

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

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Welcome to the November edition of What's Emerging. This month we feature some links on the advances in data storage - we anticipate this will impact extensively on our daily lives, changing every product we use and the nature of how we use them. There's also plenty of other interesting innovations including some associated with energy such as the foldable car and solar energy from space.

We hope you enjoy this edition.

Cheers

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Business Tips

Google predator

Google is the Big Gorilla in the room globally for business and everyone is trying to figure out what they might do. This is a link to a report on Google from Infonortics. The full report costs US\$640 but you can download the preface which makes interesting reading if that is all that you want to do.

Super fast data storage and recovery

Scientists from the University of Pennsylvania have developed nanowires capable of storing computer data for 100,000 years and retrieving that data a thousand times faster than existing portable memory devices such as Flash memory and micro-drives, all using less power and space than current memory technologies.



What's Emerging

How to think

A great short summary on how to think and store conversations.

Twine - a semantic web product

Twine is a new product about to be launched that looks at your information and sorts, organises, and analyses it using a variety of systems and methods. The system is in Beta testing. Go to the site to register an interest if you want to see if it can improve your productivity.

3 Skypephone

Three Mobile has announced the release of a mobile phone that uses the Skype system as well as normal mobile calls. It will be available by Christmas.

Internet based PA service

Sunday gives busy people the resources of a 24/7 personal assistant, available via telephone and email, at a fraction of the cost of other options. As a request-based service, Sunday offers advantages over traditional hourly or fully dedicated personal assistant options - primarily that members have the freedom to send in quick tasks as they come up.

Solar in space

A Pentagon-chartered report urges the United States to take the lead in developing space platforms capable of capturing sunlight and beaming electrical power to Earth. Space-based solar power, according to the report, has the potential to help the US stave off climate change and avoid future conflicts over oil by harnessing the Sun's power to provide an essentially inexhaustible supply of clean energy.

Gene killers

Researchers have created plants that kill insects by disrupting their gene expression. The crops, which initiate a gene-silencing response called RNA interference, are a step beyond existing genetically modified crops that produce toxic proteins. Because the new crops target particular genes in particular insects, some researchers suggest that they will be safer and less likely to have unintended effects than other genetically modified plants.

Hybrid or electric?

Big auto makers revving up efforts to electrify automobiles are taking shots at each others' strategies. The argument among auto-industry leaders is over whether it is time to skip past partial electrification of cars - represented by gasoline-electric hybrids such as the Toyota Prius - and push instead to revive the idea of an all-electric car.

Terabyte memory for gadgets

Researchers have developed a low-cost, low-power computer memory that could put terabyte-sized thumb drives in consumers' pockets within a few years. Thanks to a new technique for manipulating charged copper particles at the molecular scale, researchers at Arizona State University say their memory is, bit-for-bit, one-tenth the cost of - and 1,000 times as energy-efficient as - flash memory, the predominant memory technology in iPhones and other mobile devices. This would eliminate all current limitations in portable electronic storage and the implications are huge.

Foldable electric car

The [Smart Cities](#) group at the MIT Media Lab is working on two low-cost electric vehicles that it hopes will revolutionize mass transit and help alleviate pollution. The group will unveil a prototype of its foldable electric scooter at the [EICMA](#) Motorcycle Show, in Milan. A prototype for the team's foldable electric car, called the City Car, is slated to follow next year.

Energy neutral homes

California energy regulators have adopted a target that all homes built after 2020 produce at least as much energy as they consume to reduce demand for electricity and cut pollution tied to power generation.

Google offers software prize

Google Inc. is offering US\$10 million in prizes for people who build the best software for the company's upcoming cell phone operating system. Is this the future of software development?

Plastic from carbon dioxide

Novomer is a company that is working on ways to turn carbon dioxide into plastics and other useful products. Timely given the issues of carbon capture and sequestration.

Gauges to save power

Can glorified glow lamps stop blackouts and slash energy costs? Manhattan-based [ConsumerPowerline](#) thinks so. This winter, about a thousand participants in the company's energy-conservation program will receive small plug-in boxes that glow red when power demand peaks, urging them to turn off space heaters, defer dishwasher runs, or otherwise save electricity. Energy suppliers respond to spikes in demand by gearing up extra production capacity. That can be so expensive that many utilities are willing to pay to promote conservation during periods of peak use.

ConsumerPowerline pays apartment complexes, companies, and institutions to conserve on cue.

Mobiles alter our brains

Research by Professor Croft at Swinburne University in Melbourne has shown that certain brainwaves react to mobile phones. The study is now looking at how different age groups react. Any health impacts are yet to be determined.

Ice cap shrinking faster

In 2007 the Arctic ice cap declined to a record minimum size, shrinking to 4.13 million square kilometers compared to 5.32 m km in 2005, and was 2.61 m km lower than the 1979-2000 long term average. With less ice to reflect sunlight back into space, more is being absorbed on Earth, leading to greater warming.



What We Are Writing About

Book Review - [The Future Files: A History of the Next 50 Years](#), by Richard Watson

It may seem strange for us to be promoting the book of another futurist but we believe that highlighting what is happening in the field is good for getting people to a better understanding of what we do. This book starts off in a vein very similar to our thinking, where Richard states in his preface that he is not intending to predict the future and "that anyone who says that they can do this is either a liar or a fool". Thinking that futurists are trying to predict the future is one of the main myths we encounter and it is great to see this stated up front in a book about the future. The book is neatly organised into sections from politics, to health and ageing, to retailing, to money and financial services. Richard writes in a very clear fashion and presents a myriad of ideas and possibilities in a very readable and accessible way. It is a great read for anyone wanting to think about what the future might hold. I have two minor criticisms of the book:

1. Firstly, while Richard states at the back of the book that most of the references come from his trend report, it would have been great to have had the text footnoted and referenced all the way through because there are a lot of facts and figures presented and the reader may well wish to check out the sources.
2. In my view Richard sometimes confuses some issues. For example, on p84 he states that physical media, such as newspapers and books, has the ability to cut through the clutter of media that we are presented with these days via the internet. This confuses reputation and quality with the delivery method. It is obvious that a quality media outlet such as the New York Times can deliver online content through the internet that will cut through clutter. The excellent writing of Thomas Friedman in the online version is an example of this.

Overall I would recommend reading the book for a great summary of ideas and possibilities for the future. I would just caution you to get professional help when thinking about what you might do about those ideas and possibilities.