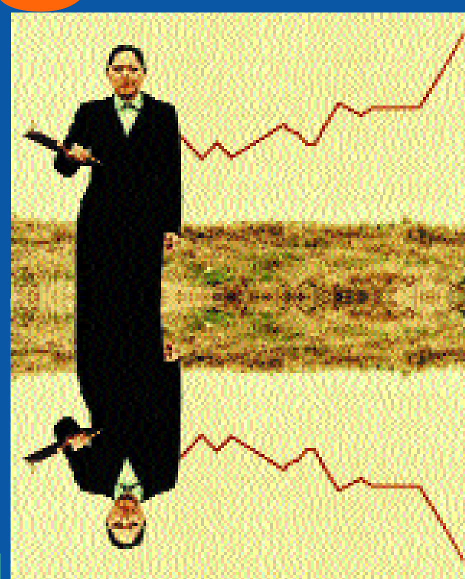
One trend begets another trend, often an opposing one—possibly ad infinitum. Contrasting surely. Conflicting? Hard to say. But history shows that the pendulum does swing back, almost invariably. It seems to be a natural law, though not completely understandable or explainable. Newton formulated it into a stated law: For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction. But Sir Isaac didn't explain exactly why.

Trends



Counter Trends

Nevertheless, humans continue to observe and be influenced by trends. And, though not exactly a law, every year for a while now, *T&D* detects, acknowledges, and examines several particularly prevalent trends. This year, we did one better: We telescoped on the trends and their polar opposites, and even their evil twins.

See what we mean....

Trend

E-Shift

By Brian J. Miller

HR + b2b = e-hub

Well if you haven't heard, there is an important shift underway. Soon, there will be e-marketplaces on every HRD corner, and the question will be, Where is the real value?

In an economy in which speed and agility are the elements for success, b2b e-marketplaces are promising competitive advantages to whomever, and whatever, they touch.

E-marketplaces—also known as exchanges, trading hubs, or net-markets—are virtual forums in which a community of interested buyers and suppliers congregate to exchange information about their procurement requirements as well as the products and services they offer. These e-marketplaces also facilitate online commerce in which buyers and suppliers can conduct transactions efficiently once their requirements and capabilities are matched—via auctions, live trading exchanges, RFP generators, or catalogue aggregation.

The goal is to enable buyers to hook up with the optimum suppliers (and vice versa) and thus reduce inefficiencies caused by lack of (or too much) information. In that way, e-marketplaces are the ultimate mediator.

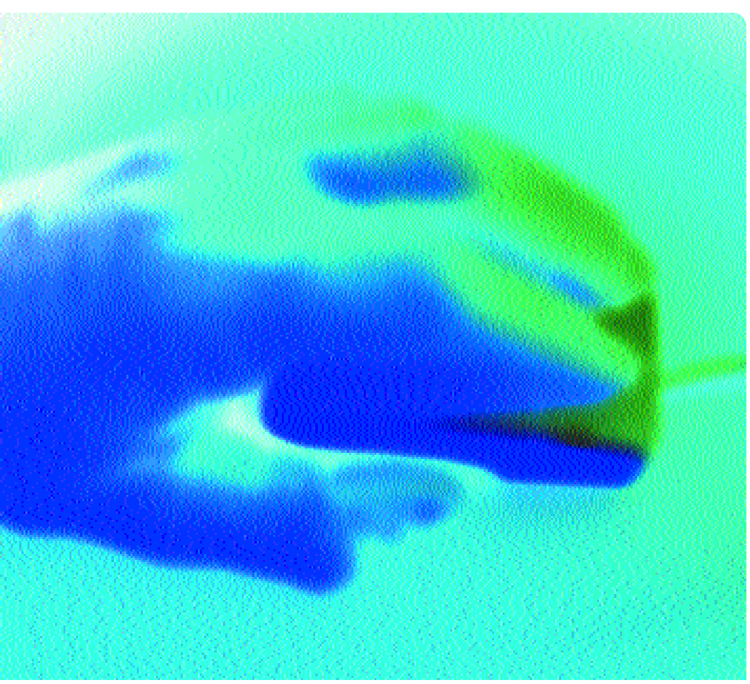
Let's parse it out.

Buyers

Controlled buying. Most companies have poor control over spending. Typically, they allocate total budget amounts but have little control over who is spending what and when. The National Association of Purchasing Managers estimates that one-third of all corporate purchases are out of compliance with volume purchase agreements, called VPAs. Rebel buyers go outside of those contracts for reasons of "convenience." To add insult to injury, on average, the rebel buyers pay 18 to 27 percent above the VPA price.

Lower admin cost. The cost of processing a purchase order manually ranges from $125 to $175 per event. E-procurement can lower that cost to $10 to $15 per order because of speedy approvals and easier, asynchronous communication with suppliers that eliminate faxes and phone calls. For example, British Telecom estimates it reduced procurement costs $113 to $8 per transaction via Commerce One's BuySite technology.

Price-Process transparency. Finding the right product at the right time for the right price is of great value to busy executives. The first step is lowering the cost of discovery (who does what) as well as the overall unit price.



The Holy Grail:

- Track frequent purchases.
- Uncover duplicate and triplicate orders.
- Surface troubled business units and poorly performing suppliers.

Simply put, buyers always want to make the best decision possible. If they can do that without sacrificing security, speed, anonymity, reliability, and product quality— it's a no-brainer.

Suppliers

Lower customer acquisition cost. Compared to traditional marketing avenues, suppliers can discover new buyers at much lower costs. If customers are already in a centralized e-market, half of the journey is complete.

Lower selling cost. Some estimates suggest that up to 40 percent of all orders have to be reworked because of errors, incompleteness, miscommunication, or mishandling. Clickstream tracking makes for fewer errors in online purchases, especially large orders.

E-collaboration. This is the true win. Remember: Buyers are looking to make the best decision possible. Suppliers have an op-

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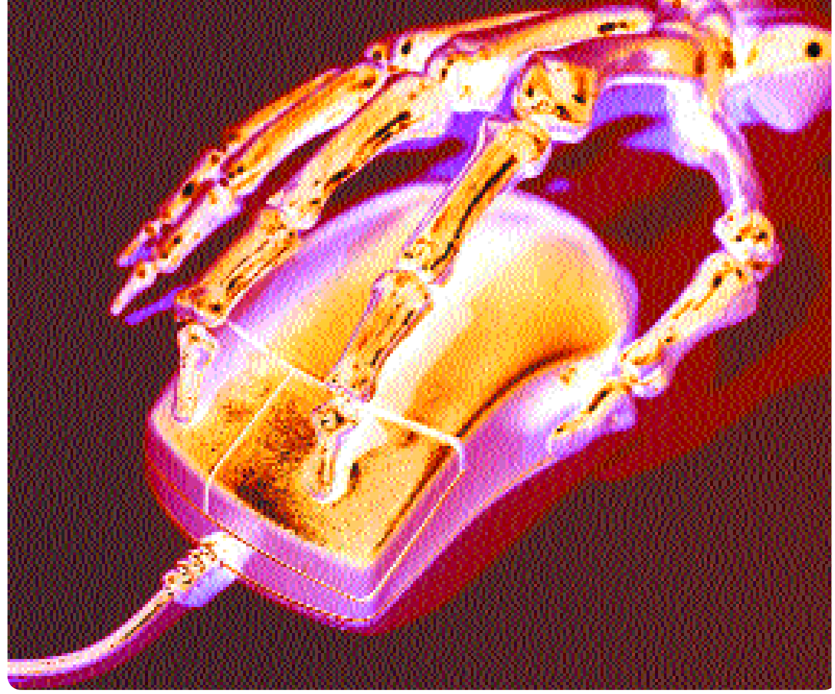
Digital Backlash



By Karl Albrecht and Ronald Gunn

Beware of geeks bearing gifts.

Something strange happened on January 1, 2000: All across America and the rest of the developed world, nothing strange happened.

Virtually everybody was keyed up for the dreaded Y2K event (which meant little more to most people than the turnover of computer clocks), but what we got was a non-event. No economic meltdown, no financial disasters, no planes falling from the sky, no food riots. The anarchists and doomsday cults also came up empty. It was, by any measure, a Big Letdown. Many people seemed disappointed when nothing happened. It was as if a long-awaited party had been canceled, without explanation.

The arrival of the Digital Millennium seems to have depressed many of us. What otherwise should have been a time for each person to celebrate, ruminate, appreciate, take stock, reflect, dream, and enjoy turned out to be a botched exercise in Digital Mania.

We assert that many people, perhaps a sizable majority, felt vaguely cheated. Yes, there were parties; yes, the ball dropped in Times Square; yes, the news magazines conducted the obligatory review of the century. But, for many people, it all added up to a hollow exercise without the deep personal meaning they had expected (perhaps unconsciously) to feel. We were robbed of a personal milestone and left vaguely dissatisfied.

Many people are still experiencing Digital Angst. If the economy is booming, why doesn't business seem to be fun anymore? Could it be that the triumph of digital process over imaginative substance is wearing thin? Could there be nascent discomfort with the increasingly apparent power imbalance between humans and technology? Why do so many of us feel that we're on a treadmill to nowhere? Who—or what—are we supposed to be keeping up with? And aren't we all just a little tired of hearing about the Internet?

Instant, mostly young, dot.com millionaires are the new heroes of American culture. News reports of their huge success seem to be from another world—the world across the Digital Divide. The dramatic stories on CNN and from other business media contribute to a win-lose, heroes-failures psychosis. As in the Roman gladiator contests, you're either a winner or you're dead.

The big surprise of the Digital Divide may be that it's rapidly becoming more ideological and psychosocial than economic and technical.

In recent years, the Internet and all things digital have outranked almost every other story in news broadcasts, books, and magazine articles. Journalists (wittingly or not) have united with makers of computers and software and with Internet service providers in a half-conscious collusion to popularize the Net phenomenon. The gee-whiz technocracy, with the popular press waving the banner, has an al-

Continued on page 27

portunity to help buyers proactively—to plan, schedule, and manage their products and services. Therefore, all events before, during, and after a purchase can also move online. Suppliers will be embedded firmly into the buying lifecycle. Savvy suppliers will use this opportunity to better understand market conditions and meet unfulfilled needs. The ability to conduct promotions, measure the result, and continuously adjust to new buyer information will increasingly be a core competency for suppliers. In the end, suppliers want to be valued partners, not just line-item costs.

All in all, e-marketplaces seem to be a win for everyone. However, as we look closer and graft HRD needs to e-marketplace construct, we see interesting challenges.

Buyers

- Control of maverick buying
- Lower administrative cost
- Price and process transparency

Sellers

- Lower customer-acquisition cost
- Lower selling cost
- Online collaboration=stronger relationships

E-b2b meets HRD

Let's get to the point and talk numbers.

Free-agent talent. Knowledge workers: Most of us will work for eight to 10 different employers in a lifetime, compared with four to six employers a decade ago. The issue for HRD is talent acquisition and retention.

B2b dwarfs b2c. Total b2b Net revenue is expected to top $2 trillion in 2004, up from $80 billion in 1999—a 91 percent CAGR. HRD's issue: How to take advantage and hone partners, and technology.

Knowledge services. Merrill-Lynch estimates that the market (including corporate learning and education) is a $740 billion industry in the United States and a $2 trillion industry globally, with more than 10,000 vendors. HRD's issue: How to make sense and the right decisions.

E-commerce outsourcing. Organizations are stepping up their outsourcing initiatives as they seek to integrate and Internet-enable supply chains and customer service solutions, resulting in a rise in median outsourcing budgets from $750,000 in 1999 to $1.5 million in 2001. HRD's issue: What do I keep? What do I outsource?

Like large celestial bodies, those phenomena are pulling HRD professionals into a sphere of influence. The need to create innovative benefit programs, self-service and Web-enabled HR systems, and e-learning and OD programs has placed new pressures on already strained human resource professionals. At the heart of the matter is the ability to implement e-technology intelligently to improve business processes and practices.

Steps to success

Realize that ownership doesn't necessarily maximize efficiency. HR professionals must replace a do-it-ourselves operating assumption with one that turns to partners for success. To enable that change, HR professionals should insist that anyone who requests funding for an internal project prove that doing it in-house would outperform external alternatives. If yes, track the performance of the internal offering against partners and competitors.

Embed an e-service broker. HR professionals will need to establish an e-marketplace that brokers deals and aligns internal buyers and customers (accounting, IT, and so forth) with external suppliers to command superior prices via volume purchases and reduce duplicated efforts. To enable that, HR professionals must understand the benefits and challenges of e-hub construction. Whether the decision is to internalize marketplace development or partner with an external player, you must uncover what you know and don't know and align with strategic outcomes.

Build flexible partnerships. Partnerships are often managed as narrow interactions delineated by functions such as procurement, credit, and marketing. But the power of partnerships is grounded in connectivity. To take advantage of e-collaboration, HR professionals need to connect suppliers to suppliers, creating priceless information among "best of breed." To enable that, HR professionals need to monitor the pulse of their organizations' reframing processes to support the lightning-speed forming and disbanding of partnerships based on supplier performance and immediate need.

Embrace Internet technology. To benefit from Web opportunities, HR professionals must leverage

- ❑ e-workflow tools (who does what, when)
- ❑ personalization tools (personal preferences)
- ❑ catalogue management tools (who has what)
- ❑ collaboration tools (I know what you know).

To enable those, HR professionals need to understand what's available inside the organization via IT and outside the organization. Remember to keep your eye on the ball and focus on the performance you seek to enable. The technology will follow.

Measure performance based on e-marketplace execution. Conventional metrics such as ROI will persist. But as HR marketplace interdependencies increase, new success indicators will continue to emerge that highlight which relationships should be kept and which should be shut down. To enable that, HR professionals need to introduce such metrics as partnership profitability, product and service performance, and long-term supplier viability.

I can hear you now: "Brian, that's easier said than done!" I agree. We all know that it will take courage and stamina. The steps can be daunting but are achievable. The real challenge for HR professionals is not matching buyers and suppliers to find the best price. It's connecting the whole transaction and information process—from sourcing to credit to multilanguage-multicurrency to implementation to backend settlement.

For HRD to meet e-b2b and deliver on the promise of extraordinary efficiencies, the many processes of a single offline purchase must be enabled real-time via the Internet. Two salient points:

most messianic obsession with selling the benefits of digital technology to T.C. Mits and T.C. Wits (the celebrated man and woman in the street). We feel it's proper to ask whether the fascination with digital gadgetry, especially in America, is the subject of or result of the unprecedented media treatment.

In its earliest days, Internet devotees hailed it as "the great democratizer." It would level the effects of social status, economic conditions, and political clout. It would put even the tiniest businesses on the same footing with the mighty giants. Now, even the Internet's most rabid promoters concede that it is having the opposite effect. It exaggerates the disparity between the haves and the have-nots. Notwithstanding politically correct ads showing adorable black children somewhere in Africa logging on to the Web, poor people won't be lifted out of their dire economic circumstances by computers or the Internet.

An unvoiced assumption seems to be that all human beings have an equal appetite for consuming and processing information. That seems questionable, judging by the low sales of nonfiction books, for example. The lack of convergence (as predicted) of television and the Internet also casts doubt on a universal insatiability for information.

Listening to its more vocal and determined advocates, one gets the feeling that the Digital Doctrine takes on an almost Fascist overtone, eerily reminiscent of the political environment in prewar Germany. That may seem extreme, but many well-educated adults have confided to us that they feel intellectually intimidated by what they call the "techno-Nazi" ideology and are reluctant to speak their misgivings. More people, including those who use computers and the Internet regularly, say they are feeling caught in an ideological stampede of sorts.

To read the subtext of the Digital Drama, there's a clearly defined Digital Doctrine—a set of Orwellian ideological premises that must be embraced. What are the key propositions, spoken and unspoken, that define the Digital Doctrine and shape its energy?

The Digital Doctrine

We seem to be expected to believe the following tenets:

- Technology is a thing unto itself, an all-pervasive agent that governs our lives—as opposed to something that people choose to do with gadgets.
- If a thing can be done, then it will be done and, indeed, must be done—for example, connecting your refrigerator to the Internet.
- The Wired World is our destiny. You must learn to love (or at least live with) the Big Brother aspect. Otherwise, you will certainly be left out (of something) and left behind (somebody).
- Some of us get it, and the ones who don't must either be helped to get it or be driven like sheep to their ultimate destiny to love it in the end.

Vocabulary signals ideology. One of the clearest signs of a developing new ideology is the special lingo its devotees use to signal their allegiance to new truths. Characteristically, the Digital World has cyber-speak, a notably impersonal patois of processes and things. The New Economy-Old Economy shibboleth signals an attitude, a narcissistic in-group psychology that says, "We're the enlightened ones; we get it. Anybody who doesn't agree with the cyber-ideology doesn't get it and will be left behind."

Internet language reflects a pecking order: a *newbie* is a freshman who is expected to be properly humble and respectful toward those who got there first. Classifications according to technology affinity, such as *late adopters* and *resisters*, apply labels to anyone who doesn't enthusiastically embrace a particular new technology.

As management consultants, we've watched with considerable amusement as the "geeks" have suddenly discovered business. In no other dimension of practice have we seen such a rush of idealistic, narcissistic, and ill-informed zealots who have no interest in learning from the experience of others. In record time, the invading cyber-Vikings have created their own business ideology and vocabulary, which, they say, taking great pains to emphasize, owe nothing to the traditional thinking processes of commerce. They characterize established enterprises as "old economy" or "bricks and mortar" to authorize themselves to "reinvent" business. "After all," they pronounce, "the Internet changes everything. The old rules no longer apply"—implying, so why bother to learn them?

Here's a peculiar fact: Many of the Netizens who are promoting the Net and all forms of e-business are the same people who screamed bloody murder in the mid 1990s when America Online announced it would give its customers access to the Internet at no extra charge. They lamented that allowing hordes of civilians onto the Internet would clutter up the place with a bunch of newbies and nuisances.

Actually, the Internet will evolutionize business, but not revolutionize it. In fact, companies that take best advantage of online technology are turning out to be the established leaders in the so-called old economy—retailers, publishers, catalogue marketers, banks, and all the rest. Consider that as early as 1989, Hewlett-Packard decided to wire the entire company, putting more than 90,000 employees in contact with each other. Procter & Gamble and Wal-Mart have linked their computer systems—b2b in the current jargon—for well over a decade.

Separate business process automation from supplier selection. It's important to make a distinction between and to separate 1) business process automation and 2) supplier selection.

Business process automation (BPA) and business process outsourcing (BPO) are grounded in regulating relationships. That means establishing focal points for monitoring new product and service introductions and implementation tracking, problem solution, and contract negotiation.

Supplier selection is a subset of BPA-BPO and is only one component of the overall value chain. Though HR marketplaces will enable the rapid selection and deselection of suppliers, the main goal is to limit flux and create relationships that add value. The challenge is to pull apart the two events conceptually, yet integrate them tactically.

Integration versus disaggregation. Integration involves quickly sharing information about buying needs and supplier capabilities across the value chain. Getting the right information at the right time enables buyers and suppliers to create successful solutions.

Disaggregation is the pulling apart of value-chain elements, including information intermediation (trade magazines); transaction intermediation (wholesalers and aggregators); and implementation intermediation (system integrators).

Technology has enabled organizations to specialize in one or more of those value-chain elements, generating an influx of specialty players—at last count, more than 500 companies. The challenge for HR is to connect the pieces in an environment that rewards specialization.

All in all, HRD and b2b marketplaces will have a productive relationship. We must remember that true value is much more than e-transactions. It is immersed in value-centered partnerships. HR needs the benefits of price-process clarity, focused spending, strategic relationships, and lower admin, seller, and customer-acquisition costs. Simply put, HR marketplaces enable the invisible to become visible.

Brian J. Miller *recently started E3-Services to help clients reframe their strategies, create powerful experiences, and seamlessly embed technologies and processes into their organizations. Brian wants to learn more, so email brian.miller@e3-services.net.*

Ironically, many of the old rules still apply, to the consternation of new-economy entrepreneurs. Mark Twain, arguably one of the best marketing consultants in history, lived during the time of the California gold rush. He advised, "When everybody is out digging for gold, the business to be in is selling shovels." Few independent miners made fortunes digging for gold; most went broke. Selling shovels was indeed more profitable than digging with them. One of the few millionaires to emerge from the gold rush period was a Jewish immigrant named Levi Strauss, who made heavy-duty work clothes out of denim and sold them to miners. The ones going broke on the Internet are those digging for gold; the ones making profits are selling them the shovels.

In the business sector, Dot.Com Delusion has spawned a whole new set of ethical dilemmas. Entrepreneurs team up with venture capitalists and stock underwriters to launch businesses that have no hope of long-term viability. Investors rush in like eager sheep, part with their fleece, and are left with worthless hides (at least for the purposes of this metaphor) while the insiders walk away with their cash. Almost all of the so-called Internet millionaires are actually stock market millionaires. It has been about market valuation, not value in the marketplace.

The new message to young people thinking about starting a business is, "Forget built to last and learn built to flip." More companies are being created with the sole purpose of taking them public and then flipping them. The quaint idea of building a going concern that will deliver long-term shareholder value is nowhere in the equation. The new cyber-hero isn't the entrepreneur who works hard to build a viable firm, but the one clever enough to promote it and flip it, moving on to the next one before the bills come due. Established firms are, in many cases, at a disadvantage vis-à-vis unprofitable digital-mania firms that can use hyper-inflated share prices to acquire other firms without putting up cash. That puts enormous pressure on executives of all firms to use PR gimmicks and accounting tricks to try to boost share prices to unsustainable levels. Unabated, snake oil begets more snake oil.

A few predictions

E-commerce will be the big failure story of the decade. Successful companies will, of course, continue to use online technology to simplify and integrate their operations, interlocking their systems more with those of suppliers and partners. And most established companies will extend their market reach through Web technology. However, the heart of the e-commerce story as promoted by the press, namely the Internet-only company, will eventually be seen as a total failure.

Internet-only companies doomed themselves to unprofitability early by adopting a fanatical give-away mentality. The idea was to forget about actually selling anything on your Website (at least not for a profit margin) and just get as many people as you can to visit your site—in other words, to aggregate eyeballs. When people visit your site, you can sell their names to other e-merchants that want to advertise their products. Only a few firms have made that portal approach work, and they get most of their revenue from the many smaller Web wannabes that spend their investors' capital trying to build attention share. Few Internet-only companies actually sell enough of anything to cover their advertising and operating costs. As they go out of business and stop buying advertising, even the major portals may go out with them.

Internet companies have been burning through investor capital at an alarming rate, and few have shown enough sales productivity to justify further investment. Despite the breathless press stories about the phenomenal growth rate of online commerce—in percentage terms, of course—the fact is that online sales account for only a small fraction of total retail sales, even in America.

The enormous promotional investment fueling the current level of attention to, interest in, and economic activity surrounding everything digital can't be sustained indefinitely. As Internet businesses fail in droves and the investments fail to perform as hoped, digital capital will be scarcer and the artificially sustained energy will wane. Once the Net-bubble has deflated, there will be a massive sag in energy and money for all things digital. Internet Fatigue, as we call it, will be signaled by the widely expressed attitude: "We're tired of hearing about the Internet."

The S-curve rules

Fundamental to the Digital Doctrine is the sacred principle that the number of Internet users will grow without bounds, eventually including all but about three people on the planet. MIT's director of media technology, Nicholas Negroponte, predicted in 1997 that "there will be 1 billion people on the Internet by the year 2000." Many "by the year 2000" predictions are becoming an embarrassment now that 2000 has arrived. Nothing rises to the sky, and pundits who don't understand the principle of the S-curve get to learn about it in a practical way.

The S-curve is a natural principle, almost on a par with gravity, that dictates patterns of growth for everything from bacteria colonies to human populations to stock prices to market demand for new products. Any fast-rising variable goes through an early "getting started" phase, followed by a sharp upward acceleration and then a slower rate of growth that may level off. Plotted on a chart, the pattern looks like a stretched letter *S*,

108 million Americans have no desire to get onto the Internet

60% of consumers have stopped buying the latest high-tech gadgets and devices

43% of PC owners believe technology is advancing too quickly

40% of PC owners believe technology is too complicated

SOURCES
Harris Online
Alliance
Research/Gateway
Computer

DoBe.org declares January 28, 2001, an Internet-Free Day.

with its overall shape determined by the rate of growth and distance from the foot to the shoulder. There's every reason to believe that the number of Internet users will also follow the S-curve.

As for 1 billion people on the Internet, we ask, Really? All with more than $10 dollars to spend per year? What if the eventual Internet population isn't 99 percent of the developed world? Suppose it turns out to be less than half, regardless of economics or education, because of people's individual mental proclivity? It seems clear that, even in a highly educated population, some people are more information-oriented than others. What if not everyone is yearning to be a cyber-citizen?

Where might we be on the S-curve now? Most dot.com business models, and much of the economic ideology of the Digital Agenda, assume we're on the early rising part of the *S*. A frightening thought: What if we're much farther up the S-curve than most people think? What if the hard core of addictive users is mostly committed to the Internet and the rest of us can take it or leave it? How many ventures hang on the assumption of continued exponential growth?

Consider that two-thirds of the world population has never heard a dial tone. Nearly half has no reliable access to electricity or running water. In all likelihood, not more than 10 percent will be eligible economically for the Internet within the next 20 years. The idea that all we have to do is give people computers is a projection of a distinctly American, upper-middle-class worldview and smacks of the Great Society. It's the cyber-equivalent of "Let them eat cake."

In America, home of the first and most wired population on the planet, it seems likely that more than half of the people who will use the Internet in anything more than an occasional way are already doing so. Will every new gadget and killer application grow the population of Internet users, eventually recruiting everyone? That seems more and more unlikely.

Internet Fatigue is already in evidence. The scenario, as we see it: As the Dot.Com Death March continues, more investors will lose faith in the Internet Fantasy. The Digital Dream will become the Digital Nightmare. The same herd of investors who rushed in will rush out of Internet-based stocks—and possibly the whole category, but certainly away from the gee-whiz sectors. Venture capitalists will become choosier and will gravitate toward the shovel makers. At the same time, established "old economy" firms will become ever more competent and aggressive at extending their businesses with online technology.

Profit margins and earnings growth rates of even the most worshipped online companies, such as America Online, will remain appallingly low, and their share prices will be brutally repriced to normal levels. We will likely see one or more major icons of e-commerce such as Amazon.com fail or have to be acquired to continue operating. Advertising expenditures will fall precipitously as venture capital dries up and dot.bomb companies trying to survive cut budgets and promote themselves with Internet banner ads, merely prolonging their agony. Few portals, if any, will stay profitable.

Ironically, there will be a dramatic return of attention in business (and by CNN) to the so-called old-economy companies—you remember, the ones with actual profits. CNN and other media will, of course, claim that they knew all along that the dot.com boom couldn't last.

The ultimate expression of Internet Fatigue will be a loss of interest—a Digital Depression. It won't be possible for the media to keep up the drama indefinitely. Even people who use PC-Net technology every day will be saying, "Enough, already. I get it. The Internet is here. Now, let's get on with our lives." The hard-core addicted population of about 15 to 20 million people worldwide will continue to live in the Wired World. Meanwhile, the digital middle class will continue to take it or leave it.

Digital deliverance

Once we've wired the world, we can't unwire it. Is that what we want? If we assume that the wiring will continue at breakneck speed, what are the consequences of not forging a balance between humans and technology? The sci-fi-like scenarios of artificial intelligence surpassing human intelligence take on a meaning with greater *gravitas*: If we don't insist on substance first, served by process second, and we fail to re-emphasize that technology exists to serve the aims of human community, then a quiet new elite may emerge: people who can turn off the TV and the PC and think.

After one of our recent talks, a senior executive mused, "You know, there'll come a day when people will pay a lot of money to go where they can't be connected."

Karl Albrecht *is chairman of Karl Albrecht International, San Diego, and author of more than 20 books on management and organizational effectiveness. His latest book, published by the American Management Association, is* Corporate Radar: Tracking the Forces That Are Shaping Your Business. *You can contact Albrecht at karl@albrechtintl.com.*

Ronald Gunn *is managing director of Strategic Futures Consulting Group, Alexandria, Virginia, and has been published by* The Futurist, *the American Management Association, and trade associations. You can contact Gunn at rgunn@strategicfutures.com.*

Trend

Technology for Good

The fast, the easy, and the impartial.

After a nine-hour workday, you're finally on the train hoping to make your daughter's soccer game when your cell phone hums. It's a co-worker asking whether the printer should start producing the new manuals. Knowing there are still additions, you decide to contact the printer yourself. You fire up your laptop (you haven't upgraded to an email-enabled phone yet), send an email with new content, and within minutes receive a reply from the printer. Problem solved. With the aid of technology, you stopped an erroneous print run, saved your company a few bucks, and still managed to make the soccer game.

Similar scenarios occur every day. Indeed, even the most basic business technologies have improved communication and increased productivity. Simply stated, it's fast, easy, and impartial.

Fast. The automobile, washing machine, microwave—technological advances are about saving time. Business technologies are no different.

The debate over bandwidth aside, the velocity of business has accelerated dramatically due to advanced technologies. Email, though the most obvious example, is but one of many. In our day-to-day personal lives, there is speed dialing, pay-at-the-pump gas, direct deposit, e-tickets, and, thankfully, ATMs. Medical advancements include thermometers that work in less than three seconds, laser surgery that restores 20/20 vision in less than 15 minutes, and wireless wrist devices that provide blood-pressure readings that users can send to their doctors.

But increased speed isn't limited to high-tech gear; basic word-processing applications are excellent examples. Two words: *copy* and *paste.*

Easy. Though managing or operating technology isn't always easy, its purpose *is* to make work easier. Look at meeting tools. There are simple tools—such as electronic whiteboards that eliminate the tasks of transcription and flipchart reproducing. There also are advanced synchronous and asynchronous meeting tools that radically increase productivity by recording all participant comments, allowing application sharing, and, more important, enabling meetings among dispersed populations.

Technology is also improving people's lives by simplifying or automating many tasks. For instance, computers act as assistive technology for people with disabilities, using adaptive technologies such as screen-reading programs, touch screens, speech-recognition software, and modified keyboards.

Impartial. Big Business tools are now available to all businesses. Accounting, publishing, and presentation software give small businesses the same functionality and sophistication as larger companies. Websites offer any company global exposure. Handhelds and other conveniences present up-to-date information regardless of executive level.

The Internet is also opening the doors of prestigious universities and degree programs to new domestic and international students. The October issue of *The Standard* profiled one such student in its special report on education. Gabriel Ramous, a mechanical engineer and former seaman in Buenos Aires, is working towards a business degree from UC Berkley through a program sponsored by LASPAU, a U.S. nonprofit affiliated with Harvard and Argentina's Fundacion Aragon.

Though some people will argue that the Digital Divide is evidence of technology's partiality, a recent Forrester Research survey found that Asian-American and Hispanic households outpace white households in Internet access—69 percent, 47 percent, and 43 percent respectively. Though only a third of black households have Internet access, they're getting connected at a faster rate than any other group. Federal plans, with millions of dollars worth of backing from high-tech companies, aim to shore up the divide, and companies such as Delta Air, Ford Motor, and American Airlines are subsidizing or buying personal computers for employees to use at home.

Though luddites argue the negatives, few can deny that technology's intent is the improvement of people's personal and business lives. The intellectual capital guy Thomas A. Stewart says in *Inc.* magazine, "Technology is just an enabler, but it's one hell of an enabler."

Churches are going wireless. Universalis, a Roman Catholic publishing house in Britain, has expanded its desktop Internet Mass to wireless application protocol phones.

According to eMarketer.com, grandparents are using email and personal Webpages as low-cost alternatives to telephoning.

At Greenwood Elementary, in Plymouth, Minnesota, one fourth-grade class has conducted Web conferences with National Park Service rangers in Washington, D.C.

Counter Trend

Technology for Evil

Perhaps evil is too strong a word. Technology for evil implies some intent for destruction and chaos. It's true that hackers do try to cause mayhem and computer bugs do exist to wreck our systems. Still, it's safe to say that the purpose of most developing technologies is positive. But in use, technology can be controlling, irritating, and scary.

Controlling. Often, the same qualities that make technology good have negative effects on its users. For instance, the speed of the Internet, email, and faxing has created a greater need for immediacy in nearly every business transaction. Can anyone say, Instant gratification?

Consider the worker on the train in the "Technology for Good" opening scenario. Although the example illustrates how new tech tools can help users give fast and immediate attention, it also shows how technology can make people too accessible. You're never off the job. There's nowhere to hide.

Our reliance on tools and gadgets such as spellcheck, debit cards, grocery store scanners, and PDAs has increased to a point at which people are forgetting how to function without them. Sometimes the programs we use to make our jobs less complicated do just the opposite. On a recent elist, Moondance quality control editor Jan L. Hodges related the story of a computerized HR hiring program. A former employee—who left in good standing—sought to be rehired. An online program the company uses to screen applicants didn't recommend her for employment. In spite of the heaps of praise from people who had worked with her previously, she wasn't hired—based on the computerized results.

Irritating, frustrating, etc. Technology doesn't have to be broken to irritate us. In fact, it's often when it's working that we get frustrated. In a word: Voicemail (no elaboration needed).

Again, consider the soccer parent's ringing cell phone on the train. Now try to imagine the response of the seatmate trying to get some shuteye. Undeniably, automated messaging, locks, alarms, security cards, and the like can be saviors. But oftentimes, they're just annoying.

Scary. For the most part, the downside of technology stems from people's personal and cultural responses to it. However, some recent headlines are downright frightening: Cloning, Carnivore, Nanobots.

A recent *T&D* article on e-learning asked readers whether they would prefer to have a doctor that went through traditional medical school or one that learned via simulations. Far-fetched, right? Not so. In July, IC-USA began operating the first 24-hour remote monitoring and intervention service for intensive-care units at two hospitals. A critical-care team monitors patients from a remote location equipped with real-time video and live-data feeds from digital camera and monitoring systems.

In another example, Big Brother is alive and well, probably at your office, according to a study by the American Management Association. It says that 73.5 percent of major U.S. firms record and review employee communication and activities on the job, including phone calls, email, Internet connections, and computer files. That figure has doubled since 1997.

In other developments, the debate over cell phone radiation risk continues. Starting August 1, the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, began requiring U.S. cell phone manufacturers to publish the SAR (specific absorption rates) levels of their products. But no one's saying what that means to users.

What is the future? The September 26 issue of *Business 2.0* focused on updating Alvin Toffler's Future Shock. Bill Gates and others detail their visions of the future. One contributor, Ray Kurzweil—recipient of the 1999 National Medal of Technology and principal developer of the first omni-font character-recognition device, first print-to-speech reading machine, first CCD flatbed scanner, first text-to-speech synthesizer, and first commercially marketed large vocabulary speech-recognition device—wrote: "Technological change is at least exponential…. So, technological progress in the 21st century will be equivalent to what would require (at today's rate of progress) on the order of 20,000 years."

Good or evil, it will be interesting.

By Ryann K. Ellis

The good, the bad, and the ugly.

By 2007, there will be nearly 500 million obsolete computers in the United States, according to the National Safety Council. Carnegie Mellon University estimates that during the next four years, 70 million computers will be dumped in landfills.

The State of Louisiana is prohibiting new prison inmates from bringing in typewriters and is considering confiscating those of current inmates. Typewriters are the number 1 security risk for hiding contraband.

Need Help? *TechnoStress: Coping With Technology @work @home @play* by Michelle M. Weill and Larry D. Rosen Amazon.com

Fast/Complex

Giddyap!

FAST FACTS

Magnetic levitation trains in Japan have reached speeds of 321 mph (517 km/h).

The team that won the 1999 Internet2 Land Speed Record Award sent 8.4 gigabytes of data from Redmond, Washington, to Arlington, Virginia, in 81 seconds—a rate of over 830 megabits per second.

A cesium atom in an atomic clock beats 9,192,631,770 times a second.

FAST SOURCES

Encarta
Didyouknow.com
Uselessfacts.net

Fast is in. Thanks to the Internet, we can communicate with colleagues, friends, and family, buy a sweater, or comparison shop for auto insurance—all in the blink of an eye.

In business, *Internet time* is the term used to describe the blistering pace of the New Economy. At a 1998 conference, Bill Taylor, a founding editor of *Fast Company* magazine, called Internet time “the business equivalent of dog years.” Three months in Internet time, he said, is the same as a year in traditional companies, in terms of the number of products launched, deals made, and people that need to be hired and trained.

Why? Because the New Economy is a knowledge economy: Ideas are it! Beating out your competition doesn’t mean doing something better; it means doing it first. Entrepreneurs building businesses now count on speed more than a business plan to keep them on top. According to Taylor, the concern of new-economy companies is “return on minutes” rather than the traditional return-on-investment.

As the Internet continues to affect more and more businesses, fast becomes less a descriptive term and more of a concept, or even an icon, in its own right.

Charles Letbetter, director of practice and strategy for an Atlanta consulting firm and frequent contributor to *Fast Company* discussion boards, sees fast as the force that has pushed innovation through the ages. Fast is “an underlying and overwhelming desire to improve,” he says, “combined with the resources to facilitate that improvement.” The difference at the turn of the millennium, says Letbetter, is the kind of resources that make change possible at speeds previously inconceivable. Technology has enabled and allowed us to conduct business 24/7—with an arsenal of pagers, cell phones, personal organizers, laptops, and wireless Internet devices.

In a period embodied with so much possibility, there is much more to do than time to do it. According to a study by Andersen Consulting, almost 83 percent of American workers who took more than seven days vacation stayed in touch with the office while away.

The danger, Letbetter cautions, is in glorifying speed for speed’s sake—rushing to embrace each new trend without thought of the long-term consequences. Improperly implemented, fast becomes “nothing more than an excuse to indulge in absolute and uncontrollable chaos that ultimately breeds even deeper levels of greed and distrust,” he says.

Jeanne Allert, principal at a Baltimore Internet consulting firm says, “There’s a fine line between being nimble and being erratic.”

Yes, the world is getting faster. In 1924, three airplanes traveling together became the first to circumnavigate the Earth—in 175 days. Nine years later, one man flew solo around the world. It took him seven days.

Experts at Intel say that microprocessor speed will double every 18 months for at least the next 10 years.

The speed of light, about 186,000 miles per second, used to be the cosmic speed limit. But in July, scientists at the NEC Research Institute in Princeton reported that they had caused a pulse of light to travel at many times that speed.

Bill Gates, *In Business @ the Speed of Thought*, says, “If the 1980s were about quality and the 1990s were about reengineering, then the 2000s will be about velocity. About how quickly the nature of business will change. About how quickly business itself will be transacted.”

Slow/Simple

Counter Trend

Do you feel like you're on a treadmill every day that goes faster and faster? You're not alone.

The Internet age is blurring the lines between work life and home life. We can call clients and access our email from anywhere—and we do. Speed is the measure of success; leisure time is a rare commodity. Standing still and doing nothing is, at best, self-indulgent and, at worst, lazy.

But some people are fighting to bring slow back—for example, the Association for the Slowing Down of Time. Members of this German organization pledge to "prolong the time taken for it whenever it makes sense to do so." They promote the right to reflect in "situations where mindless activism and vested interests produce solutions that are expedient rather than genuine." A quote at the top of the organization's letterhead: "I prolong, therefore I am."

In the United States, a growing number of people are also aspiring to a slower and simpler life. Although they're quick to point out that they don't belong to any organized movement, some of their beliefs have been labeled "voluntary simplicity."

In his book *Voluntary Simplicity*, Duane Elgin defines the term as "a manner of living that is outwardly simpler and inwardly richer." In *The Simple Living Guide*, Janet Luhrs defines simple living as "living deliberately," saying, "You choose your existence rather than sailing through life on automatic pilot."

Each simple lifer defines his or her lifestyle differently, but what's shared is a desire to step away from the artificial rhythms of the current frenetic lifestyle and focus instead on personal values. How? Live below your means so you can work less and have more time for what you value. One guide simple lifers have adopted (although not written as a simple living manifesto) is the book, *Your Money or Your Life*, in which Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin spell out nine steps for achieving financial independence while aligning your time with your values.

Dave Wampler, founder of the Simple Living Network, says that for many people the American Dream has turned into the "American Nightmare." People are realizing that they just don't feel fulfilled with more and bigger and better, and are searching for something else. Without any advertising, 7,000 visitors a day view Wampler's Website. He says some people come to declutter their lives and learn how to do things more easily. Others seek financial independence, a spiritual connection, or to "live more lightly on the Earth."

A senior programmer analyst in the health-care industry puts it this way: "Chasing after the brass ring is so self-defeating. It's often better to slow up and make it come to you."

Simple doesn't mean easy, though. Paul Letourneau, a San Francisco resident who worked as a designer in college, says he has learned how easy it is to design something complex. "Just keep throwing things at it until it starts to work, then let somebody else clean up the mess you made." It's tougher making something simple, he says. "That requires stepping back and looking at the big picture every moment, acknowledging that every decision has consequences. It takes real artistry to create something simple."

There's no short-cut solution. Kristin Nuwer, a producer for America Online and "poster-child for Gadget-aholics Anonymous," says wealth makes for artificial simplicity: You can hire someone to do things you don't have time for, but you won't increase the quality of your life. Her own high-tech way of life is temporary—to achieve financial freedom so she can slow down. She doesn't want to end up like the typical modern-lifer—"every harried person you see balancing a coffee cup and cell phone behind the wheel, everyone at the gym at 5:30 a.m. using a laptop attached to a stationary bike, everyone who hasn't eaten a home-cooked meal since last Thanksgiving, if then."

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

Whoa, horsey!

Although each person may take different steps to simply his or her life, here are some resources that can help:

- *Your Money or Your Life* by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin, 1992; revised 1999
- *Voluntary Simplicity* by Duane Elgin, 1981; revised 1993
- *The Simple Living Network*, www.simpleliving.net, offers a free newsletter, a resource database, and study groups.

It is not enough if you are busy. The question is, What are you busy about?
—Henry David Thoreau

Trend

The Flight to Dot.Coms

A one-way ticket.

The dot.com world is everything I assumed it would be: fast, creative, competitive—and fast. Deciding to join the e-learning movement has meant leaving behind some big-company practices, while not forgetting that direction is as important as speed. I'll always treasure the wonderful opportunity I had to create magic for Guests at the Disney Institute. But the Internet is the breakthrough that will fundamentally change the way we learn and how we manage the learning process. Joining Click2learn puts me on the leading edge of the learning revolution. And I can't imagine a more fun place to be.

Craig R. Taylor
Former Disney executive, now vice president of marketing, Click2learn; www.click2learn.com

Do you have what it takes to join a dot.com? Take Wetfeet.com's Startup Compatibility Quiz, at http://www.wetfeet.com/industries/dot

It used to be that there wasn't much new in the world. Then along came the digital revolution and, *Bam!* there's little that hasn't changed.

Depending on how you look at it, this is either a great time or a terrible time to be in the training and learning game. Many training and HR professionals are going to dot.coms. In a survey of 473 HR professionals, the Society for Human Resource Management measured a 17 percent voluntary turnover rate among employees last year.

The money motivates some people. Who hasn't heard the stories of Internet entrepreneurs turned overnight millionaires? Shelby Rogers, a producer at an interactive agency who used to work at About.com, knows nearly 20 people who have migrated to dot.coms from traditional companies. She says, "Some people were idealistic and wanted to change the world, some were vain and wanted to be part of history, but most wanted to strike it rich."

But even dot.com players who will never hit the jackpot can't deny the thrill of being part of the new-economy action. Get rich quick or not, it's an exciting time to work at a technology company. The new frontier of the 1960s was space; we have the Internet. We are discovering it, exploring it, and settling it—all at the same time.

Chet Riley, a Lieutenant Colonel who was recently retired from 23 years in the U.S. Marine Corps to join findaspace.com, says, "I think the big draw is being able to build something from scratch."

Workers used to being a faceless employee in a maze of cubicles are being given the opportunity to make a real impact in the world, just by going to work every day.

For Jeanne Allert, principal at Ellipsis Partners, a group of consultants that helps non-profit companies use Internet strategies, one of the highs is the "incessant jolt of adrenaline that comes with a rapidly changing industry."

With a dearth of established industry practices, every moment is an opportunity for learning. Allert says, "You're learning every hour, and then you have to quickly turn and teach someone else, and go back for more. It's a new classroom every day; everyone teaches, everyone learns."

That opportunity for learning at dot.coms is another draw for workers, who know that in the New Economy, knowledge equals opportunity equals money. Another aspect of dot.com culture is little to no bureaucracy and laid-back atmospheres. Foosball tables, pets at work—the idea is to make people happy, boost their creativity, and come out ahead of the competition. So for many workers migrating to technology companies, the definition of dot.com is "fun," though the fun comes with a price. Dot.com management has a vested interest in keeping employees content enough to work the long hours required to be first on the market. Rogers says of her job with About.com, "It doesn't matter how many foosball tables or free sodas companies offer, you have to be ready to work 12 hours a day almost every day of the week."

And forget time off. Riley spent a year at findaspace.com without taking a vacation day. He says, "I think I've got four weeks vacation. I don't know, I don't really care."

Like Riley, some people can hack it. They enjoy working hard and playing hard with people who share the same vision. If their dot.com tanks, there's another one right around the corner. Colleagues of Rogers who left About.com cashed in some of their options, relaxed for a while, and then "eased back into consulting for other dot.coms." She says, "Once you have the skills and stomach for a dot.com, it's hard to turn away."

The Return Trip

Counter Trend

Forgive them if they gloat a bit. Naysayers—who, in the era of dot.com sovereignty, remained loyal to the idea of good old-fashioned profits can, if they wish, say, "I told you so."

Since April, when tech stocks took a tumble, traditional business practices and Economics 101 don't seem so outdated after all. High stock prices aren't enough: Enterprises are once again expected to have solid business plans that make money. So far, few Internet-only companies are able to show a profit, despite exaggerated stock prices. And so begin the shutdowns.

There are signs to watch for—closed-door meetings, unpaid bills, no office supplies. If you're smart, you won't stay long enough for missed payrolls. Many laid-off techies jump to another startup, ready to try their luck again—although this time, they ask tougher questions in their interviews. The other reaction is a growing number of people who are leaving the dot.com life to go back to traditional companies. Many dot.comers have just burned out, not able to sustain the frenetic pace and pressure dot.com workers put on each other—such as the looks you get when you leave for the day at 5, or 6, or 7. Such as the expectation that work should become your whole life.

And for what? There's no guarantee that your sacrifices will pay off. Chet Riley, U.S. Marine-turned-dot.com worker, compares working for a dot.com to sitting at a slot machine in Vegas. "A lot of people sit at one-armed bandits, but only a few are going to walk away with a lot of money. The rest are going to run out of money." Still, Riley says he gets a rush from the risk—from knowing that "in six months from now you could be unemployed." But he admits that he's an unusual case because he can count on his retirement money from the military to supplement his (relatively) low dot.com pay.

Fact is, the stories you hear of people getting rich off the dot.coms are the exception rather than the rule. Many people squeak by with tiny paychecks in the hope that they'll be one of the winners down the line. Riley says that at a dot.com, "The pay raise is always right around the corner, and it becomes a year and a half." What did he expect from joining a dot.com? He answers with irony: "An opportunity—long hours, a questionable future, and poor pay."

So, you put in your time and energy and hope that you'll be the one to hit the jackpot. But all the while, the small voice in your head is figuring the odds. If you listen, you might go the way of Jenn Raley, who left a Web-development job to work for Harvard University. Of the Web job she says, "We put a lot of work in, but the idea wasn't going anywhere. It turned out to be a big waste of time and money." She looked at other jobs at tech companies but decided she wanted to go back to working for a university. "Academia is very stable, and the benefits are unparalleled. Also, I appreciate the mission: It's not about making money."

Whether it's a layoff or a light bulb that prompts the change, qualified workers are looking anew at companies that can offer them stability and shorter hours. They want to eat dinner with their families, play golf, go to bed early. Priorities such as those come back into vogue as older workers enter the New Economy, and those qualities are equally important to many Gen Xers. According to an April study by *CIO* magazine, less than 20 percent of business executives polled would make a lateral move to a dot.com. One in 10 had moved to a dot.com, only to return to a not.com.

Jeanne Allert, a principal at Internet consulting firm Ellipses Partners, relates the story of a stint as a Web designer at a not.com. A staff member asked apologetically if Allert could add 50 pages to the Website, saying "It's a tight deadline, I'm sorry." Dot.com accustomed, Allert steeled herself for another all-nighter. "I need it in three months," said the staffer. Allert says she grinned like a Chesire cat. "That is why people leave the dot.com world." She predicts that in five years "the opening of a new Internet company will be as exciting as the opening of a new ice cream parlor."

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

They're back!

Websites devoted to tracking the dot.com fallout:

- startupfailures.com
- www.f***edcom pany.com (you fill in the blanks)
- dotcomfailures.com.

Oops! Dotcomfailures shut down in September, saying in its last newsletter, "Three months and $2.6 million later, dotcomfailures.com is closed."

Oops again! A week later, they sent out another message: "After a miracle round of financing, we're back online."

Casual Dress

Dressed to chill.

I have wondered how long men would retain their ranks if divested of their clothing.
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

In a survey cited in *Business Casual Made Easy,* 80 percent of executives said the following items are "unacceptable":

- sweatsuits
- spandex
- shorts
- t-shirts with slogans
- bared midriffs, halter tops, tank tops
- flip-flops.

So, have you worn a suit to work lately? Once the uniform of choice for businesspeople, the suit seems to be going the way of the Windsor knot. According to a survey this year by the Society of Human Resource Management, 87 percent of HR professionals polled said their companies offer the casual dress option one day a week or every day. In a similar SHRM study in 1992, just 63 percent of respondents said their companies offered casual dress codes.

What caused the 24 percent jump? We could thank (or blame) the Internet age. According to Ilene Amiel, author of *Business Casual Made Easy*, it's generally agreed that casual days started on the U.S. West coast, where computer companies allowed programmers to dress comfortably to encourage creativity. Like the Internet, the casual trend spread. Many companies are using casual dress policies to attract and retain employees, especially the high-tech workers who expect to dress down. There are many benefits to a casual dress code. In SHRM's 1996 benefit survey, HR managers cited increased employee morale and productivity and the opportunity to use casual dress as a recruitment and retention tool.

According to the Business Research Lab, a research and management-consulting firm, a casual dress policy can send the message to employees that the company is flexible and innovative, and doesn't want to control employees or favor affluent workers. Many employees also sing the praises of casual dress, listing comfort, lower costs for clothing and dry-cleaning, and heightened creativity. Many also believe casual dress makes them more effective. In a 1998 survey by *USA Today,* 64 percent of respondents said they work more efficiently when wearing casual dress.

Though it's easy to see the benefits of dressing down, doing so is harder than it looks. Much confusion exists about appropriate casual attire in the workplace, and relaxing the dress code often makes employees' morning routine harder. As one *Training & Development* staffer replied when she was chided for wearing a skirt on a Casual Friday, "It takes too much time to find something casual to wear."

What's more, people seem to interpret the meaning of *casual* differently. ABCnews.com reports, "Stodgy employees think casual means taking off your suit jacket. Others show up for work in weekend wear—hiking boots, sandals, tank tops, shorts, wet hair."

Some companies are now hiring consultants to teach employees about appropriate casual dress. The Conselle Institute of Image Management, for example, conducts seminars on "strategies to dress for appropriate impact in all situations." *Strategies* for casual dress?

Employees who aren't able to attend a seminar can get help from a copy of Conselle's *Professional Style Scale*, which identifies and defines four levels of dress in an attempt to ease casual confusion. Amiel's *Business Casual Made Easy* and a book by Sherry Maysonave, *Casual Power,* categorize and define levels of casual dress. But the best way to lessen employees' confusion is a written policy that spells out exactly what is and isn't appropriate. A chapter in Amiel's book tells how to develop and manage a business casual policy, or you can hire her to write the policy or coach managers how to write it.

Like it or not, casual dress is probably here to stay. Many employees now list a casual dress code as a job requirement. Some people would, in this time of dot.com mania, pick the casual dress option over stock options. Tanya Kennedy, a Washington, D.C. product manager, says, "Stock options may or may not produce results, but casual dress will affect my budget immediately."

Businesses would do well to keep that in mind. Kennedy suggests that companies that want to retain professional dress will need to pay their employees higher salaries to justify their clothing investment.

Some are suited,
some are not.

If you have to wear a suit to work, you probably feel like everyone else in the world is allowed to dress down. But although 87 percent of American companies do allow casual dress, that number is declining, according to this year's benefits study by the Society of Human Resource Management,

In 1998, the figure hit a high of 97 percent; in 1999, it decreased to 95 percent. This year, the number of companies allowing casual dress is 10 percent lower than just two years ago.

The cause of the decline? We can put part of the blame on employees who arrive at the office in clothes more appropriate for a day of chores. According to a survey by Accountemps, a California-based staffing service, close to 40 percent of managers said they thought workers appeared too casual when dressing down. However, discarding a casual dress policy isn't the only solution. Companies should first try a dress code that spells out what can and can't be worn in the office. A written policy also heads off legal trouble; when the policy isn't on paper, an employee whose clothing is judged inappropriate could charge discrimination.

But not all issues regarding casual dress can be solved with a written policy. A 1999 study by employment law firm Jackson Lewis found that 44 percent of the HR executives polled noticed more tardiness and absenteeism after implementing a formal casual dress policy—excuse the oxymoron.

In the same study, 30 percent of respondents reported a rise in flirtatious behavior after allowing casual dress. Jackson Lewis urges clients to monitor employees' behavior to prevent sexual harassment charges.

Judith Rasband, director of the Conselle Institute of Image Management, says, "The business casual trend isn't about fashion. It's about the whole casualization of America that began in the turbulent 1960s. It's about the general decline in civility."

The Conselle Institute teaches that the way you look directly affects the way you think, feel, and act. Rasband says, "When you dress down, you sit down—the couch potato trend. Manners break down, you begin to feel down, and you're not as effective."

Rasband urges people to pay close attention to the messages their clothing sends. Sherry Maysonave, author of *Casual Power*, says, "People think you're smarter when you're well dressed, and they think you come from a high socioeconomic class."

Indeed, many nouveau riche men and women of the Internet age are bringing back professional dress as a statement: "I have arrived." A member of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association quoted in the *Washington Post* had this to say about the return to professional dress: "If you have a growing class of affluent young people, they're going to want options."

Clothing manufacturers and retailers are ready to provide options. In an attempt to revive the standards of professional dress, a group of men's clothing retailers has started a movement called Dress Up Thursday, with the mission "to assist corporate America in reconceptualizing the importance of appropriate business attire in the workplace."

The group's Website, *www.1dressup.com*, explains that the casual dress trend has run away with the original concept, turning into "sloppy casual" or "weekend casual." To stem that tide, the movement asks retailers and manufacturers to contact a CEO whom they know personally and to ask him or her to "raise the bar in terms of office dress decorum on Thursdays," starting last September.

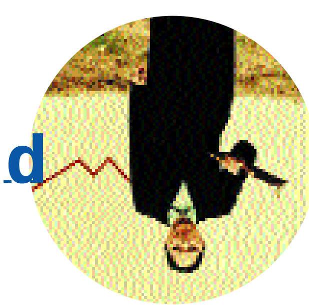
Judith Rasband and the Conselle Institute are also participating in the Dress Up Thursday movement; Rasband's *Guide for Dressing With Professional Style* will be made available to participants. She says, "Dress Up Thursday is a great vehicle allowing you to experience the difference in the way you think, feel, and act as well as the way others react to you. Super-casual for after work and [weekends] makes a nice change. Relaxing…becomes special."

I love the Business Casual look for the way it combines unattractive with unprofessional while diminishing neither.

– Dilbert

Back-to-Business Attire

Counter Trend



Family-Friendly Fever

Wanted for hire: Women with kids.

Nearly two-thirds of all U.S. mothers with children age three or younger are working outside the home, compared with only about half in 1990 and just 42 percent in 1980.

The activist group National Partnership for Women and Families, Washington, D.C., aims to extend working-mom policies to other workers.

The unemployment rate among working U.S. moms is (like for the general population) at a 30-year low—6 percent, compared with a double-digit unemployment rate in the early 1990s.

We're not just talking flextime anymore. The Clinton administration is drafting legislation that would ban workplace discrimination against parents. A report by Charles Babington in the *Washington Post* says that would likely open the door for litigation against employers for denying jobs or promotions because of time spent tending to family responsibilities. If the bill is passed, parents would become "a protected class with respect to employment discrimination." That could mean a company couldn't derail parents off a career-advancing track because it believed they couldn't meet requirements of the job.

Detractors predict that the already crowded courts will be flooded with new—and perhaps unwarranted—lawsuits. Employment watchdog groups contend there's little evidence of parental discrimination in the workplace. A Washington, D.C., lawyer calls the Clinton proposal "feel-good legislation."

The proposed bill is just the newest add-on in the family-friendly workplace package. Flextime, 12-week unpaid leave for mothers *and* fathers, onsite child care, and leave for elder care are becoming commonplace. They are, in fact, among the criteria for being named to *Working Mother* magazine's list of "100 Best Companies for Working Moms." The list, now in its 14th year, has become a recognized tool for measuring a company's culture and values. On the list are such staid U.S. corporate institutions as Bank of America, Prudential, and IBM.

Options such as flextime, now almost taken for granted as employee benefits, double as perks in the current, highly competitive recruitment and retention war. In study after study, family-friendly policies have surpassed salary in the top 10 reasons to stay with or go to work for a company.

Not only has the American workplace become more accommodating of parents—mothers in particular—but moms are starting to be more in demand as employees. *MSNBC Business News* (www.msnbc.com) reports that many companies are recognizing that women with young children are pros when it comes to multitasking—a skill that's highly valued in the fast-paced work environment these days. Some companies are even actively recruiting mothers with elementary school children. Small-business owners especially are finding that allowing such employees flexibility is an inexpensive benefit that is more than repaid in loyalty and that enables the small firms to compete with large companies where work schedules are more structured.

One problem: Companies may have a hard time finding these treasures. Many moms who want to work already have jobs, considering that the U.S. unemployment rate is at a 30-year low and that the federally mandated Welfare-to-Work program has effectively placed many women into many jobs.

In a sense, the trend has come full circle: The workplace adjusted to accommodate women by offering family-friendly benefits, which have become sought-after perks by female and male employees alike, and now women workers are hot commodities. As a matter of fact, it's payback time.

"The costs of hiring and training are so severe, that it's becoming important to look at those who the job market hasn't been very kind to [in the past]," says Laurie Levenson, president of Direct Access Staffing in Carlsbad, California. Levenson, who has five working moms on her 20-person payroll, says she finds that people who benefit from flexibility end up working harder and are more productive out of appreciation.

It must be a sign of the times that a recent applicant that we know of had no hesitation asking her prospective employer in the first interview whether she'd be able to leave work early whenever necessary to attend her kids' soccer games. And she never even mentioned health benefits or salary.

There's a new interest group in town: Childless adults. Not only that, but they're mad as hell and aren't going to take it anymore. Their beef? Don't get them started. For one, workers with children get more flextime. What's more, employees *without* children seem to be the ones who are always expected to work late or on weekends.

It's discrimination, says Leslie Lafayette, a restaurant owner from Sacramento, who spoke her mind in an article by Mary Macinerny in *Parents Express* at www.family.com. Lafayette has founded the Childfree Network, 5,000 members strong who are fighting the "family agenda."

They're not alone. There's also the Singles-Friendly Workplace Campaign, waged by the American Association for Single People, www.singlesrights.com. Its rallying cry: Who watches out for singles? According to AASP, singles make less money, have a higher unemployment rate, and receive fewer benefits.

There's no denying that employees with children get thousands of dollars a year in extra insurance, unpaid leave, scholarship aid, and tax credits that are denied to employees without offspring. These huge sums are rarely if ever compensated in benefits such as additional vacation leave or larger 401(k) contributions. The mission of the Singles-Friendly Campaign is to bring those and other discrepancies to the attention of U.S. corporations, union leaders, and elected officials.

Who knows how widespread the backlash against family-friendly policies is, but it's not confined to the United States. Elinor Burkett, author of *Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless,* reports a parental boomerang in Australia, where in the near future, 28 percent of Australian women will be childless. In Britain, as the Blair government advocates 12-week paid maternity leave, there's a divisive trend gestating between "the altruistic parent and the selfish singleton," according to an article in *The Spectator.*

Back in the States, says Burkett, nonparents are forced to pay additional taxes for childcare facilities, family allowances, and other government plans from which they don't benefit. Oh, why be polite? Burkett says that family-friendly policies are racist, regressive, and anti-woman—a "politically correct way for affluent baby boomers to milk the system for more cash and personal indulgences." Not one to throw out the baby with the bath water, Burkett recommends that pro-family policies be shifted to the low-income population.

Burkett's detractors say she doesn't take into account the costs of raising children that tax breaks are intended to offset. But they concede she does provide convincing statistics that point to a big backlash, such as that one in four American women born between 1956 and 1973 will never give birth and 19 percent of married couples have chosen not to have a child. Burkett predicts a "demographic collision course" between the kiddie haves and have-nots.

Some companies seem to be aware of the backlash and are already responding. Lancaster Laboratories in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, reports Macinerny, has been recognized by *Working Mother* and *Inc*. magazines for its approach. "Our philosophy has been to be employee-friendly and friendly to families, regardless of whether the family is just [that employee]," says Carol Hess, executive vice president. "Flextime is for everyone here."

Then there's an article in *The Industry Standard* ("The Parent Trap," July 3, 2000) that says families and dot.coms don't mix, mostly due to the insane hours these startups extol. Says one dot.com worker/parent, "Your co-workers make you feel like slackers if you leave at 5:30 to have dinner with your family."

There's backlash to the backlash. A single man complains he's denied work-at-home time while it's freely given to mothers. And, contends another faction, the most discriminated group of single adults is gays and lesbian, with or without children—especially regarding parental leave and partner benefits. Rohan Squirchuk, managing director of Australia's Council for Equal Opportunity for Employment, suggests it should be more about work-life balance and "leave as need" for all workers.

Whatever your status or view on the singles-parental front, it's probably best not to adopt the cynicism of W.C. Fields—at least not if you want to work at companies like Patagonia where mothers are allowed to breastfeed at their desks or at Amazon.com, which lets employees bring their dogs to work.

By Haidee E. Allerton

Anyone who hates children and dogs can't be all bad.
– W.C. Fields

Single adults make up 40 percent of the fulltime workforce in the United States and are 47 percent of all heads of U.S. households.

Amazon.com lists at least seven books with parental backlash titles.

What's your view? Go to www.publicdebate.com.au/is/456 to vote: Are childless adults being discriminated against? And see what others think.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES
Salon.com
www.mycareer.com

Parental Backlash

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