

T.G.I.M.

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A futurist's look-ahead: Jim Carroll on key trends to watch



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Toronto-based futurist and author Jim Carroll ranged the globe last year to speak to groups as varied as the Professional Golf Association, the International Dairy, Deli and Bakery Association, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Addressing the concerns of his listeners, and mixing with experts from the various sectors he had access to, helped to shape his thoughts on what's in store for 2012. He shared these forecasts on his blog:

Business rebounds in North America

North American and European businesses have been living with recession and the rapid rise of China, Brazil, Russia, and India. But Mr. Carroll expects something wonderful to happen this year as wide variety of industries – from agriculture to manufacturing to industrial – rebound, thanks to a renaissance in thinking in recent years.

Rise of the tinkering economy

The future is once again being built in the garage next door. But now it's by a globally connected, new generation of hobbyists, working in what are being called "micro factories" and "personal factories." The impact, Mr. Carroll predicts, will be massive.

Technology changes our relationships to things

Our relationships with the things that surround us are



The year ahead will see smart clothing, 'personal factories' and even more interactive products, says Toronto-based futurist Jim Carroll.

being changed by technology. Mobile technologies, for example, are influencing what we buy in food and how we shop. These same technologies are changing our relationship to our bodies as they monitor our food intake and track vital signs such as blood pressure.

Embedded technology has also become part of the clothes we wear, such as GPS-enabled shoes for people with Alzheimer's disease. "When relationships change, everything changes, and opportunities for growth and innovative thinking abound!" Mr. Carroll stresses.

Generation regeneration

A massive generational change is under way in ownership of our organizations – from family farms to medicine to business – as change-adverse baby boomers are replaced by a younger generation keen to try new and different things.

Revenue reinvention

With the increasing velocity of business cycles, product innovation, new business models and the rise of social networking, soon every organization will be faced with the need for relentless reinvention of its products or services.

Dominance of design

The design virtuosity pioneered by Apple Inc. will spread to everything from the cars we drive to the lamps we use, to the refrigerators we open. They'll have simple, easy-to-use interfaces and clean lines. "Our future is going to look great, intelligent and interactive!" he enthuses.

Chips ahoy

The power of the computer chip will continue to spread, as your phone becomes a credit card and your clothes talk to your doctor. Silicon Valley will be taking over the innovation agenda in a host of industries.

Leading locally

We're becoming more local even as the world becomes more global. Mr. Carroll notes that a University of Pennsylvania study found that areas with small, locally owned business of less than 100 employees had greater per-capita income growth than those that were home to larger, non-local firms.

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