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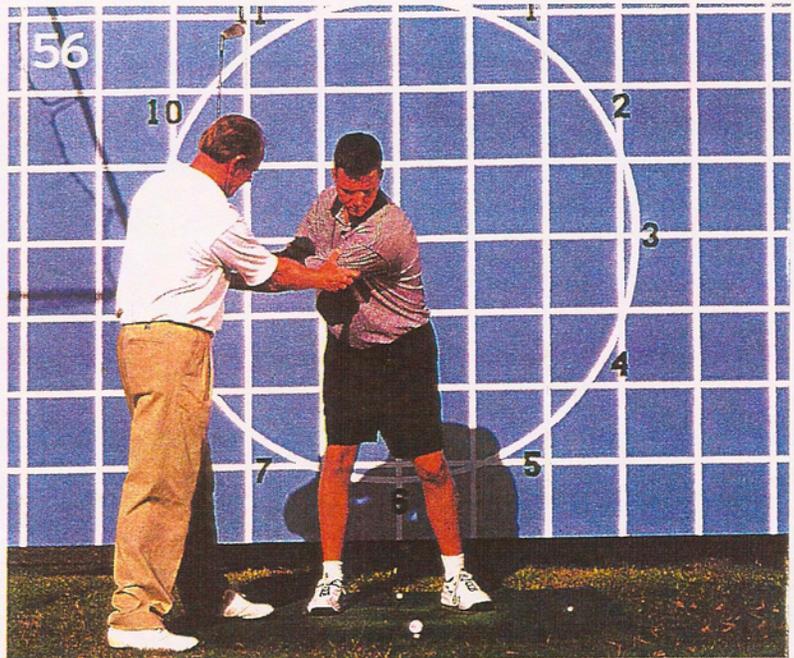




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Things to Come

NANOBOTS COURSING THROUGH YOUR BLOODSTREAM? BRAIN CELLS CONNECTED TO THE WEB? TECHNO-FUTURIST RAY KURZWEIL SAYS PREPARE YOURSELF. BY JOHN CARROLL

Ray Kurzweil gravitated to the scientific limelight at an early age. In 1965, at 17, he won a Westinghouse science award, a meeting with LBJ, and a guest spot on the TV show *I've Got a Secret*. Now fast-forward 35 years to 2000. At 52, Kurzweil won the National Medal of Technology and another presidential handshake, this time from Bill Clinton. In between trips to the White House, he kept quite busy: He helped pioneer speech-recognition technology, launched and sold a series of businesses that grew out of his technological innovations, and authored three books, the most recent being *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (Penguin Putnam, 1999).

Part showman, part scientist, and full-time futurist, Kurzweil, CEO and editor-in-chief of KurzweilAI.Net, has been wowing technology conferences with the big-screen presentation of Ramona,

his hip, female cyber alter ego – a character he uses to help demonstrate how we can reshape ourselves in virtual reality. When he recently sat down with *Spirit*, Kurzweil talked about Ramona and how virtual reality will profoundly alter business, healthcare, and the conditions of human existence over the next 10 to 30 years.

SPIRIT: You've written a lot about the next evolutionary step for mankind: the merger of man and technology. Where is this taking us?

RAY KURZWEIL: In addition to biological technology, computer and communications technology is growing exponentially more powerful and smaller. Within 10 years, computers ... will be embedded in our clothing and eyeglasses; images will be written directly to our retinas; and we will have very high-bandwidth communication to the Internet at all times.

SPIRIT: What will we evolve into, then?

RK: Within 30 years, it will be commonplace to have bil-

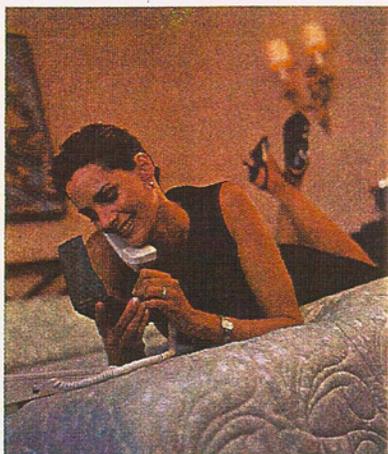
CHAD WINDHAM

HAVING CONSULTED HIS CRYSTAL BALL, RAY KURZWEIL PREDICTS THAT VIRTUAL REALITY WILL LEAD TO PROFOUND CHANGES IN BUSINESS AND HEALTHCARE.


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lions of nanobots – microscopic computerized robots the size of blood cells – traveling through the capillaries of our bloodstream. They will help keep our physical bodies healthy by scouting for pathogens, thereby augmenting our immune system. They will also communicate with our biological neurons through wireless, noninvasive communication. They will communicate with each other on a wireless local area network and wirelessly with the Web. This will provide full-immersion, virtual-reality shared environments incorporating all of the senses [so you can hear, see, and touch the people you're meeting through the Internet.]

Ultimately these nanobots and similar technology will increase our intelligence and allow for the downloading of knowledge. The nanobots can create new interneuronal connections – the connections between neurons, which is where most of our thinking takes place. Since electronic technology is increasing exponentially, we can ultimately multiply our thinking capacity, pattern-recognition faculties, and cognitive abilities by factors of thousands or millions.

SPIRIT: By the second half of this century, you see us capable of “reinstantiating” ourselves – meaning tiny computers will be able to scan our brains and transfer ourselves out of our physical bodies. Just what has to be developed to make this possible?

RK: Brain reverse-engineering is already well underway and further along than most people realize. The nanobots will be capable of scanning local neuron

processes, and the feasibility of this has already been demonstrated, although not yet with the capacity necessary for this scenario. If we scan all of the salient neural details and then re-instantiate – install – information on a neural computer of sufficient capacity, then the neural computer will display the same personality and knowledge and intelligence of the original brain that was scanned.

SPIRIT: You believe that we'll see a continual development of computer speed and miniaturization at an exponential level, with no end in sight. Is this all the inevitable result of the technology that's on the drawing boards today?

RK: The specific paradigm of Moore's Law [that computer power will double roughly every 12 to 18 months], which is shrinking the size of transistors on a flat integrated circuit, will take us out another 10 to 15 years. That alone is sufficient to provide enough processing power to emulate the human brain, by my calculations. However, it will take us longer (until about 2030) to complete the scanning and reverse-engineering of the human brain, which is also needed.

Moore's Law itself was not the first but the fifth paradigm to provide exponential growth of computing. And there will be a sixth paradigm – computing in three dimensions – which is already being researched in many different laboratories. Our brains are organized in three dimensions. We live in a three-dimensional world. Why not compute in three dimensions? There are already three-dimensional circuits working at

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PETER HOEY

1. To Enter: No purchase or obligation necessary. Sweepstakes runs from July 1 - August 14, 2001. To enter without purchase or obligation, complete the entry form on the Southwest Airlines web site (southwest.com/nolanryan). Incomplete entries are not eligible. Entries must be received by August 14, 2001. Use of automated devices is not valid for entry. All entries become property of Sponsor. Entries limited to one (1) per person. Contestants must provide a valid email address. In the event of a dispute over identity of online entrant, entry will be deemed submitted by the holder of the email account on the date the entry was submitted.

2. Drawing: On or about August 15, 2001, independent judges, whose decisions are final, will conduct a random drawing from all eligible entries received. Entrants need not be present to win. All prizes are guaranteed to be awarded. Odds of winning will depend on the total number of eligible entries received.

3. Prize: Twelve (12) Grand Prize packages will be awarded. Each Grand Prize package will consist of roundtrip air travel on Southwest Airlines from closest major airport to winner's residence served by Southwest Airlines for winner and a guest (two [2] roundtrip tickets) to Austin, Texas; three (3) days, two (2) nights double occupancy hotel accommodations for winner and guest (one [1] hotel room per winner) September 28 - 30, 2001; dining with Nolan Ryan for winner and a guest; and a chance to play softball in a game with Nolan Ryan for winner. No substitutions, cash equivalents, or transfers of prize permitted, except at the sole discretion of Sponsor. Winner and travel companion must travel on dates specified by Sponsor. Exact dates are at the discretion of Sponsor. In the event Nolan Ryan is unavailable to attend, an alternate Major League Baseball pitcher will be selected, or the event will be rescheduled at the sole discretion of Sponsor. All persons must depart and return to same airport. Note: Flight service into and out of Dallas (Love Field) is subject to the requirements of the Wright Amendment. Value of Grand Prize is approximately \$1,200.

4. Eligibility: Sweepstakes open to all legal U.S. residents 18 years old and older as of August 14, 2001. Employees of Southwest Airlines Co., its advertising and promotions agencies, their immediate families (spouse and parents, children and siblings and their spouses), and individuals living in the same households of such Employees are ineligible. Contestants must have Internet access as of July 1, 2001. Void where prohibited or restricted by law. Sweepstakes subject to all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. By participating, entrants agree to these official rules and accept decisions of Sponsor as final. Void in Puerto Rico and where prohibited by law. The promotion is offered in the United States only and shall only be construed and evaluated according to United States law. Do not complete entry if you are not located in the United States.

5. To Claim Prize: Winners only will be notified by certified mail and will be required to complete and sign Affidavits of Eligibility and Liability Releases and, where legal, Publicity Releases, which must be returned within seven (7) days after prize notification or prize will be forfeited and awarded to an alternate winner. If prize notification letter is returned undeliverable or unclaimed, the prize will be awarded to an alternate winner in a random drawing. Prize package winners' guests or, if minor(s), their parent(s)/legal guardian(s), must execute Liability Releases and, where legal, Publicity Releases prior to the issuance of travel documents. Unclaimed or undeliverable prizes will be forfeited and awarded to alternate winners. Prize is not transferable or redeemable for cash. Prize is guaranteed to be awarded. Acceptance of prize constitutes permission (except where prohibited) to use winner's name, hometown, and likeness for purposes of advertising, promotion, and publicity in any media without additional compensation.

6. Limitation of Liability: A winner agrees that neither Sponsor, nor their affiliated entities, nor any of the Employees, Officers, Directors, Agencies, or Representatives shall be liable for any injury, loss, or damage due in whole or in part to winner's participation in this Sweepstakes or winner's acceptance, possession, use, or misuse of the awards. Nor are they responsible for printing or typographical errors in any Sweepstakes-related materials; fraudulent, misdirected, or incomplete entries; or transactions that are processed late or incorrectly or are lost due to computer or electronic malfunction. Winner is solely responsible for payment of all federal, state, and local taxes on prize and for any travel or other expenses not specifically mentioned in prize description. Sponsor reserves the right to cancel or modify Sweepstakes if fraud or technical failure compromises the integrity of the Sweepstakes as determined by Sponsor in its sole discretion. This Sweepstakes offer is being made exclusively by Sponsor. Sponsor is not responsible for technical, hardware, software, or telephone failures of any kind; lost or unavailable network connections or fraud; or incomplete, garbled, or delayed computer transmission, whether caused by the Sponsor, user, or by any of the equipment or programming associated with or utilized in the promotion or by any technical or human error that may occur in the process of submissions which may limit a participant's ability to participate in this promotion.

7. Winners' List: Winners' Names List will be published on Southwest Airlines' web site (southwest.com/nolanryan) after September 4, 2001.

8. Sponsor: Southwest Airlines Co., P.O. Box 36611, Dallas, TX, 75235-1611.

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small scales in laboratories. We have plenty of time, at least 10 years, before Moore's Law, which deals with two-dimensional circuits, runs out of steam.

In general, I am talking about technologies that we can touch and feel today - wireless local area networks, distributed computing, brain scanning, brain reverse-engineering, three-dimensional computing. They are not yet at the level needed for scenarios in 2030 or 2040, but then we're not yet in 2030 or 2040.

The result was a moving, three-dimensional model of Ramona. In the live presentations, I wear a motion-capture suit that contains magnetic sensors. Special tracking electronics and computers then track in real-time the motions of my body. These are then converted in real-time into the movement of Ramona. My voice is transformed into Ramona's voice in real-time using special synthesizer technology. Using technology similar to speech recogni-

“ In the future, we will all have the ability to be someone else in virtual reality. We can choose what our image will be. ”

SPIRIT: Can you also take the methodology you developed for the rate of technological change and apply it to economic cycles?

RK: Because information is traveling more quickly, cycles are compressed. Also because we have better information flow, economic downturns are likely to be less severe. Also, there is an overall exponential increase to overall economic activity.

I have graphs that show this has been going on for the entire century. The only noticeable "bump" was the Depression. So we will continue to have business cycles, but they will tend to be faster and less severe, and overall exponential economic growth will continue.

SPIRIT: Back to the present. You've been touring throughout the country with Ramona, your digital alter ego. How was she created?

RK: We started by laser scanning a [real] woman who was close to my vision of Ramona. She was then transformed in the computer into my idea of Ramona.

tion, the phonemes - parts of speech - that I/Ramona are speaking are used to control the movements of Ramona's mouth. This is a very quick overview.

SPIRIT: What prompted you to create Ramona?

RK: One answer is that we all have different personalities inside us that we do not have the opportunity to express. Ramona is a personality I wanted to express. In the future, we will all have the ability to be someone else in virtual reality. We can choose what our image will be in virtual-reality environments, and we are likely to choose different images for different situations. In some cases, this will be for the purpose of entertainment. And in some cases, it will be a way of exploring different kinds of relationships, or different modalities of artistic expression. So at a different level, Ramona is a way of presenting these future possibilities with today's technology. ☺

FREELANCER JOHN CARROLL HAS CONTRIBUTED TO HEALTHCARE BUSINESS, HOUSTON PRESS, AND SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS.