

The future legal environment

Ian Pearson, Futurologist, Sept 2006

This document is provided free of charge for your own personal use, but the copyright remains the property of Futurizon GmbH. No reproduction or distribution of this article in any form is allowed unless you have written consent from Futurizon.

You can read more articles on almost every aspect of the future at <http://www.futurizon.com>.

Futurizon provides speakers, consultancy, and commissioned reports on all aspects of the future.

Contact details: info@futurizon.com or idpearson@gmail.com

The business world is moving into an era of strong turbulence. The 5 year plan will soon become an impediment, locking thinking into too long a timeframe when pressure can change dramatically overnight. Empires will rise and fall. In such times, the winners are those who are quick to see the changes and quick to adapt. The rest die. As businesses restructure and new technology creates totally new fields, there will be lucrative opportunities for legal firms. In the short term, even technologies like data storage change things. Memory sticks will soon be able to hold all of people's everyday files, making the disk drive redundant. Wireless communication between memory sticks will make new challenges to copyright control and corporate security. Meanwhile, web mash sites will result in frequent damaging leaks of confidential and personal data

Convergence of industries will mean lots of new sources of competition, and erosion of boundaries will play havoc with regulation. The physical environment will become smart, with chips everywhere, doubtless stimulating a range of issues around civil liberty and surveillance. The creation of digital bubbles to interact digitally with one's surroundings will enable people to shield themselves from stuff they don't want, while other people will use the same technology to broadcast junk bits to people as they wander around. The information world will be much more intrusive and harder to resist.

Virtual environments are now picking up speed online and already creating some interesting legal issues. The worlds can be fully distributed around the net, making it difficult to determine jurisdiction when a crime is committed. Virtual assaults, thefts, espionage, even relationship law will get involved when people form strong emotional bonds. It will get much more interesting though once virtual worlds start combining with the real world to make augmented reality. Then, competing shops will be able to digitally invade each others' premises. People will often wear head up displays so will see a competitor's products on the shelves as well as those from the retailer whose shop they are in.

Even cosmetics will present new legal issues. Electronic makeup will change appearance as people go through the day, and if not secured properly, could be hijacked to display adverts or rude messages on people's faces. Going a stage

further, active skin will link our nervous systems directly to the network, making it possible to record and replay sensations. It will also allow the generation of pain, opening up the possibility to have digital prisons, with inmates punished directly if they stray outside them.

Artificial Intelligence presents another interesting legal area. Machines will soon be capable of consciousness, and crime. What should their rights and responsibilities be. How do we shut down a strongly encrypted criminal algorithm that roams around the net? And what happens once we start getting computer games with conscious entities in them. Will they be legal at all, and if so, will children be allowed to control other conscious beings. And if these beings get rich, buy androids, and upload into the real world, what nationality could they be, bearing in mind that they can transmit their minds around the net at will and use androids in any country.

But all of this will be set against an environment of more intrusion of digital surveillance into our lives. If we carry on using surveillance to pick up every tiny misdemeanour by people who are otherwise law abiding, with all the proper legislation, what then when people notice that criminals don't bother with registrations and know all the loopholes. A Stepford Society where honest people have no freedom while crooks roam around free is not sustainable.