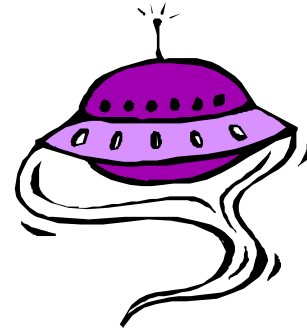


A Futuristic Ride into Cyberspace and Beyond



MARLENE B. BROWN, MS, CMC, CSP *Clark Mills, N.Y*

At a recent keynote presentation, my goal was to provide some solutions to the questions facing companies and associations in today's global economy. I planned to predict some trends facing theirs and other industries, share some concepts on leveraging technology to gain a competitive advantage, and demonstrate how to combine high-tech marketing with high-touch salesmanship for high-return business profits. While these are now my areas of expertise, as a speaker, eight years ago this little kid from a farm in upstate New York didn't even know how to turn on a computer! My journey into embracing technology has been a fascinating and challenging one.

In 1994, I attended my first Comdex convention, as one of more than 200,000 attendees at the world's largest annual technology show. That same year, I founded NSA's Technology PEG, and chaired their first Technology Learning Lab. In just three years, my "techie trek" had gone from a neophyte use of typewriters and yellow legal pads to a fairly advanced user of, and presenter on, the many facets of technology. Perhaps that's why my mom had given me the middle name of Alice. I had stepped through a looking glass into a whole new world. Why should we embrace all of this? Let me share with you how you can use technology to meet your needs.

When people bring me in as a business futurist speaker or marketing strategist, they want to understand why they must adapt to the change, get suggestions on how to manage this change and understand the leadership skills required

to become first in their industries. They also want to know which technology tools will help them improve their organization, add value for the customers, and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. I tell them the two essentials are contact management programs and e-mail addresses, with Web sites a close third. The future lies in database relationship marketing and e-commerce.

The Internet has revolutionized the way we communicate and the way we do business in a short period of time. Remember when you didn't have a fax machine? An Internet connection is as necessary today as the fax machine and the telephone. Online systems are the fastest growing delivery method for business information. Digital data takes up less space than hardcopy print, it's easier to store, and can be manipulated in ways not possible with print. Make it a point to move information and

knowledge you share with customers and suppliers into digital form.

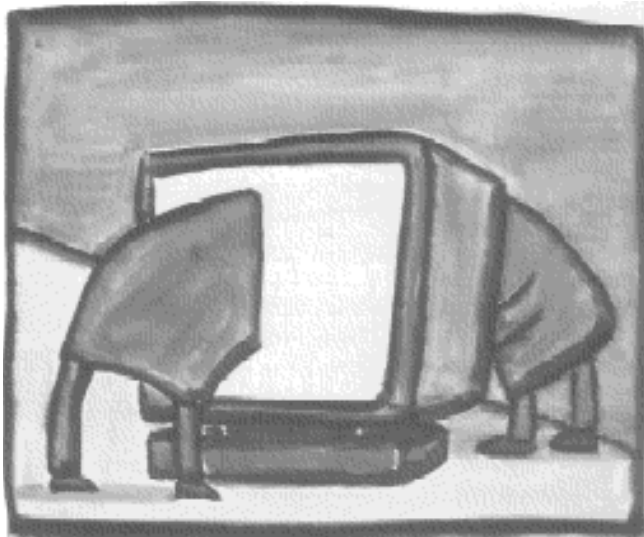
A number of recent studies show some interesting trends: 61 percent of all homes that own a PC access the Internet; the number of PCs in the workplace connected to the 'Net increased by 52 percent (*Advertising Age*); the number of adults age 19 to 51 online in 2002 will outnumber the online populations of any other age segment (Jupiter Communications); shopping on the Internet nearly quadrupled this year to over \$5 billion (Marketing Corp. of America); 34 percent of 2,000 people surveyed (or 680) reported personal home use of the Internet is replacing time spent watching TV (Price Waterhouse).

Speakers and consultants who understand they are "information providers" are positioning themselves as leading edge. We have gone from the "information age" to the "digital futures age of connectivity." In order to take advantage of this, we need to utilize the technology available to us. Consider what you use postal mail for, how often you use the fax machine to communicate, and how often you're now using e-mail to communicate both knowledge and information, as well as to stay in touch with your clients.

If you sell to consumers, or sell to people who sell to consumers, you need a Web presence to help achieve your strategic goals. With a storefront on the Web 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, you can expand your present methods of marketing to reach a broader market. Not only can you take advantage of direct sales on your Web site, you can position your company in a particular market, advertise with graphical brochures, provide customer service and promote other products and services.

In today's competitive global economy, it's essential to embrace a different perspective in managing the new technologies available, embracing constant change, while acquiring or contracting out the technology skills necessary to become first in our industries. Everywhere you look, *www.com* has become commonplace. I believe the most powerful technology tool in existence today is the Internet and

the World Wide Web. Not only must we be there—*studies increasingly show people perceive more value in companies who have a Web site*—we must also be cross-linking with others in a collaborative marketing venture that makes it easier for the one billion Internet customers expected by the year



2000 to find our services and products. Quite a jump from the 181,000 users at the end of 1993, the first year of the Web.

While a Web site is a supplement to—not a substitute for—your other marketing efforts, used correctly, the Web can enable you to reach markets you never imagined. Along with other Internet tools, the Web can create a decidedly unfair advantage for you over your competition, if they do not understand the power of the Net. Last fall, a meeting planner for a major corporate client of mine found my Web site—*www.technotouch.com*—while surfing and hired me to be their wrap up

keynoter at their Asia-Pacific Executive Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia. To gain this advantage, your online presence must be continually promoted and properly marketed.

Many people jump onto the 'Net without realizing that marketing on the Internet takes time and a solid plan. You have to set goals, and know how to attain them. Every prospective buyer of your products and services has a finite amount of personal bandwidth available to hear your marketing message. When I create Web sites for clients, I remind them that content will always be king. This is a market where the numbers are compelling, the start-up costs and inventory are relatively low, and sales will only keep growing.

We need to keep in mind that the most important use of technology, and the 'Net are the business application.

One of the key component in leveraging technology to gain competitive advantage is in linking Web sites with like-minded partners. I have pages on my Web site where I cross-link with fellow speakers, consultants and meeting planners. This will enable all of us to take advantage of the multi-billion dollar business we'll see as the convenience of a "virtual world" continues to be preferred by more and more people. Riding those E1-Techno waves will be a shared adventure, the likes of which we can't even imagine.

Welcome to the other side of the looking-glass. Enjoy the journey

See our Web site for more information www.nsaspeaker.org

Marlene B. Brown, MS, CSP, is an internationally recognized business futurist, marketing strategist, and keynote speaker. She is also the author of *TechnoTouch: Managing Change for 21st Century Leadership*. Marlene can be reached at (315)853-1318, marlene@technotouch.com or via her Web site at www.technotouch.com

