Some Brief Considerations For The High Tech New Year[1]

Arnie Dahlke

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Here we are again. Another year!

The ritual of New Year's Celebrations goes back centuries. Ancient Babylonians saw the period between the Winter Solstice and the New Year as a battle between Chaos and Order, while Pagans worshiped the Sun God and Christians welcomed the birth of the Son of God. Romans celebrated Kalends of January (the New Year) by dancing, singing, and feasting in the streets. Hindus viewed this period as a time to change the rules and order of things—they even changed their clothing and positions with servants during this time.

Today, Ecuadorians burn straw-stuffed dummies (representing last year's events) at midnight. in a symbolic ritual to get rid of the past. Brazilians, wearing colored underwear—pink for love, yellow for prosperity, and white for peace and happiness—gather on the beaches on New Year's Eve to honor Yemanja, the "Mother of the Sea," who brings good fortune.

Common to all of these centuries of cultures is a sense of "starting fresh."

In this sprit of renewal, I thought about the past year and its implications for the coming year. It is very apparent looking back that two major forces are changing the way organizations around the world are functioning.

The first is the exploding, global expansion of digital technology. Microchips in pacemakers are saving lives. Using a chip, a toilet has been developed that will automatically shut off the water when the toilet springs a leak or starts to overflow. A new application has been developed for the iPhone to help motorists find open parking spots, as well as blocks that are closest to them with the most vacant spaces. A plethora of Social Media is increasingly changing the way we communicate, the way we disseminate information, and the way our organizations function.

The second major force is the dramatic growth in the number of millennials in the workplace—the new generation of employees who are intimately tied to and driving the digital technology. Millennials represent the first generation to grow up in a digital world. From an early age, they learned to use digital technology as their primary vehicle for communication. They would rather text then call a friend. They are globally interconnected in a wide array of social networks, such as Facebook, Linkedin, Twitter, Wiki's, Blogs, and YouTube. People communicate less frequently by traditional phones and more by the Internet.

Together, these two forces have very important implications for the 2011 workplace.

To start with, organizations must be very aware of how new technologies are influencing their functioning. It also means that organizations need to explore how the new technologies can be used to improve their productivity and the quality of their products and services.

Following are some brief considerations for organizations facing these forces of change, focusing on three major areas: *The Workplace*, *Teamwork*, and *Customer Relations*.

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[1] From: http://www.arniedahlke.com/ 101215_Some_Brief_Considerations_For_The_High_Tech_New_Year.pdf.

The Workplace

People no longer have to stay in the office to be in the information loop. Cellular phones, Blackberries, Ultra-mobile PCs, and other mobile devices allow them to have access to e-mail and important data almost anywhere. Salespeople, for example, can both prospect and stay in contact with their customers wherever they are. Someone charged to complete a project with a short deadline can do so while traveling in an airplane or at a desk at home.

As of three years ago, "91 percent of organizations allow employees to work at home occasionally."[2] As a result, companies are seeing "productivity gains, reduced absenteeism, reduced employee turnover costs, reduced real estate costs, and reduced relocation costs—to name a few."[3]

It is essential that companies accept and foster this electronic flexibility. This is particularly important with the growing workforce of millennials, who are more independent and project-focused, rather than job-focused. Give them flexibility for an assigned task and they will be more self-committed to it, making it more likely they will complete it. Give them the freedom to achieve clearly defined objectives in their own way.

Teamwork

Teamwork is going digital. With teleconferencing and video conferencing through Internet platforms such as WebEx, Skype, ooVoo, Live Meeting, and other emerging technologies, people from around the world are able to collaborate as teams without meeting in person. Teamwork in a conference room is rapidly being replaced by teamwork on the Internet—*virtual* teamwork.

Virtual Teams allow people to work from anywhere in the world at anytime, making them a convenience for today's global, 24-hour workday. They allow for the recruitment of competent people from an expanded talent pool not restricted geographically. The usual expenses associated with bringing people together from different locations is saved or at least greatly reduced. Virtual Teams enable organizations to be more globally competitive and more capable of rapidly getting their products to market.

Be aware of the growth in popularity of Virtual Teams, particularly among the newest generation of workers. Take steps to handle this new environment. This means acquiring the right technology and software. It means establishing clear objectives, accountability standards, and performance measures. In this global world, it also means recognizing and dealing with cultural differences, such as differences in decision-making and appropriate communication etiquette.

Customer Service

Exchanging information through social media is having a significant impact on purchasing behavior. Facebook has more than 500 million global users, and Twitter has seen over 20 billion "tweets" of which 20 percent are estimated to be related to product and services requests. This sharing of thoughts on the quality of both products and services influences 20-50 percent of all customer decisions, particularly for expensive products or services. Social networking is especially influential with first time buyers.

Social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, and Twitter, gives customers who are making purchase decisions the capability of exchanging product information, price comparisons, and customer satisfaction experiences across the globe. Social media gives businesses the opportunity of reaching out to and being reached by any customer or potential customer anywhere at anytime.

It is important for organizations in today's world to pay attention to the usefulness of social media in uncovering the needs of both existing and potential customers. Work with an IT professional to discover the latest digital options for tracking customer purchases, customer feedback, and customer contact information. Explore the possibility of using customer kiosks to collect data. Take steps to make sure you have a website that is user-friendly and provides customers with options for solving problems they may be having with your products and/or services—and make sure it is interactive, giving customers opportunities to provide you with continuous feedback about their experiences and ideas for new products and services.

These considerations are just a small sampling of the areas being influenced by digital technology. I encourage you and your organization to dedicate time and effort to explore this topic in more depth.

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[2] Standley, Alan. "Set Your Workers Free?" Baylor Business Review, Fall 2006, 25(1). Retrieved April 5, 2007.

[3] Mamaghani, Farrokh. "Impact of Information Technology on the Workforce of the Future: An Analysis," International Journal of Management. Dec. 2006, 23(4).