

STORY SHERIDAN WINN • ILLUSTRATION FRANK GRIMES

# FORTUNE SELLERS

THINGS CHANGE SO FAST, IT'S A JOB IN ITSELF TO SIFT OUT THE NEXT BIG THING. HOW DO THE FUTURISTS DO IT AND WHAT WILL BE HOT IN 2011?

Since history has been recorded, there has been evidence of the human desire to peek into the future. The ancient Chinese practised scapulimancy by reading the cracks on ox bones thrown into the fire, while the Greeks consulted the Delphic oracle. The Romans believed "praemonitus, praemunitus" – forewarned is forearmed – and few would doubt the effectiveness of their military strategy.

It was under the aegis of military and government that the first professional futurist organisations, such as the RAND Corporation and SRI International, began, in the 1940s. These non-profit research institutes studied long-range planning, trend watching and scenario development. By 1966, *Future Shock* author Alvin Toffler was teaching one of the first university courses devoted to the future at New York's The New School for Social Research.

Today, futurists come in many guises, including mathematician, social demographer, philosopher, marketer, risk analyst, investment manager, corporate strategist and cultural critic. Disciplines might include systems theory or evolutionary biology. As technology reaches more deeply into so many aspects of our lives, speeding everything up, consumer trends come and go fast across the radar.

The world of the futurists is sometimes encapsulated as "the three Ps and a W": the possible, probable and preferential futures, plus a wildcard. To help tap the shifting moods, *AFR BOSS* spoke to five leading futurists to garner some insights. We also share 20 trends expected to influence how we live, work, play and do business in 2011.



## BUILT ENVIRONMENT

CHRIS LUEBKEMAN, DIRECTOR GLOBAL FORESIGHT AND INNOVATION, ARUP GROUP

CHRIS LUEBKEMAN gives a compelling presentation – a look back at society's imaginings of what our 21st-century future would be: from food pills and travel à la *The Jetsons*, to the moody brutality of *Bladerunner*. These fanciful ideas underscore his point that imagining change without context gets you nowhere and we tend to under-imagine our futures. Luebke is an educator who has trained as a geologist, engineer and architect. His focus is the built environment and how we will live and work in future cities with constrained resources. He brings his problem-solving skills together with his design thinking to project plausible stories of how life might be in 10, 20, 30 years.

"Because we're responsible for the creation of something, we have a legacy at Arup," he says. "We have one toe planted on the ground and we reach to the sky."

Arup Group's forecast team comprises 12 people, increasing to 20 for specific projects. It includes a physicist, art curator, economist, human-computer interface expert, demographer, ex-banker, lighting designer and architect.

"The strength of the team is that they all have their own projects, networks and communities of expertise," Luebke says. "When we come together, the discussions are fascinating. We might discuss something that could become a trend or have a factual conversation about the energy flow of nations or body energy in a room. A good futurist is insanely curious," Luebke says. "I'm always asking 'why' and am fascinated by life. I talk to mechanics, astro-physicists, cooks and waiters, and I listen with intent. Everyone on my team is passionate and curious."

One pitfall is searching for or believing in singularity. "There's no singular future," Luebke says. "It has to be seen in multiples and multiple possibilities. There's a huge disparity in the value of life. If you ask, 'What will the world look like?', do you mean it will look like Copenhagen or Zimbabwe? If you look at planet Earth as a whole, the current condition of living creatures is mind-boggling."

Luebke thinks some companies create an official future to convince shareholders they "have the graph". "The unfortunate thing is, many of them believe it – and that's a recipe for disaster," he says.

## AUSTRALIA: THE NEXT 10

Luebke believes the issue will lie in Australia's growing dependency on China. "Australia will have to deal with Taiwan," he says. "How it reacts will dictate its image of itself and its stature. Second, Australia is at a demographic turning point – changing from an Anglo society into a new society. It'll be challenging, but it's a wonderful opportunity."

## AIR SUPPLY

KRISTINA DRYZA, FREELANCE FUTURIST



KRISTINA DRYZA was raised in Adelaide. She has been based in Tokyo since 2008. Her clients have included BSKyB and Virgin Group. She is known for "visioning" topics such as "temporariness and the fragility of life", in the context of design, trends, and innovation.

"I interpret and translate the context and emotions driving emerging consumer trends, so the agency not only discovers what's next, but what's important," Dryza says. She works solo but has a loose group of collaborators. She has projects in Asia, Europe and the US and gets called in at the start to be agent provocateur. "I ask the questions the team is too fearful to ponder," she says.

She browses galleries, channel surfs, and reads magazines in which she has no personal interest. "Within that disinterest, words and phrases start calling," she says. "To me, inspiration is about application: making an imagined future real."

Context is crucial. "It's the relationship between things that matter," Dryza says. "I figure out how parts function as a cohesive

whole. There are lots of trends. It's how you put them together that's the differentiator."

Dryza believes in new combinations, rather than new ideas. These come from combining general and specific knowledge. "General knowledge is an interest in the way the wider world functions," she says. "Specific knowledge is the detail of the problem you're trying to solve. The more of each type you have, the greater the choice of combinations. "There's a wonderful moment in trends research, when all your disparate sources of information synthesise into a resounding signal that gives you a purpose and direction to follow."

"The trick is to understand the philosophy, emotions and values driving a trend," she says. "For example, luxury is being redefined as products, services and experiences that deepen one's understanding and appreciation of life. A handbag design is easy to copy. Much harder to imitate is a sensation or way of looking at the world."

## READING THE AIR

"It's about what's 'in the ether', rather than being right or wrong," Dryza says. "Whether it manifests into a tangible product or service is another thing. I lay out the landscape of what could happen. The skill lies in reading the air."

## AD AGENCY X-FACTOR

MARIAN SALZMAN – PRESIDENT, NORTH AMERICA, EURO RSCG WORLDWIDE PR



**MARIAN SALZMAN IS** one of the world's best-known trend spotters and has won numerous awards. Her early career included the development of new social research methods – from slumber parties for tweenagers to leveraging instant messaging and AOL chat rooms. *The Wall Street Journal* cited her as the first advertising professional to use online focus groups. In 1994, she designed the “citizens of cyberspace” study, which predicted America would soon be online.

Since 2007, Salzman has advanced the concept of “personal CPM”, a valuation that expresses one’s influence and ultimately can be put out for sale, similar to the cost-per-thousand measure online marketers use to evaluate the reach of corporate brands.

Salzman’s team comprises public relations professionals, not trend spotters per se; 60 people in three offices. “They bring the outside in and push news back out to national and global media and the social networks,” Salzman says. In addition, she has access to 9000 people globally, who generate insights and ideas about the near future, which she defines as the next 36 months. “Beyond that, it’s science fiction,” she says.

“I crave cross-tabulations and get pleasure from writing algorithms to isolate interesting segmentations,” Salzman says, explaining how she makes sense of data. “I’m also a news junkie and comb the internet for relevant facts and figures that put meat onto the bones of any trend stories ... My goal is to stay on top of what may be next and why.

“It’s easy to see the world and possible shifts in attitudes, beliefs, values, brand preferences and media choices through my own experiential lens,” Salzman says. “The trick is to live uncomfortably, whether it’s [putting oneself in a radically different social setting] or immersing myself in ethnographic research that begins to mirror psychotherapy.”

### DON'T LOSE THE PLOT

Salzman believes intuition is less magic and more a finely honed nose for what’s next. However, she reads a supermarket novel several times a week to stay in touch with human behaviour. “All plots in life fit into the plots of literature: man v man, man v nature, or man v himself,” she explains. Intuition can be learned and enhanced by smart listening and by digesting stories of everyday life and innovation.”

### TOP TRENDS

**Marian Salzman**

#### MAD AS HELL – AND ONLY GETTING MADDER

There are always many reasons for anger (the GFC upped the ante, particularly against the establishment). Today’s 24/7 news and blogosphere amplify the people, issues and topics, adding fuel.



#### WITH BARE HANDS

As the world reboots post-GFC, people reassess the worth of self and things. There is a feeling of loss of control and a desire for the simple life. People yearn to be practical DIY-ers.

#### NET GAIN

People are losing trust in institutions, but gaining faith in technology and looking more to digital and social media networks to meet their needs.

#### PUBLIC MYCASTING SYSTEM

Broadcast news is dead. MyCasting emerges. People curate interactive content, expressing their world view in images, shared links and tweets.



#### BOOTING UP

Watch out for the return of skin-thickening boot camps to toughen up kids and employees for the rigours of the 21st century.

#### ME CHANGERS

“Change” isn’t just a slogan anymore. It’s becoming a way of life for many. Volunteering or forced into it, baby boomers are tapping the can-do spirit.

#### REINVENTION, PART 2

Even amid loads of anger, as regular people reinvent themselves, they’ll allow stars and corporations to do the same. (BP are you listening?)

#### GENDER BENDER

Masters of all they survey no more, men will have to adjust to the treatment women have long endured: being shown as sex objects or selfless homemakers.



#### MICRO-MINI TRENDS

All on our radar: The rise of African consumers, small-scale solar energy, money-transfer services on your phone and smarter ways to read on a mobile device.

#### WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Public and private finances are globally unstable; addictive behaviours and foreign dictates are concerns. More people will look for control.



## GLOBAL ROAMING

JEREMY GUTSCHE – FOUNDER, CHIEF TREND HUNTER, TRENDHUNTER.COM.

**JEREMY GUTSCHE** always wanted to be an entrepreneur but couldn’t hit upon his business idea, so in 2005, he started TrendHunter.com, as a place where people could share concepts. Gutsche’s Toronto-based website – targeted at entrepreneurs, journalists, marketers, designers and the insatiably curious – is a hub for the quirky, cool and just plain weird. The viewer data from its articles helps to inform the Trend Report and the PRO business (a collection of patterns that have emerged). Through PRO, Trend Hunter works with clients such as Microsoft, eBay, and Google to identify “meaningful” patterns that could affect their products.

“We’ve created the world’s largest and most frequently updated database of new business ideas,” Gutsche, 32, says. “On one side, we crowdsource content from our 35,000 members, who range from young professionals to baby boomers.

“On the other, we get around 11 million views a month from our audience, which we use to identify the patterns that emerge from our content. Where

traditional trend spotters use experts to identify emerging trends, we use our crowdsourced and crowd-filtered approach.”

An editorial team supports Trend Hunter’s contributors and processes the best material. “We publish around 100 new articles daily,” Gutsche says. “We have people working on the development of the website and we work with The Secret Location studio to produce episodes of Trend Hunter TV.

“We’ve developed algorithms that help us leverage more than 150 million views of data,” Gutsche says. “We look for patterns and relationships that emerge and use those to inform our Trend Hunter PRO and Trend Report business. We look for clusters and patterns of articles that get more attention from our readers. That helps us understand when the pulse of what is interesting is changing.”

### MICRO RULES

“Don’t get obsessed with macro-trends, because everyone knows them,” Gutsche says. “Look for the micro-trends that can be useful to your specific innovation problem. Start with a solid understanding of your customer, in order to create ideas that are truly useful – and be open to inspiration from other industries.”

## TOP TRENDS Jeremy Gutsche, Trendhunter.com

### HARD TO LABEL

Whether it's Starbucks disguising one of its chains as an indie espresso bar or Absolut going without a label, retailers know buyers are shying away from big brand names. As consumers blame mega-brands for tough times, smaller or newer businesses can build on anti-corporation sentiment.

### TWEETONOMICS

From hashtag-powered sites to tweeting shoes and social networking stockings, as long as Twitter continues to flourish, so will the businesses and service industries that use it. A surge of career opportunities will evolve from the Twittersphere.

### PERPETUAL ADAPTATION

Barbies are going retro, planes are going glam and even old-school tech gadgets are being redesigned to satisfy demand for ever-evolving aesthetics. The products consumers buy are evolving radically, without losing their primary functions.

### GERIATRIC COUTURE

Embroidery, crocheting and vintage fabrics are being resurrected, and forward-thinking fashionistas are turning geriatric style on its head by modernising it and embracing it as today's anti-fashion.

### MODERN KIDVERTISING

Marketers are focusing their efforts where the money is –



parents. Children's campaigns aim to engage adults with eco-friendly textiles and minimalist decor. Say farewell to brightly patterned goods and cartoon commercials, and welcome in "adultised" children's products.

### LUXURY LIVES

Planes with personal rooms, business-class bedrooms and 22-carat flight trolleys show consumers still crave luxury. The financial crisis made many businesses scale back, but others are capitalising on upper-class consumer wants.

### HYPERREALISM

Artists are rebelling against photoshopped perfection and striving to create their own accurate representations of reality. Their pieces of photorealistic art defy deception and stand out against the faux feel of many magazine covers.

### YOU ROCK

Hard-edged hotel designs, rock-star fashion and even rebellious product design – the old saying "rock'n'roll will never die" rings true in a variety of industries.

### TOUCHSCREENS FOR TODDLERS

Using touch-sensitive platforms for the iPad, developers are producing games that appeal to mums and dads who want to integrate new technology into their parenting. Story time has never been so advanced.

### DEMOCRATIC SELLING

Businesses such as Threadless pioneered crowdsourced clothing in 2006, but consumer preferences are now pushing a variety of products, from furniture to quirky card designs. The voice of the customer has never been louder.



**FUTUREWORLD'S** network helps organisations understand the coming business context, choose an ideal vision and fast-track it to creation, through insight, communication and strategy, says founder and chairman Wolfgang Grulke. "We work from the future backwards," Grulke says. "We define the business environment of the future, then ask the difficult questions about how the business is going to fit into that process."

FutureWorld's weekly e-zine, *MindBullets: News from the Future*, projects changes in the technological, economic, social, political and business landscape. The team of contributors scans the environment and comes up with radical ideas. Their thinking is synthesised into possible trends to provide scenarios of alternative futures. One *MindBullets* edition, published in May 2005, predicted the collapse of housing markets in December 2007. "Nobody believed us at the time," Grulke says.

Grulke worked internationally with IBM for more than 25 years and started FutureWorld as an informal business network in 1987. It has more than 100 "gurus", associates and ambassadors. "We're not consultants, we're practitioners," Grulke says. "In the last 10 years, our top 10 gurus started 115 new businesses between them. We synthesise. There are so many detailed scenarios done all over the world. The challenge to executive teams with limited time and attention spans is to assimilate all this stuff."

The first part of any FutureWorld session is to open up to divergent thinking. In that process, intuition is important. "In any executive team, there will be several people who struggle to think conceptually; they like everything to be based on fact," Grulke says. "In the future, there are facts, but you don't know if they're going to happen. Our thinking helps businesses to make decisions based on a belief that something is possible. If they do this, the consequence of success can be enormous."

## MANAGEMENT

WOLFGANG GRULKE, CHAIRMAN,  
FUTUREWORLD INTERNATIONAL