

A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

We will witness more technological change in the next ten years than we have experienced in the past 150 years, BT's Principal Consultant and futurologist, Professor Graham Whitehead, predicted at a major conference in St Andrews this month.

Professor Whitehead was speaking at "A Climate of Change", the Scottish Council for Development and Industry's 36th Scottish Council Forum (March 22/23).

The conference looked at the need for new thinking and better decision-making processes because of globalisation, the acceleration of innovation and technology and climate change.

Delegates heard that these factors, combined with the convergence of industry sectors and mounting expectations of customers, employees and capital markets, any predictable patterns in our economy will be disrupted.

Key speakers also included BBC's World Affairs Editor John Simpson and prominent academics and industry chiefs at the cutting edge of technology, energy and recycling.

Professor Whitehead developed some of the conference themes, looking to a future in which humans will be carrying enormous amounts of personal information and exchanging it in public places, with the advent of the SmartCard.

"One SmartCard could carry all your personal details, from your ID card and passport to driving license and medical history," he said.

"I see everything having SmartCard readers, computers, phones, mobiles, TVs etc, and the appropriate information will be exchanged without the extreme efforts required today of re-typing the same details on every web-page.

"The advent of Broadband connections will bring an era of Always on Real Time Access (AORT A) with artificial intelligent agents wandering around this new information maze for material that might be of interest and pushing it towards you.

"Humans will be able to converse with these agents who will have faces, voices, will hear and understand what you say and might even have personalities!

"The new information age will mean looking at how we trade with our customers and it will be vital to target each one and personalise communication with him or her.

"A simple advertisement will not be good enough and an interactive, proactive experience will be essential."

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