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Randy Johnston • Nov. 23, 2020



A Top Technology Initiative Article. From the December 2020 Issue.

Vision for the future comes from a variety of sources. Clear vision and sources of inspiration can come from colleagues, friends, quiet time, struggling with an issue, conflict, relaxing on the beach or vacation, meditation or attending a religious service, exercise, hiking, taking a shower, reading, listening to podcasts, watching

webinars, attending events (a tradition we hope resumes soon), and sketching on a

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seeing [intuitively](#) (called [noesis](#) in Greek);

- an [introspection](#);
- the power of acute observation and [deduction](#), [discernment](#), and [perception](#), called intellection or noesis;
- an understanding of cause and effect based on the identification of relationships and behaviors within a model, context, or scenario (see [artificial intelligence](#))”;

One of my favorite things is coming up with models that serve as a framework for a collection of ideas. I've been privileged to develop models we have discussed in previous columns, such as the 3PHD. model of computing, which includes People, Procedures, Data, Programs, and Hardware from the 1970s. In the 1980s it was the accounting software pyramid that is still in use at [Accounting Software World](#). In the 1990s we worked on the model for SaaS and hosting. In the early 2000s, we focused on security models, policies, and internal controls to protect remote computing. In the last decade, we used Venn diagrams to describe emerging technologies, as described in this column over the last few years. And the most recent addition is a framework for Advisory Services, which I'm guessing will frame my thinking for the next decade. You'll learn more about this next year and beyond.

You see, models can be enabling and limiting. While models help generate new discoveries just like the [periodic table](#) did for chemistry, it may keep you from looking in other places such as nanotubes or quantum computing because models can limit your vision. Compliance thinking can limit your vision. However, recent discoveries, such as those in [materials science](#), can leverage models to see the future. For accountants, [Luca Pacioli](#) may have laid the foundation, but [blockchain](#) may be the new model. While all this talk of models seems “heady” or “heavy,” leveraging these models help guide the future.

Turning Models into Practicality

We have discussed forming business strategies and tactics in past columns and

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merger & acquisition advice. Wouldn't your clients be best served if you delivered a few primary services well, picked a few additional core services that you enjoy and have the skills to perform well, and referred the other services to trusted advisors much like a concierge? Certainly, if your firm has more resources because it is larger, you can offer more of these services, but your clients will recognize your ability to focus and excel if you are a small firm.

In the coming year, we expect to use models to be high and wide in our vision and provide insight that is deep and narrow on specific products and services that may work for your clients. While the COVID-19 pandemic changed my vision of what 2020 would hold, an unexpected benefit was the extra time that minimal travel provided. Being on the ground and not in an airplane enabled learning and re-learning about products in-depth, unlike anything in the last twenty years. When my consulting practice was dominantly about creating SaaS products that many of you use today, we were creating the future. I believe I can see the future of computing in accounting. And together, we will create this "new normal."

As noted in previous columns, "the best way to predict the future is to create it." Alan Kay, the former chief scientist of Atari, is credited with this wording found in the Facebook post incorrectly attributed to Abraham Lincoln. This saying may have originated with [Dennis Gabor](#), the physicist who won the 1971 Nobel Prize for inventing holography. "The future cannot be predicted, but futures can be invented," he [wrote](#) in a 1963 book. "It was man's ability to invent, which has made human society what it is."

So, What Should We Expect in this Decade?

At this time of year, we usually like to make predictions for the next year, but I'd like to have you consider a longer view. Many business strategists suggest [five-year plans](#) help you envision your future. Unfortunately, in 2021 many of you will be drawn into

short-term cash flow and business management issues in many of your clients. I'd

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- Procedures
 - Will become interactive between professional firms and clients.
 - Will be able to be written automatically and recorded in workflows.
 - Will become more automated with Robotic Process Automation.
 - Will be signed off with automation provided by secure digital identities.
- Data
 - Will become more understandable with visualization and vocalization.
 - Will explode in volume because of the Internet of Things.
 - Will swing back from being the property of companies to individual ownership.
 - Will become more accessible, but secure, while being centralized.
- Programs
 - Will become more integrated with secure digital plumbing between them.
 - Will become more “buggy” and then improve because of new diagnostic techniques.
 - Will be discovered and recommended automatically based on your needs.
 - Will become more self-writing being taught by users with low code and no code.
- Hardware
 - Will become less proprietary.
 - Will become more secure based on individual demands.
 - Will communicate across the entire planet, blocked in some cases by governments.
 - Will support more intelligence and interaction in vision and voice.

OK, those all seem too far fetched to be practical. However, I'm going to check this list ten years from now. In the meantime, how about some short-term predictions?

So, What Should We Expect in this Coming Year?

First, it would be ideal to have a COVID-19 vaccine that works and is safe. Second, it

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- Will need to be revised for security and privacy laws.
- Data
 - Will continue to be more centralized but watch your security.
 - Will become more connected and reportable.
- Programs
 - Will become faster, smarter, and easier to use.
 - Will solve problems you haven't considered.
- Hardware
 - Will get faster communications with 5G, internet speeds, and Wi-Fi 6E.
 - Will become less reliable.

And how do we solve client problems? We'll continue to look at long-term and short-term issues recommending strategies that we know to work. Further, you'll see that we'll provide a structure or cookbook on how to solve the problems, discuss the right ingredients, and teach you how to pick the best and freshest solutions in the market. The best technology solutions for you and your clients are yet to come.

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