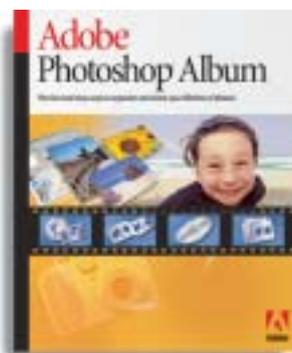


tools of the trade

Two New Photo Tools and Sight and Sound in Your Pocket

Adobe® Photoshop® Album is an image organizer that includes a basic set of tools for photo repair, e-mail, and printing and presentation modes that produce slide shows, photo albums, cards, calendars, and



Adobe Photoshop Album

books. The software creates a visual database for anyone with proliferating folders of digital images. Those benefitting would include home users, real-estate agents, insurance investigators, plastic surgeons—anyone who



SanDisk
Digital Photo Viewer

accumulates and sorts digital images. The program imports your images into a photo “well” by date, and there you create any system of tagging you want to use to organize the collection. There’s a timeline bar at the top of the page arranged by year and month, and you can slide and click on particular dates (a birthday, time of a recent sale) to find a picture. You can add sound to the slide shows, and you can open the Adobe Photoshop Elements program if you have that on your computer for more sophisticated image editing. www.adobe.com

If you have room for

another set-top box on your TV, the **SanDisk Digital Photo Viewer™** is an inexpensive image projector that plays the digital cards you use to record pictures in your digital camera. It will read the most popular memory cards (CompactFlash I and II, SmartMedia, Memory Stick, SD, and MultiMedia), and it simply plugs into the TV. With a remote control

you can rotate images, zoom in, and display several pictures at once. The box is actually smaller than a videotape and is easily moved from set to set. There is a demo online at www.sandisk.com/consumer/dpv.asp.

The **Creative NOMAD® MuVo™** plugs into your computer’s USB port as a removable storage device that will hold 64MB of data files—that’s its business side. The memory module snaps into a custom battery pack that converts it to a pocket-size MP3 player that provides up to 12 hours of continuous play on a single battery—that’s its other



Creative NOMAD MuVo

Has IT Reached the Down Side of the Hill? ◆

Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ THE DOOMSAYERS' PREDICTIONS have been echoing in the tech and popular press for several months now. It began in January when Larry Ellison, head of Oracle, the second largest software company, said the best days [for the software industry] were over, and now that we have reached the end of the growth spurt, those times would not return. Although he is somewhat famous for making sweeping predictions that can be very wide of the mark, Ellison's company is located at ground zero for the tech boom/bust (Silicon Valley). On the other hand, there are industry notables like Tom Siebel of Siebel Systems, Inc. who are more optimistic, predicting healthy growth for the

industry once the economy drags itself out of the swamp in which it is currently flopping around.

A lull in the debate set in as months went by and more tech companies sank. And then the argument re-emerged in a May article in the *Harvard Business Review*. Editor-at-Large, Nicholas G. Carr put a fine point on his position with a title that was just looking for an eye to poke: "IT Doesn't Matter." Carr's theme was that "As information technology's power and ubiquity have grown, its strategic importance has diminished. [Further,] the way you approach IT investment and management will need to change dramatically." (Article is available at www.hbr.org.)

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Audio Lumifier



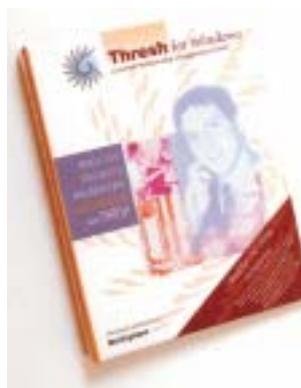
side. The MuVo weighs less than an ounce without its single AAA battery and is only 2.8 x 1.3 x 0.6 inches. When the USB storage device is plugged into your computer, it serves as an additional drive, and you can drag and drop data files or MP3 or WMA (Windows Media Audio) files onto it. The very small player has exceptional fidelity with a wide frequency response (20Hz-20kHz) and low harmonic distortion (<0.05%).

www.americas.creative.com/

The Audio Lumifier™ from Zelco Industries, Inc. has three functions built into its 4-inch long profile to assist readers. It has a rectangular, retractable 2-times magnifying lens with very low edge distortion. The lens swings left or right, and there's a light source built into the bottom of the Lumifier that follows the movement of the lens to center its light on the field. The device is also a digital recorder with 20 seconds of recording time.

Not enough for longer messages but enough for short, temporary notes. Temporary because when you begin a new recorded message it records over the last one. All in all, it's a very handy tool to keep within reach on your desktop or in your briefcase. www.zelco.com

Thresh, a product of Biz Vigilant, is a low-cost customer relationship management (CRM) software package for small busi-



Thresh for Windows

nesses. The program can be installed by the user and be up and running in minutes rather than days or weeks. Thresh tracks customer interactions, quality management/corrective actions, sales actions, and marketing actions even though they haven't been completed. Records that are saved automatically are updated for all users connected to the system. Tasks can be assigned and followed through to completion. Full reporting capabilities track trends for later analysis or as documentation of company practices. Thresh may be used to meet ISO 9001:2000 customer satisfaction monitoring requirements, including customer surveys. A tour of the product is available online at www.threshb2b.com.

continued from p. 2

Search author's name.)

So it's not that IT doesn't matter; that was just to get your attention. Rather, it's what IT used to mean to an organization that has changed, and the older expectations now don't matter. He explains the difference between proprietary IT, which could be owned by a company and could provide a strategic advantage, and IT as infrastructure. Scarcity was the key with proprietary IT—you had something others didn't. But now that IT's "potency and ubiquity have increased," it has become commoditized, and, like other technologies that also changed from proprietary to infrastructural (railroads, electricity, telegraph, and telephone), IT has become a common business expense that offers no special advantage. Ubiquity is a key notion in Carr's theory, and he says, "History shows that the power of an infrastructural technology to transform industries always diminishes as its buildout nears completion." The author then takes what might be a great leap when he adds, "And as for IT-spurred industry transformations, most of the ones that are going to happen have likely already happened or are in the process of happening."

This may be the weakest part of Nicholas Carr's argument—that the transformations are pretty much over. He does quote visionary Bill Joy, chief scientist and cofounder of Sun Microsystems, who poses the question, "What if the reality is that people have already bought most of the stuff they want to own?" And then Joy answers his own question with, "There is good reason to believe that companies' existing IT capabilities are largely sufficient for their needs." But both Carr's assumption that most of the transformations have

happened and Joy's belief that companies have all that they need neglect to take into account the next great thing that usually shows up unannounced.

For a recent lesson in what happens when you think the innovating is done and that we have all the capacity we need, recall the arrival of the Internet a few years ago. At the time, another visionary called it a fad and even ventured a guess at how long it would last as a passing interest (he predicted its demise in a matter of months). That was Bill Gates. And had he not turned his corporation around with the speed that he did—to catch up once he realized his mistake—the company would have suffered greatly. Even though unforeseen by some gurus, the Internet as a business network has caused "IT-spurred transformations."

Two truisms should encourage caution here. First, assume that the next great thing will be developed somewhere else. That is, not at Sun or Microsoft or Intel—it's most likely to come from a garage or a university basement so we (and they) are not likely to see it coming. That's because larger corporations benefit from, and tend to embrace, the status quo, just as the fat cat prefers dozing in the sunlit window. And, second, don't expect innovation to end until man ceases to be curious about things.

Commoditization

Carr explains how IT turned into a commodity. First, he says IT is a transport mechanism. It transports information, and, like other commodities, it's more "valuable when shared than when used in isolation." And as the technology spreads, it becomes more accessible and less expensive for all.

Generally, this change has been good, but there's a danger built in. Carr recalls the 19th Century growth of the railroads, which helped create a widespread industrial overcapacity that he says contributed to a deflation that lasted for two decades. The times are different, but because IT is like the railroads, he says it's possible that overspending on IT could set up a similar worldwide deflation.

As IT becomes a commodity, the large software companies are beginning to consider offering their products as subscriptions delivered over the Internet as Web services rather than purchased packages that have to be sold/updated/sold/updated and so on. Microsoft's .Net is one of these initiatives.

Tomorrow

If we're on a downward slide concerning IT, what's the best way for companies to deal with the changes? Nicholas Carr has three new rules for IT management.

1. Spend less. (Because IT has lost its strategic advantage for you, buy it as you would a utility service.)
2. Follow, don't lead. (It's now less likely that being on the cutting edge will get you a measurable advantage.)
3. Focus on vulnerabilities, not opportunities. (Look to fixing what you have and securing what is working. It's what the author calls shifting from offense to defense.)

So, is the software industry, and information technology in general, at the beginning of a long, unending slide? Is consolidation the answer, or subscription offerings, or increased customer outsourcing? One thing is for sure. The cat never sleeps in the window for very long because, as a wise man once said: The only thing that doesn't change is the inevitability of change itself. ■