



## **‘Fast Five Trends For Right Now’**

**By Mike Walsh**

The only thing worse than the current scourge of articles about impending global economic disaster are sci-fi styled pieces on future innovations unlikely to even happen in your lifetime. Trends are useful – but in my view, anything beyond 2-5 years is pure fiction. The seeds of mass market change are always with us, percolating away in the background – you just have to pay attention. Here are five I’m tracking right now....

### **1. Cloud**

It’s ironic but even as the price of personal storage plummets, we find ourselves storing more and more of our content elsewhere. People have been talking about Cloud Computing forever, but suddenly it just happened. Almost everything we now create – documents, videos, photos, contacts and schedules – is easily kept online. The driver of this trend is not storage, but rather connectivity. Stuff is simply more useful when other people can see it - photos are more fun when people can comment on them, documents more relevant when co-workers can collaborate on them, and company data more insightful when it can be benchmarked against your peers. Like a webpage that no one links to, content on a hard drive sitting on your desk is a fraction as valuable as content floating in the Cloud.

### **2. Cheap**

Personal tech is becoming cheap. And no, it’s not because of deflation. If you were watching the top 25 lists at Amazon at Christmas, you would notice that most of the items in the electronics category were Netbooks. Netbooks took everyone by surprise. Small, inexpensive and with great battery life – bare-bone computing bucks the trend that PCs should get more powerful with every generation. But here is the curious thing - in a way, we are still on the ski slopes of Moore’s Law. It’s just that now the entire Internet with its billions of servers, network nodes and storage farms, has become the world’s most powerful computer. Whether its communication, research or just fun - most of our daily computing activities can be executed using nothing more than a web browser and a wireless internet connection. Of course, the cheap trend will not just impact PCs. Across the board, consumers are trading quality and fidelity for convenience and social connectivity. CDs replaced by MP3, DVDs by online video, HD camcorders for cheap Flip video cameras, and now laptops for Netbooks. Expect more categories to follow.

### **3. Solid**

Memory is going solid state. That means no more moving parts, no hard disk parking errors, greater speed and reliability. It started a decade ago as flash cards for cameras. Last year, the inconceivable happened - solid state memory turned up in hard drives for laptops. Soon it will be standard. There is a new architecture coming where our personal devices will be constantly connected to content and contacts via wireless broadband. In this scenario, local storage will work more like RAM - caching what we need locally and fast, rather than what we do now – bulky hard drives to keep copies of everything at hand.

#### **4. Ubiquitous**

That of course raises the question, what does it mean to be constantly connected? How we access the Web influences the ultimate nature of it. Consider the experience of the US as compared to Japan. In the US, most consumers accessed the Internet through fixed cable broadband while in Japan, the most popular gateway to Web content was through mobile devices. Not surprisingly, Web behaviour and content developed in very different ways in each country. In my view, the next wave of access innovation is ubiquity – a network that is continuously accessible and typically accessed without deliberate intervention by the user. Ubiquitous access will have powerful implications for how the Web evolves. Your bedside radio will adjust its clock from the Web, your TV will download your favourite TV shows, your phone will update its address book from your social network, and the photo frame on your desk will display pictures that your daughter is taking on her holiday in real time. There is no magic to this. In fact, you may not even notice. In the same way you don't need to understand phone technology to make a call, the Internet will gradually disappear from view.

#### **5. Overlay**

Here is the final, and in some ways most powerful trend – augmented reality. You might have noticed recent video games such as “Eye of Judgment” for Playstation, using toy cameras to project 3D animations over trading cards. That kind of technology is gradually appearing in phones. Already iPhone and Android based phones offer applications capable of cross referencing your GPS co-ordinates and pictures taken with your phone with product databases to give you reviews and local data. That's only the beginning. Eventually with micro projectors or enhanced eyewear, the Web will become a persistent overlay onto the real world – providing us with content tailored to our physical contexts.

So that's the fast five in five fast paragraphs. I could elaborate but in a way, they are all expressions of the same point which most of us knew ten years ago - the Web changes everything. Even the Web.