

► Volume 6, Issue 1

Focus to the Future



“There are too many complaints about society having to move too fast to keep up with the machine. There is great advantage in moving fast if you move completely, if social, educational, and recreational changes keep pace.”

Margaret Mead,
quoted in *Time*, September 4, 1954

Doesn't it seem a bit ironic that people thought change was too fast in 1954? Does the pace of change seem too fast to you in 1997? Perhaps if it were only one part of our life that was affected, it would seem easier to manage. For most of us the pace seems unmanageable because we feel bombarded on all sides. According to Business Trends Reports and other futurists, change will continue at a fast pace. Here are some of the top trends we should watch in 1997:



1) Growth as a Strategic Direction.

According to a recent survey of 150 executives of Fortune 500 companies, growth is becoming just as important a goal as downsizing. Perhaps that explains the phenomenal \$660 billion spent in mergers and acquisitions in 1996. In an article in *Fortune* magazine (February 17, 1997), the writers found that the “hostile takeover” mergers of the 80's have been replaced by “strategic alliances” in the 90's. Many companies find they have no choice but to form alliances with their former competitors. Deregulation has turned entire industries completely upside down -- media companies, utilities, banks, telephones -- all are frantically trying to adapt to a new reality. The writers assert that “heft has become enormously important.”



2) Retail Trend.

More and more consumers are opting for the convenience of 24-hour shopping offered by mail order or the internet. A survey by *NetSmart* found that shopping on the internet is taking off. Recently, 54% of those surveyed said they bought merchandise online in 1996, this has jumped up from 37% in 1995. In fact, 18% said the internet is the first place they look when they go shopping. A case in point is amazon.com which is considered to be the largest virtual bookstore. They offer more than 2.5 million titles. Many books have not only a

description but also offer a review. Most books are discount priced including all of the New York bestselling books at a 30-40% discount. It doesn't get any more convenient than this!

3) Retrofit Trend.

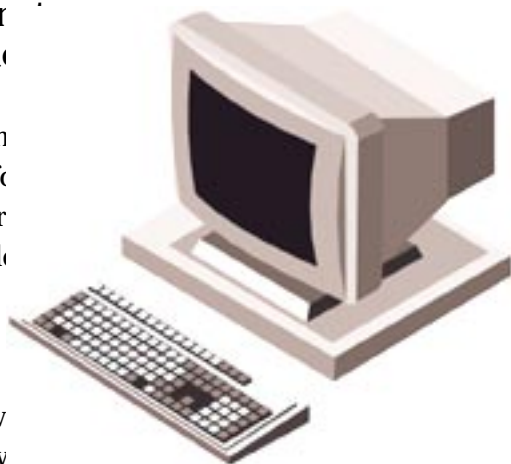
This trend involves bringing back products and themes from the past (e.g. Green Acres theme song to promote the Ford Explorer.) In a recent *FastCompany* article on "Ways to Make Change", Marian Salzman commented that brands matter because people are looking for something to hold onto. She believes that "a sense of tradition matters: even as they embrace new technologies, consumers have grown nostalgic for the innocence and pretechnological simplicity of their childhoods."

4) Downshifting Trend.

More and more people are downshifting by taking drastic steps to streamline their household/financial tasks and shedding clutter that needs to be maintained or insured. People are trying to reduce the stress in their life by switching to lower gears.

5) Internet Continues to Grow.

The internet has plenty of room for growth. There are now over 100 million households in the US alone and two-thirds aren't connected yet. WebTV now provides access to those without computers to access the internet through their TV sets. The internet eliminates size - market presence is a homepage and everyone has the same screen size. Frank Feather, author of "The Future Consumer", predicts that everyone will have their own homepage through which they will live, learn, work, play, shop, and pay. Don't forget to check out our new web site:



<http://www.thechangeagent.com>

and let us know what web sites you find useful.

Other futurists believe that the internet will have the most impact on education - most universities have websites and some are exploring offering courses via the internet. The *Futurist* predicts that we are rapidly moving toward a distributed work force that uses electronic technology to link workers and functions scattered at different sites.

6) The Just-in-Time Work Force.

In the US, the number of individuals employed by temporary agencies has increased 240% in the last 10 years. Many organizations are streamlining operations and reducing costs by outsourcing support functions.



7) Worker/Consumer Revolt.

Around the world and across the US, strikes and protests will dramatically increase as workers and consumers vent their anger against corporations and government policies they see as discriminatory, exploitative and/or unjust (e.g. Texaco, Denny's). Even professionals are revolting - some university faculty members and medical doctors are looking at joining unions to "protect their interests."

To look at the future can be overwhelming. When it comes to future, it is probably best to keep in mind Abraham Lincoln's wisdom, "The best thing about the future is that it only comes one day at a time."

If your organization is undergoing change and could benefit from a customized program which would help your employees empower themselves to deal more productively with the future, please call our office at 1-800-339-0973 to discuss your specific needs or complete the "Is Your Mission Possible?" survey on our website at <http://www.thechangeagent.com>.

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State Medical Society of Wisconsin
United Way of Franklin County
Wright State University

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Joyce Carter,
Assistant Vice President in
Business and Fiscal Affairs
Wright State University



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