

Review of *Next: The Future Just Happened* by Michael Lewis¹

Jonathan A. Brown²

Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities
California, USA

This book first arrived in the early stages of the NASDAQ meltdown and when Napster was seen as a potentially successful alternative. So why read the book now? Like Lewis' work on the financial markets, this book is both amusing and informative. But many phases of the technology industry are a shadow of their former selves; Napster, .coms, telcoms, box makers, software companies. With that history, some would argue that the book has become an instant period piece. But those that would make that suggestion are wrong. Even will all that tumult; the data suggests that the Internet, in both commerce and communications, continues to transform both personal and business relationships.

The book is a series of vignettes of several people who have used the Internet to their advantage. One concerns a juvenile stock trading whiz who seems to have run circles around the Securities and Exchange Commission. Another deals with a young man who parlayed an interest in the Internet into one of the most successful legal advice functions on the Net. He also highlights the improved fortunes of an aging rock ensemble that used the Internet to tell the normal channels of distributions for music to stuff it. He writes about a technical whiz in the United Kingdom who has helped to advance the code for MP3 sharing over the net, and the Anti-Napster juggernaut was advancing. Finally, he writes about a TIVO using grandma.

At times, Lewis waxes a bit too enthusiastically about each of his people and also about the immediate potential for the transformative power of the Internet. But both his premise and his conclusions, that the Internet will significantly alter existing assumptions about hierarchies of expertise and even of age, are fundamentally sound.

Lewis also does a fine job of explaining the Kessler cycle of innovation. And here his insights look even better than they did a year ago. Kessler argues that technology goes through a predictable cycle, where new technologies begin to disrupt existing patterns of organization. Ultimately, after a period of mocking by the existing providers, the innovation is either co-opted into existing patterns or the old firms simply die. The recent technology supplement in the *Economist* written by Peter Drucker, gives historical evidence about how accurate Lewis' assumptions are. Kessler's patterns seem to have reoccurred many times in history.

Lewis is clearly writing for the broader public but this is not simply a popular treatment. One of the areas where I would have preferred a bit more formal discussion was in the appropriate treatment of intellectual property. In a short period of time, traditional assumptions about who owns ideas and for how long have been transformed. Stanford Law Professor Laurence Lessig's

The Future of Ideas does an excellent and more formal review of the issues in that area. In the end Lewis accomplishes his objective, to give a broad audience the opportunity to think about the disruptions of the usual ways of doing things.

¹ Lewis, Michael, (2001). *Next: The Future Just Happened*. W.W. Norton & Company; ISBN: 0393020371.

² Dr. Jonathan A. Brown is president of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities. He teaches at the School of Policy, Planning, and Development, University of Southern California and the Universidad Anáhuac del sur in Mexico. He can be reached at Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities, 1100 11th Street, Suite 10, Sacramento, CA 95814, USA. E-mail: brown@aiccu.edu, Phone: (916) 446-7626, Fax: (916) 446-7948.