

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

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Welcome to the May edition of What's Emerging. This month we have a free seminar offer and link to our radio interview with Richard Fidler on The Conversation Hour (see "What we are Writing About") along with our usual links and a book review. There is still time to register for our seminars in Canberra (3 June) and Melbourne (5 June) so hop to it!

We hope you enjoy this edition.

Cheers

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



Business Tips

Xobni

Xobni (Inbox backwards) is a plug in for Outlook that helps you search and organise your email. It is only in Beta form at the moment but it looks promising and Microsoft is trying to buy it. We have tried it and love it.

The best FaceBook apps for business and career enhancement

While FaceBook is used primarily for social networking there are so many applications being written for it that many are useful for business applications, especially for small business. Here is a selection where you might find one or two gems that work for you.

Wi-Fi security tips

There are some great tips here for securing your wireless laptop or computer. It is titled for road warriors but with more and more wireless networking at home it is more and more important for general users. Warning: will require you to have a free registration.



What's Emerging

PETA offers \$1 million reward to first to make In Vitro meat

PETA is now stepping in and offering a \$1 million reward to the first scientist to produce and bring to market in vitro meat.

Palm-sized projector unveiled at CeBIT

Developed by Adelaide company, Digislide, the prototype Digismart Pocket Projector weighs less than 200g, can easily fit on to the palm of a hand and can connect to any type of device, including mobile phones and media players.

Cowbins - greening the land

In Lewisham they've trialled a project called Feed the Cows, which painted large recycling bins to look like cows. The project has increased recycling by 61% in just three months.

10 ideas that are changing the world

More than money, more than politics, ideas are the secret power that this planet runs on. Here are a few you need to know about, care of Time Magazine.

Disruptive civil technologies - Six technologies with potential impacts on US interests out to 2025

To support the development of the National Intelligence Council's Global Trends 2025, SRI Consulting Business Intelligence (SRIC-BI) was asked to identify six potentially disruptive civil or dual use technologies that could emerge in the coming fifteen years (2025). While these are designed to look at US interests the thinking behind them is relevant for global thinking.

Do it yourself property management software

Now you don't need to be a real estate agent to manage property. With Streetfolio you can manage your own property. So say goodbye to property management fees and hello to property management the easy way.

Social networking for activism

The Point is a web platform for group action, helping you make things happen that you couldn't accomplish alone.

China's internet users hit 221 million, rank world's first

The Internet population in China reached 221 million by the end of February, which outnumbered the figure in the United States to rank the first in the world.

Environmental cost of shipping groceries around the world

Cod caught off Norway is shipped to China to be turned into filets, then shipped back to Norway for sale. Argentine lemons fill supermarket shelves on the Citrus Coast of Spain, as local lemons rot on the ground. Half of Europe's peas are grown and packaged in Kenya.

The virtual wall for pedestrian crossings

The Virtual Wall provides a barrier made up of plasma laser beams depicting pedestrians crossing the road while the real pedestrians cross behind it.

New trend in biofuels has new risks

Biologists and botanists are warning alternative biofuel plants may bring serious unintended consequences. Most of these newer crops are what scientists label invasive species - that is, weeds - that have an extraordinarily high potential to escape biofuel plantations, overrun adjacent farms and natural land, and create economic and ecological havoc in the process.

Livecast: DIY webcasts using your phone

A company called ComVu just released "Livecast" innovative technology that facilitates DIY webcasting. In only a few minutes, anyone using a cell phone camera can be streaming live multimedia just like professionals. Okay, quality may not be quite the same, but it does seem to have potential.

In lean times, biotech grains are less taboo

Soaring food prices and global grain shortages are bringing new pressures on governments, food companies and consumers to relax their longstanding resistance to genetically engineered crops.

Google wants to index your DNA, too

The Web search giant's investment in Navigenics is further proof it wants an early stake in direct-to-consumer genetic screening.

A faster way to detect heart attacks

A diagnostic chip tests saliva to determine if someone is having a heart attack

GM, Marathon invest in cellulosic ethanol's future

The world's largest automaker General Motors Corp. is partnering with Mascoma Corp. to develop cellulosic ethanol using Mascoma's patented single-step consolidated bioprocessing method.



What We Are Writing About

Free Seminars

We are offering FREE SEMINARS on futures thinking and strategy in Brisbane: 28 May, Canberra: 3 June, and Melbourne: 5 June. For more details and bookings click [here](#).

The Three Futurists

Paul and Sandy are two of "The Three Futurists" joining ABC Brisbane's Richard Fidler on The Conversation Hour at 11.00am Tuesday 27 May. To listen to or download the interview click [here](#).

Book Review - Predictably Irrational by Dan Ariely

As futurists we are always trying to understand better how the human mind works because how we think about the future is determined in part by our historical experiences and in part by how we think.

Dan Ariely is of Professor of Behavioural Economics at MIT. It is often said that economists create economic models and then when they do not turn out to be correct they blame the error on the fact that people did not behave as they should. Most classical economic theory is based on the premise that people are rational actors and that they will make rational decisions when they are given the relevant information. The field of behavioural economics is a relatively new field that tries to look at how people actually behave when given information. There are a number of examples in the book on how people seem to behave irrationally:

Page 26 - Ariely describes an experiment where students participated in an auction for several items including a bottle of wine and a computer keyboard. Before the auction commenced they were asked to write down the last two digits of their social security figure as a dollar figure - eg. 23 became \$23. They were then asked whether they would pay that dollar amount for a number of items. They were then required to participate in a real auction where they were asked to write down how much they would bid for each item with the winning bidder required to pay for the item with their own money. In the real auction the actual bids correlated with the last two digits of their social security number. Students with higher numbers bid more than those with lower numbers. Interestingly this "anchoring", which Ariely parallels with goslings imprinting on the first thing they see after hatching, actually stayed with the students over a number of other experiments.

Page 59 - Amazon offered free shipping if people bought over a certain dollar value in books. This increased sales significantly except in France. When Amazon investigated it turned out that instead of free shipping the French Amazon offer was shipping reduced to 1 Franc (about 20 cents). When the offer was changed to "Free" there was a dramatic sales increase. The fee of one franc was a huge reduction in shipping costs but had nowhere near the same

effect as a free offer.

Page 89 - When students were asked a series of questions about sexual issues and what their responses would be when sexually aroused, and then actually answered the same questions when actually sexually aroused (how he got this past the ethics committee I have no idea - you need to read the book to see how it was actually done) then the responses were totally different. I am sure that this does not surprise you but it does underpin how our decision making is emotionally and hormonally based as well as rationally based and we sometimes forget that.

Page 181 - People were asked to rate a new "painkiller" called Veladone-Rx which was actually a vitamin C capsule. Those familiar with the placebo effect (placebo comes from the Latin mean "I shall please") will not be surprised to know that there was a reduction in pain from taking the capsule. What also happened was that participants in the trial were given different prices for the drug and those who thought it was less expensive got less pain relief. They repeated the experiment with a drink that purported to "elevate your game" and impart "superior functionality". Participants that paid a higher price for the drink were better at problem solving in subsequent tests.

Page 198 - In another case students were given the opportunity to cheat in a maths test where they were paid for correct answers. They were split into two groups beforehand and one group was asked to recall and write down as many of the ten commandments as possible and the other group was asked to recall ten books they read in high school. The ones that were asked to recall the ten commandments did not cheat while those that were asked to recall 10 books did cheat.

A note of caution here - some of these are laboratory experiments and they do not necessarily translate into real life. Tim Harford, who wrote the Undercover Economist and has recently published the Logic of Life, argues that many seemingly irrational decisions are actually rational. The Logic of Life will be the subject of our book review next month.

I believe that the actual true position lies somewhere in between the two. We are sometimes rational and sometimes irrational (I prefer the term non-rational) because, while we are capable of rational thought, we carry in our heads the evolutionary history of our brain development. Evolution does not have the luxury of a complete re-design at each stage of development, only the ability to build on what has gone before. Therefore our brains still contain the primitive brainstem of our ancient ancestors, and brain evolution has gone from reptiles to mammals to modern humans. Our thought processes and our responses are a combination of all of these components, although we like to believe we are mainly rational thinking creatures when we make decisions. Understanding these issues and where the balance lies is critical to thinking about the future.

Paul Higgins