



# TECHNO

THE BIG IDEAS THAT  
ARE CHANGING EVERYTHING

# TRENDS

## STOP COMPETING - START INNOVATING

BY DANIEL BURRUS, CEO OF BURRUS RESEARCH



Contrary to popular belief, competing with other companies is counterproductive. No matter what your angle for competing – whether you're competing on price, service, quality, time, design, or anything

else – the unfortunate outcome is you're making yourself too much like everyone else. So even when you're in the lead, someone else eventually matches you, making you compete even more. Unfortunately, the majority of companies are so focused on competing that they're locked in a losing battle – a vicious cycle of one-upmanship.

A better idea is to seek advantage. That means redefining and reinventing your company, your products, or your services so you can jump ahead and stay ahead. It's about moving beyond your competition by nurturing, promoting, and enhancing innovation and original thinking – both individually and within your organization. In other words, you want to become an innovator and go beyond the competitors.

What's the difference between competitors and innovators? No, competitor is not a misprint. It's an original term for those who reflexively compete rather than seek to gain a strategic advantage through innovation.

In short, competitors are usually so caught up in meeting their day-to-day *continued on page 2*

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DAN BURRUS' NEW BOOK FOR 2011

*Flash Foresight: How To See the Invisible and Do The Impossible* will be the lead business book published by HarperCollins for 2011. The scheduled release date is January 4, 2011. Stay tuned for more exciting news on Dan Burrus' new book.

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## STOP COMPETING *(continued from page 1)*

challenges that they can only worry about the future, while innovators see the present only as a stepping-stone they can use to get to a bigger and better future. Which would you rather be? If you're ready to stop being a competitor and start being an innovator, here are a few tips that will help.

### BE FUTURE-ORIENTED

Since you'll be spending the rest of your life in the future, doesn't it make sense to think about it and plan it rather than just let it happen? As you plan your future innovative path, ask yourself these five questions: What path are my competitors on right now? Based on the recent past and present, where are the successful companies most likely to evolve to? What's the logical progression of the industry? How are my customers changing? What are my customers greatest unmet needs both now and in the near future? Your answers will enable you to stop competing and start thinking in terms of innovation. They'll help you open your eyes to the future possibilities so you can stay ahead of the curve rather than simply keep up. Remember: If you want real advantage and innovation, you have to go beyond what you're doing now and plan your future wisely.

### DO WHAT THE MASSES DON'T DO

Most businesses copy successful competitors and then wonder why they aren't further ahead. For example, chances are that in your business you use a word processing program, and if you're like the majority of people, you use Microsoft Word. Did you know that there are over four thousand features in Microsoft Word? How many of those four thousand features do you use on a regular basis? Probably less than ten. Do you think your competitors are using Word the same way you do? Most likely, yes. Taking it a step further, when a new version of Word comes out, your competitors purchase it, just like you. They even use the same features in the new Word program as they did in the old version – again, just like you. The point is that everyone is competing and staying on the same level with others, but few people are going beyond what everyone else does in a way that produces any real advantage or leads to innovation. The key is to dedicate yourself to finding advantage and using it to innovate. Using the word processing program example, ask yourself, "What are the features in Word that my competitors are not using that can give me an edge?" In other words, don't just copy what the competition does; rather, look at what they're doing and then do what they don't do.

### CHANGE YOUR CUSTOMER

If you truly can't find ways to innovate, then analyze to determine if there's a better customer you can go after – one that's better and different than what everyone else is going after. Can you innovate by customizing your product or service for the better customer so that the better customer would want what you offer and not what the competitor offers? This is the process that gives you the advantage, and it all boils down to simply being more innovative on an ongoing basis.

### SHAPING YOUR FUTURE

One thing is certain about the future: competition will intensify. So why play that game when you can own the game? Standing out by innovating again and again! Granted, keeping track of what your competitors are doing is a good idea; however, letting what they're doing dictate your next move is not the best strategy. Instead, focusing on innovation is the way to go for long-term profits. In fact, when you become an innovator rather than a competitor, you'll be the envy of your industry – the company all the others strive to imitate. That's when you'll truly be a leader and have the upper hand and the innovative outlook that enables you to turn tomorrow's opportunities into today's profits.

## TECHNOLOGY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

### “SMARTER” PEN

The recently released Echo smartpen makes note-taking easier than ever. More like a computer than a pen, it tracks everything the user writes down using a tiny, built-in infrared camera and special “dot” paper. At the same time, it links what is written to what is heard through its integrated recording feature. The 8GB version can store up to 800 hours of audio which can be played back at any point by simply tapping the pen to the notes. A micro-USB connector allows both written and audio notes to be transferred to searchable computer files, while simultaneously charging the smartpen's battery. A variety of

downloadable apps can turn Echo into a dictionary, language translator, or a high-tech version of Hangman, to name just a few. And by the end of the year, an audio transcription feature will be available to automatically transcribe audio files into text. Echo retails for \$199 (8GB version) or \$169 (4GB version).

*For information: Livescribe, Inc., 7677 Oakport Street, 12th floor, Oakland, CA 94621; phone: 510-777-0071; fax: 510-777-0159; Web site: [www.livescribe.com](http://www.livescribe.com)*

## JET FUEL FROM ALGAE

An aircraft powered exclusively by biofuel was recently demonstrated at the Farnborough International Airshow in England. The new fuel was refined from specially grown algae, offering a double boost for the environment. First, it reduces reliance on fossil fuels, and second, the algae itself actually consumes carbon dioxide as it grows, creating a “negative” carbon footprint. The plane, a Diamond DA42 New Generation, required only minor modifications to the engine to compensate for the higher energy content of the biofuel as compared with traditional diesel. The algae-based fuel, which can be used on new or existing aircraft, was shown to increase efficiency by 10 percent and decrease fuel consumption by 1.5 liters per hour.

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## 3D CELL PHONE DISPLAY

A new display technology will soon make it possible to view 3D images on your cell phone without the need for special glasses. By layering transparent panels over the LCD, the light is deflected to create a three-dimensional form from eight static images. Touchscreen technology also allows the 3D representation to be rotated 360 degrees horizontally or vertically with a touch of a finger. Another new development in small format displays transposes computer graphics over camera images. This would enable a user to take a picture of their current location using their cell phone and superimpose a computer generated map for easier navigation.

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## MORE TV ON YOUR TABLET

As more and more TV watchers go mobile, major television distributors are looking for ways to grab their share of the online video services market by building tablet-computer applications that offer TV and movies at little or no charge to existing subscribers. Among the providers that have announced plans to broadcast content for iPad and/or Android tablets are Comcast Corporation, Verizon Communications, Time Warner Cable, Dish Network, DirecTV, EchoStar Corporation and Cablevision Systems Corporation. Some will likely necessitate a special set-top box or adaptor, and may even require users to be in their homes, the reason being that broadcast rights are structured differently outside the home. Most will require a user to be a current subscriber, which means that they may run into stiff competition from the TV-everywhere-type services (such as Netflix and Hulu) that already offer TV shows and movies over the Internet for a low monthly subscription rate.

*For information: Web sites: [www.comcast.com](http://www.comcast.com), [www.verizon.com](http://www.verizon.com), [www.timewarnercable.com](http://www.timewarnercable.com), [www.dishnetwork.com](http://www.dishnetwork.com), [www.directv.com](http://www.directv.com), [www.echostar.com](http://www.echostar.com), [www.cablevision.com](http://www.cablevision.com), [www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com), [www.hulu.com](http://www.hulu.com)*

## ACOUSTIC TEXTILES

Researchers at MIT are working on a new type of electronic fiber that can capture and produce sound – a technology that could someday be fashioned into wearable clothing that measures the flow of blood in the body or wallcoverings that act like a surround sound system. The fibers are made from a plastic (polyvinylidene fluoride) that is used in making microphones. When a strong electric field (about 20 times as powerful as those that cause lightning) is applied to the plastic, the molecules line up with all of the fluorine atoms on one side and all of the hydrogen atoms on the other. This gives the material piezoelectric properties, allowing it to react to a range of frequencies. For example, when the fibers are attached to a power supply and

a current is applied, they vibrate and generate sound. The next step will be to make the fibers small enough to be woven into clothing by reducing the diameter from its current size of about 2.5mm to around 50 microns.

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## NEW DIAMOND COATING

A new coating method has been developed that will undoubtedly lend itself to a variety of practical applications including more durable precision tools and lightweight plastic car bodies. The process uses nano-sized diamonds that are synthesized from methane to evenly coat the surface of materials. Unlike conventional methods which require high temperatures (about 700 degrees Celsius) the new system works at temperatures of 80 to 100 degrees Celsius, making it possible to coat a wider array of substrates, including stainless steel and even plastic. The diamonds also enhance the surface strength making them suitable for high performance applications such as ultra-thin drills for penetrating hard materials.

*For information: National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, 1-1-1 Umezono, Tsukuba, Ibaraki 305-8568, Japan; phone: +81-29-861-2000; Web site: [www.aist.go.jp/index\\_en.html](http://www.aist.go.jp/index_en.html)*

## SYNTHETIC MICROBE

A biotech firm recently announced the successful creation of a cell from nothing more than a DNA recipe stored in a computer. Known as M. mycoides JCVI-syn1.0, the synthetic genome, which contains 1.08 million base pairs, represents the first organism on earth that doesn't have a living ancestor. The microbe remains locked away in a freezer while the government and various watchdog agencies work to develop guidelines for regulating DNA synthesis. Although synthetic life forms hold great promise for creating new vaccines, medicines, biofuels and clean water technologies, global policies need to be strictly enforced to prevent what many call a "runaway sorcerer's apprentice."

*For information: Craig Venter, J. Craig Venter Institute, 9704 Medical Center Drive, Rockville, MD 20850; phone: 301-795-7000; Web site: [www.jcvi.org](http://www.jcvi.org)*

## PAPER SOLAR CELLS

The latest development in the quest for inexpensive and easy-to-install solar cells is to print them on paper. The carbon-based dyes are deposited using a technique similar to an inkjet printer and could be used on any number of substrates including plastic, paper, or metal foils. The cells can currently convert sunlight into electricity with an efficiency of only 1.5 to 2 percent, but the low cost and ease of installation could still make them a viable alternative energy source. It's estimated that if 0.3 percent of the U.S. was covered with solar cells that were only 10 percent efficient, they would still produce three times the country's energy needs, including the additional power that would be needed to transition to all-electric vehicles.

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## HYDROGEN CATALYST

Scientists at the U.S. Department of Energy have made an important step toward developing a low-cost, efficient, carbon-neutral method for generating hydrogen. The key is an inexpensive metal catalyst for splitting water molecules. Current processes use precious metals such as platinum, which costs up to \$2,000 an ounce. The new material – a molybdenum-oxo metal complex – is about 70 times cheaper, does not require organic additives, and can operate in water (even sea water) with a turnover frequency of 2.4 moles of hydrogen per mole of catalyst per second.

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