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Book Review

Future Inc. – How Businesses Can Anticipate and Profit from What's NEXT

by Eric Garland
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reviewed by Jay Herson

Just after I vowed that I would not read another book on futurist methodology I picked up a copy of Eric Garland's recent book *Future, Inc. – How Businesses Can Anticipate and Profit from What's NEXT* and am glad that I did.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part Garland takes the reader through a thought provoking, almost-interactive, Internet-era journey through creation and implementation of future scenarios. He chooses the beer industry for his example because we all have some familiarity with beer or at least with pretzels. Although technical, the approach is down-home and entertaining ("this book wouldn't be as much fun if it took you on a journey through the future of ultrasonic flow meters for sewage-treatment plants. Take it from me...I have done that study, too"). Wisely, other examples are also presented in addition to the beer industry "class project," presumably because Garland feels these examples are the best way to illustrate certain points.

Garland takes the reader through Google-free preparation for a futures study – systems thinking, reading the trade magazines, and talking to experts in the industry. Eventually issues develop and these issues lead to broader issues. Now there is an inventory for Internet search. Futurists beware – there is a lot of media hype in cyberspace. How do we detect it, how do we dispose of it? With the help of some well-prepared graphics Garland makes the STEEP (trends related to Society, Technology, Economy, Ecology, Politics) search for trends, systems thinking, the futures wheel and the impact/probability matrix come alive and fit logically as he leads us through agriculture, brewing, packaging, shipping, etc. on the way to the backyard deck. Garland tells us to avoid presenting three scenarios because the client will always punt to choosing the middle one and the extremes will not be considered. Instead present four scenarios, representing the cross between two levels of probability and impact. Part one is concluded with a realistic look of how to present and defend the final report to the client. How to

deal with the ever-present naysayers and to realize that even the best of reports might never be read. At least we used the best methodology.

Part two takes us through drivers of the future i.e. trends that apply to most future studies. What are the implications of aging, falling prices for information technology, health care, biotechnology, energy, nanotechnologies, and media / communications? Each of these topics could be the subject of a book on its own but Garland spares us a long discourse. He focuses on how these trends will affect the business community. For example, instead of dwelling on the increased cost of health care he emphasizes that the future lies in keeping people well and this is a business opportunity. Other health care opportunities are: the shortage of specialists due to malpractice insurance and lawsuits can lead to worldwide competition for talent; redesign to promote health, and dealing with the chronically sick worker as Baby Boomers refuse to retire. These are very stimulating thoughts to someone who sits in a cubicle all day and Garland's enthusiastic approach almost makes the reader drop everything and look for investment opportunities.

This book is highly recommended for those curious about futurist/strategic planning methodology as well as practicing futurists and especially for people at all levels in business, government and non-profit organizations that are concerned about the future and need to learn that the future is a friend and not a foe.

Jay Herson is Managing Editor and a frequent contributor to FUTUREtakes. He is also Senior Associate at Johns Hopkins University and the Institute for Alternative Futures. His essay on "paid volunteerism" will appear in the World Future Society 2008 Conference Volume to be published in July.