



**The Future
of Work...**
unlimited

Future of Work Agenda

A Free Monthly Newsletter
November 2011

www.thefutureofwork.net

Sometimes words fail me. That's why the feature article this month is focused on visual communication—how pictures, graphs, charts, and sketches so often have far more meaning than “mere” words.

I've been listening carefully to my clients and colleagues recently, trying to tune in to their visions of the future of work, both broadly speaking and in their own organizations. I've been struck by how frequently many of them rely on images and even photographs to communicate their ideas, hopes, and beliefs (often unconsciously, using words to describe the visual images).

Yet most of us are almost illiterate when it comes to understanding the power and the value of images. We tend to take them for granted. With some unfortunate exceptions we all see the real world through our own eyes all day, every day. We use visual metaphors all the time; after all, when we talk about the future we usually speak of our “vision” (as I did just now to refer to how people think about the future of work).

Why then do so many of us resort to words, words, and more words when we prepare reports or make presentations? Heck, I am guilty of it right here. I just can't seem to avoid writing a newsletter without relying almost completely on words.

Sure, if you are an architect or an interior designer, or a graphic artist, your visual sense is highly trained, and you are “tuned in” (to use a radio metaphor, not a visual one) to pictures and other kinds of images. But you are in a distinct minority.

Anyway, I hope all of you will find my feature article (“[Picture That!](#)”) useful and even provocative. And, please, strive to use more images and fewer words in your presentations!

I have also included [a report on the October “Quick Poll”](#) in which I asked you to identify how much time you spend during a normal work week paying attention to the world outside your own organization, to the future, and to sharing your ideas about the future with your colleagues. The responses to the survey were more than a little surprising, and a bit discouraging as well.

Then, in [The Readers' Corner](#), I've reprinted a strong response—and rejoinder—to last month's article on essential skills for the self-employed. I hope you'll read David McCarty's thoughtful comments.

Finally, I share with you my recent and impending comings and goings—the events and projects that are filling up my calendar these days (“[What's Happened/Happening](#)”).

Enjoy.

Click on any Headline below to access the full story.

1. [FEATURE ARTICLE: PICTURE THAT!](#)

It's been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. But the vast majority of business presentations and meetings seem to depend far more on words than on visual images. Why does the business world ignore one of the most powerful tools for communicating, persuading, and creating memorable experiences?

2. [A FUTURE OF WORK QUICK POLL](#)

How much time do you spend thinking about, and talking about, the shape of the future that your own organization will experience? Please help us develop a deeper understanding of the state of strategic planning and your own views by completing a very brief survey.

3. [THE READERS' CORNER](#)

In October we published a short article by Lauren Bailey on the skills needed by entrepreneurs and the self-employed. To our mild surprise Lauren's suggestions prompted a vigorous rejoinder from David McCarty. We document the "debate" here.

4. [WHAT'S HAPPENED/HAPPENING?](#)

Brief announcements and notes about where we've been, and will be, holding forth in public conversations and other activities.

THE FULL STORIES

As usual, your comments and reactions to any of these articles are more than welcome. Please [send your thoughts to us](#) at any time.

1) FEATURE: PICTURE THAT!

Jim Ware

A picture is worth a thousand words (a very old saying)

I once worked for a textbook publishing firm based in Chicago, Illinois. In the midst of the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, the President of the firm and I had a fascinating (nonpolitical) conversation about the power of the televised images of the confrontations between the police and the rioters (images that were eerily familiar to some of what we're all seeing right now as the Occupiers clash with authorities in Oakland, California, New York City, and other cities all over the world).

Anyway, the President and I were sharing our observations about the power of television to bring the unrest in the streets right into our living rooms. I also commented on how impactful television had been in exposing the entire country to the Vietnam jungles and battles with the Vietcong during that horrendous period in American history. Those images had certainly contributed mightily to the antiwar protests that filled the late 1960's.

The President agreed with me about the power of television, but then he added that the editors in our firm would certainly agree with me that “a picture is worth a thousand words”—if they could write the thousand words.

I’ve never forgotten that comment, partly because it is so sadly true. In spite of the continuing “invasion” of television and online video into our lives, the fact remains that most of us are still heavily dependent on the written word, even though visual images convey far more information, far more quickly.

To be completely candid, I live with, and by, words. I am a voracious reader; and I write several thousand words almost every day. I think with my fingers on the keyboard. And the availability of word processors, email, text messaging, and the plethora of blogs, wiki’s, and other online text (along with text-driven search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing) has certainly made the written word an even more central part of our lives today than it was back in 1968.

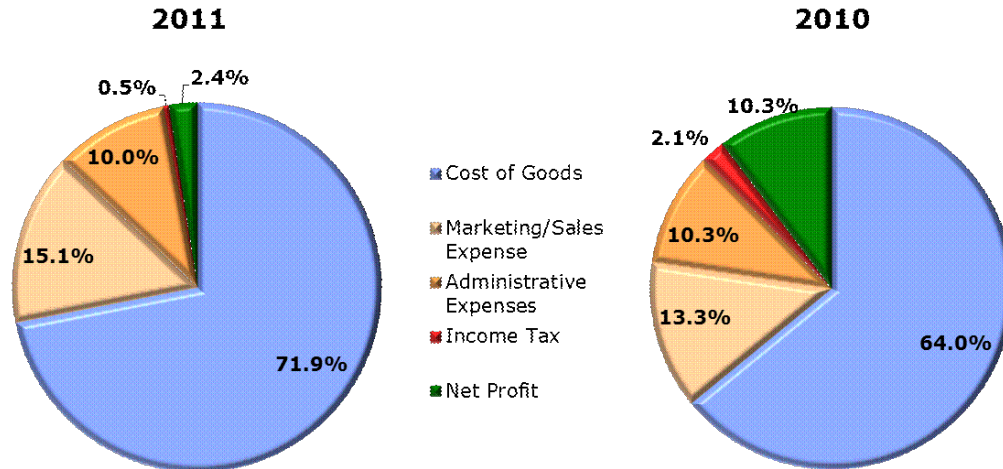
Words are certainly important, and I value good writing as much as anyone does. But the real power of words comes from their ability to construct visual images in our minds. In fact, we use metaphors of images all the time. What is a “corporate vision” if not an metaphor for a picture of the future?

To be fair, as human beings in the 21st century we certainly depend on both words and visual images as we think, imagine, and communicate with each other. It’s my sense, however, that many of us are overly reliant on words, even though we usually grasp meaning more quickly and with more depth when we have access to pictures. And by “pictures” I mean photographs, charts, graphs, cartoons, sketches, diagrams, maps, and every other kind of graphic image you can think of.

And those examples are all static images. Let’s not forget the central role that video plays in our lives today. We go to movie theaters; we watch television for news, dramas, comedies, and sporting events. Many of us attend live theater and music concerts, as much to see the show as to hear it. The epitome of success for an author is to sell the book rights to Hollywood, and to see the story turned into an on-screen “moving picture.”

There is no question that pictures can convey far more information, and vastly more meaning, than tables of text. Here’s a simple example from the business world: a table of statistics followed by a chart created from the same data:

	2011	2010
Revenue (\$000,000)	23425	19452
Cost of Goods	16852	12459
Marketing/Sales Expense	3542	2589
Administrative Expenses	2347	1995
Profit before Tax	684	2409
Income Tax	116	410
Net Profit	568	1999



In my humble opinion, it's a lot easier to see how the increases in Cost of Goods Sold and Marketing/Sales Expenses have eroded profits when you look at the pie charts than when you read the table with the raw data. Notice too how color helps to highlight the key areas in question.

Given the vast array of visual media available to us today, isn't it surprising that we don't make better use of imagery in the business world?

I believe that part of the deterioration of visual imagery in business actually lies at the feet of technology (there's a visual image for you, right there). Even though in 2011 we now have access to very powerful data analysis and visualization software, we have spent the last 30+ years living with crude digital tools that made it very difficult to embed any natural drawings into presentations and reports. Let's face it; PowerPoint® and Word® were not really designed to include hand-made drawings as a core part of the application.

But in fairness, it's only been in the last few years, with the introduction of tablet computers and touch-sensitive screens, that our digital tools could actually capture anything other than keystrokes from a traditional keyboard. Now, however, we have no excuses. With tablet computers, with Smartboards® that capture, digitize, and transmit hand-drawn graphics, and with high-definition desktop webcams, we have no reason any more for "bullets to boredom" presentations, or for meetings that rely exclusively on the written or even the spoken word.

I have recently become aware of, and very sensitive to, the power of visual images in communication and learning. I am personally committed to eliminating bullet point lists of all kinds from my presentations, and to taking meeting notes that include many more sketches and diagrams than the endless lines of words that now fill my notebooks.

I owe much of this re-awakening to the simple but profound book [Visual Meetings](#), by David Sibbet of [The Grove Consultants International](#) (I mentioned the book briefly in the "[My Bookshelf](#)" section of the October issue of this newsletter). David has just recently published a sequel, [Visual Teams](#), which I also recommend highly.

I have also been influenced by a profound book that my wife Cindy has recommended for many years. It's called [Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain](#), by Betty Edwards. I don't think of myself as much of an artist, but as Betty Edwards points out, very few of us do.

As children all of us are creative, uninhibited artists; it's not until the adults in our lives begin critiquing our sketches and telling us that we aren't any good at drawing that most of us self-censor ourselves and stop trying to represent ideas visually.

As you spend time over the next several months in meetings and in preparing your own reports and presentations, think hard about how to visualize the ideas you are creating and sharing. A picture is truly worth lots more than a thousand words; visual images are central to our understanding of our lives and our emotions. Shouldn't they be a much bigger part of our work as well?

I'll stop here, because I've gone well over my own self-imposed limit of 1,000 words for this article. Could I have said all of this with one picture? Somehow I doubt it. I do hope, however, that I've at least piqued your curiosity about a terribly important, but almost extinct, arrow in your communications quiver (that's a deliberate attempt to leave you with another visual image).

One final comment (I can't resist): If you aren't embedding visual images and rich stories that call up visual images in your strategic planning efforts, you are missing one of the most powerful ways I know of to build understanding, consensus, and emotional commitment to your ideas.

What do you think? [Please send your comments directly to me](#) or post a comment on the blog version of the newsletter. I'd love to help you and your organization "see" the future more clearly.

[RETURN TO HEADLINES](#)

2) FUTURE OF WORK QUICK POLL

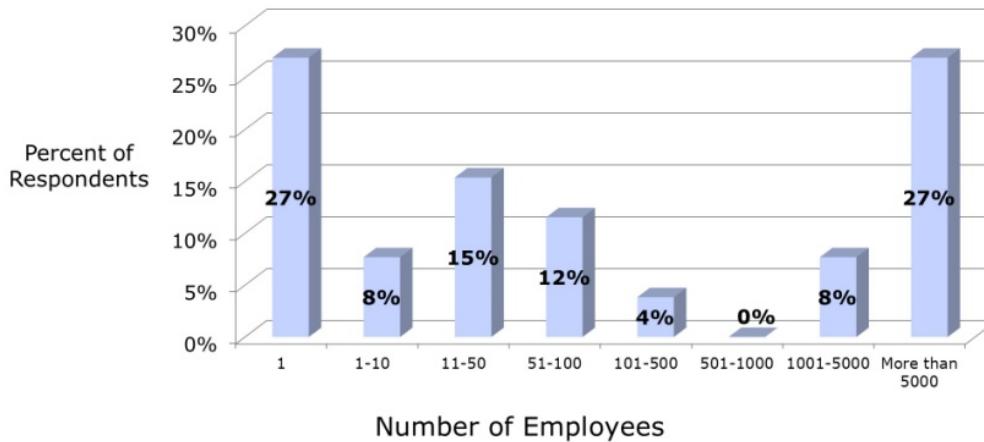
How much time do you spend thinking about, and talking about, the shape of the future that your organization will experience? We asked some very simple questions like that in our October Quick Poll.

We opted for simplicity and a quick partial look at strategic planning, rather than any extensive, complex view. 26 of you were generous enough to respond, for which we are very grateful. We know that's a small sample, so we make no claims of statistical validity. However, the results are nevertheless indicative of a pattern we should all be uncomfortable about.

Our brief analysis of what you told us shows that while some organizations take the future very seriously, and devote significant time and energy to understanding its shape, many others spend hardly any time at all thinking or talking about the future. In the face of the uncertainties and pace of change we all know are affecting every organization, that's a real cause for concern.

First, an overview of the respondents. The sample had a very bimodal distribution of firms: 35% of you work for organizations with over 5,000 employees, while another 35% are either self-employed or work with less than 10 other people.

Figure One: Size of Organizations



The functional areas represented ranged across a wide spectrum:

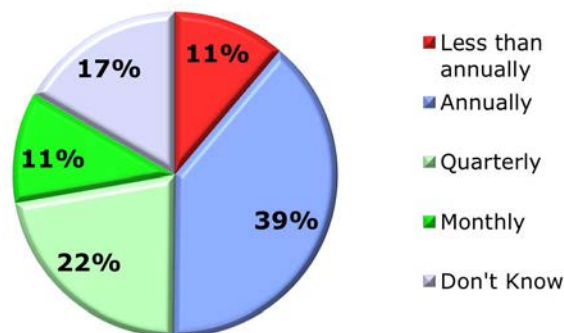
- Owner/CEO/President 24%
- Consulting/Coaching/Research 28%
- Marketing/Sales 8%
- Real Estate/Facilities Mgt. 8%
- Other 20%

The 24% of the respondents who are senior business executives come almost exclusively from the smaller companies, while the Marketing/Sales and Real Estate/Facilities executives generally come from much larger organizations (those with more than 1000 employees)

Now, what did we discover about the way these organizations approach strategic planning and think about the future?

Almost three-fourths of all respondents (72%) do construct a formal long-range strategic plan. For large organizations, the number is 89%. In itself that is not surprising. However, 50% of all respondents update their plan once a year or less; only a third (33%) update the plan quarterly or more often, which seems like the minimum time frame needed given the immense uncertainty in the current economy.

Figure Two: Frequency of Plan Update



Now comes the really interesting part. We observed the following back in the September article, "[Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow](#)":

*In their classic text, **Competing for the Future**, [Gary] Hamel and [C.K.] Prahalad reported that most senior executives spend less than 40% of their time focused on the world outside their own organization, only about 30% thinking about the next three to five years, and no more than 20% of their time talking with their colleagues about the future to build a collective view. In other words, only about 2.4% of management time (40% x 30% x 20%) is focused on building a corporate view of the future (Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad, [Competing for the Future](#), p. 4.).*

This Quick Poll included three questions that enabled us to reproduce that kind of analysis for our respondents. Here's what you told us:

- Average amount of time focused on the external environment: 20%
- Average amount of time focused on the next 3-5 years: 15%
- Average amount of time in conversation with peers about the future: 19%

That translates into **only 0.6%** of management time being spent building a corporate view of the future (20% x 15% x 19%). And **that** is only one-fourth the amount of corporate time focused on the future that Hamel and Prahalad found among senior executives way back in 1994.

0.6% is an appallingly low number! Faced with increased complexity, increased volatility, and increased uncertainty, how can any senior executive justify spending so little time trying to understand the future and building a shared view of it?

Isn't it time to begin thinking much more seriously about what lies ahead? We all know, as I have pointed out on numerous occasions, that the future is less predictable now than at any time I can remember. But throwing your hands up and burying your head in the sand (apologies for the horribly mixed metaphors—note the visual imagery too) is no way to deal with the future.

We'll comment about this issue in more detail in future articles and blog posts, but the most obvious advice I can offer is to start right now setting aside more time in your already-overloaded week to scan the environment, to build scenarios (see "[Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow](#)," September, 2011), and to talk with your colleagues about the future every chance you get ("[Don't Stop Talking About Tomorrow](#)," October, 2011).

And don't forget to use as many pictures and other visual images as you can ("[Picture This!](#)" in this newsletter).

[RETURN TO HEADLINES](#)

3) THE READERS' CORNER

Last month we printed a brief thought piece prepared by Lauren Bailey, "[Three Traits Every Self-Employed Individual Must Have](#)." We thought it was both thoughtful and provocative. However, it generated an interesting reaction from our good friend and colleague David McCarty, the founder and President of the Chicago Design Network, a Midwestern architecture and design firm. With David's permission, we reprint his entire comment here (and recommend that you click on the link above to go back and review Lauren's original article).

“Jim:

“I can only guess you printed this article to see if anybody was out there. Like the frustrated professor who starts to spew vitriol simply to see if even one of his students is listening and willing to participate in an intellectual discussion. Although technically I am not self-employed, my small organization certainly resembles self-employment. And, without question, the field of architecture has a very high percentage of self-employed. From my perspective I don’t think Lauren got a single key trait correct.

“Far and away, the traits I see are polar opposites of those Lauren mentions. Motivation is almost always external. Rent, food and family responsibility drive talented, yet underappreciated, professionals to look for a better life. A strong sense of self-worth makes it easy for them to see that someone else is making far more money from their talents than they are, while the fear of being let go in an overcrowded job market is ever present. In fact, in my experience the key trait of the self-employed is not entrepreneurship, but self-preservation.

“As I see it, the growth of the legion of self-employed is not the result of the great American Dream, but more the abusive and exploitative practices that corporations heap on today’s professionals. It is wonderful that many can improve their lot and reap the benefits of self-determination, but it is also sad that so many are not respected. I don’t know any self-employed in the 1%.

“Occupy the Future!”

David McCarty
Chicago Design Network
dave.mccarty@chicagodesignnetwork.com

[RETURN TO HEADLINES](#)

4) WHAT’S HAPPENED/HAPPENING?

Recent Activity

Work on the Move

Work on the Move: Driving Strategy and Change in Workplaces a new book on workplace strategy published by the IFMA Foundation, is now available! It was officially launched on October 26 at [World Workplace in Phoenix in October](#). Jim wrote a core chapter on change management, and he will be moderating the book launch session on Wednesday morning, October 26, at World Workplace. Pick up a copy of this very important book at your earliest convenience. You can order it online from the IFMA Foundation at this link:

<http://www.ifmafoundation.org>

Research on the Future of Work

We have just completed two focused research projects on flexible work and remote collaboration (both sponsored by [Citrix Online®](#)). The first, “The Future of Business Collaboration,” looks at how mobile technologies, and personal video in particular, are impacting remote collaboration.

The second project is an update of a paper that we co-authored in 2008 with Charlie Grantham: "Flexible Work: Rhetoric and Reality." We've just completed a new survey to get current perspectives on how mobility and flexible work programs have grown (we know they haven't shrunk!) and evolved. Our updated report will be published later this year (the 2008 report is available any time, on request).

Jim will also be leading a free public webinar for Citrix Online® on November 30, on the future of business collaboration. You can register for the webinar at the following link:

<http://learn.gotomeeting.com/forms/113011-NA-G2MC-WBR-SM?ID=701000000005rAU>

We're also supporting several individual clients to help them continue building the future of work within their own organizations.

Getting Out and About

Check our [online calendar](#) any time for specific travel and event information.

Roundtable on the Future of Work.

In partnership with the [FutureWork Forum](#), a globally active consortium based in London, we are leading an invitation-only Roundtable on the Future of Work in early December. We are very pleased that our long-time friend and client Diane Coles, Director of Workplace Solutions at SCAN Health, will be hosting the event at SCAN's award-winning Long Beach headquarters facility. And we are very excited that Citrix Online® is sponsoring the event as well. Look for reports of the conversations and our call to action following the completion of the Roundtable.

And. . .

If we're in your area and have a few minutes, we'd love to see you for breakfast, lunch, dinner (depending on our other commitments), or "refreshments" any time after 5 PM local time (and you know what that means).

We're doing our best to publish our travel schedule, including both public appearances and private client work, on the calendar that's embedded in our website at:

http://www.thefutureofwork.net/news_events.html

And please follow us on Twitter for more current updates on the future of work and our future plans: <http://www.twitter.com/thefutureofwork>

Give us a shout or send us a note, and if we can squeeze out some time, we'd love to say hello and share some good ideas the old-fashioned way: face-to-face, glass in hand.

[RETURN TO HEADLINES](#)

This issue of *Future of Work Agenda* was produced by Jim Ware of *The Future of Work...unlimited*. We encourage your comments, suggestions, and submission of materials for possible future publication.

We also want to express our appreciation to our Production Editor Lise LaTorre for her outstanding work on this issue, and on every issue of this newsletter for the past nine years. It couldn't happen without her.

Please contact [Jim Ware](#) anytime.

To subscribe to *Future of Work Agenda*, [click here](#) and register on our web site. ***Please pass this newsletter on to other interested individuals and encourage them to subscribe as well.*** The newsletter is free, and will remain free as long as possible.

To end your subscription, send a message to newsletter@thefutureofwork.net and write Unsubscribe in the Subject line. For republication rights, contact [Jim Ware](#).