healthier alternatives to some of the products that you have chosen. The combination of this sort of service plus the rising numbers of people with handheld wireless devices and broadband internet access is going to continue the inexorable pressure on prices and margins in retail supply chains.

### **ORNL study shows hybrid effect on power distribution**

Plug in hybrids are being promoted as the way forward for reducing carbon emissions in transport. A recent Oak Ridge National Laboratory study, featured in the current issue of the ORNL Review examined how an expected increase in ownership of hybrid electric cars and trucks will affect the power grid depending on what time of day or night the vehicles are charged.



## What We Are Writing About

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## **Book Review: Future Inc - How businesses can anticipate and profit from what's next by Eric Garland**

Some people would argue that we should not be promoting other futurists but it is our view that improving the overall understanding of what futurists do is good for all of us. Eric Garland has written a book that is like the curate's egg - very good in parts (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curate%27s\\_egg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curate%27s_egg) for a description on how the meaning of this saying has shifted over time).

The first section of the book - Tools and Techniques - has some very useful information for people seeking to understand what futurists do and some of the tools and techniques that they use. The book describes some basic tools and approaches in a very clear and entertaining way that clearly communicates what is trying to be put across. This is the strength of the book. We differ with Eric's views on experts and the future though (p76-78), where he argues that you should value expert opinions on trends and the future more than opinions from other people. We agree that experts are very important and serve a useful purpose for looking at grounding your views in data and expertise, however, there is a significant body of research that shows that experts make particular mistakes when looking at the future by being too sure of the present and possible trends. One other key weakness of the book is where Eric asked people to put themselves in the shoes of a 14-year-old Muslim from Qatar (p110). We agree that trying to get different perspectives on an issue by using your imagination is an important technique. However, looking at significant issues from the point of view of someone with a completely different culture and upbringing without a true appreciation and understanding of their viewpoint, can lead to significant mistakes in outlook. These critiques aside, we would heartily recommend that people who are interested in the subject (and we would argue this should be everyone) read this first section as long as they keep in mind that the approach and the tools described are necessarily of a simple nature.

The second section of the book looks at the future through a number of different areas such as aging, health care, nanotechnology and biotechnology. There are some very useful trends and ideas in this section. However, it is disappointing to us that more has not been made of cross fertilisation between these various areas. We strongly believe that a major value that can be gained from futurists tools and processes is at the intersection of several major trends and areas of interest. Little effort has been made to look at these sorts of intersections in this book.

Overall the book is very well written and very easy to understand which is a significant achievement in an area that is generally very complex. We would recommend reading the book remembering that it is only an introduction to the subject of foresight and keeping in mind the weaknesses that we have identified in this review.

### **Future of Beef**

Paul will be presenting to the beef feedlot industry in Western Australia next week on the subject of the future of beef in a biofuels driven and carbon constrained world. The presentation will be posted on our website on the 4th of April.