Is there a Future in Telecommunications

"Is there a Future in Telecommunications" was the question posed by Graham Whitehead, (Advanced Concept Manager, BT Adastral Park), at an Adastral Park Zone Lecture, presented on September 11th.

"No" Graham said – "but life is never simple"

He posed another question, "Who do you think you will be working for in 2 years time?"

He guessed that "it probably won't be BT – but you won't be out of a job".

"If you still think that Telecomms is all about putting wires in the ground, phones in homes, and getting customers to talk more – you are definitely on the way out".

Business's these days do not go bust slowly – by the time the problem is noticed, it's probably too late!

He gave the example of "*Marks and Spencer*" which may never recover .

They are still looking to retain existing customers, existing sorts of products, and looking for a return on capital now! *M&S* have successfully guessed public requirements for over 100 years – and have suddenly got it wrong. "They (also the Telecomm Industry) should realise that the only way forward is not to work better, but work differently – embracing the new technologies".

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* boasted they had successfully put information on paper for 200 years. Yet in 1993 they didn't file their accounts. Graham recalled receiving an invite to buy a set, for only £600 – which turned out to be the 1998 version (REDUCED From £1800) – he reckoned that they had warehouses full of them. However Graham has since bought the DVD version of Britannica 2002 for £39:00.

The Company embraced the technology, turned itself around, selling more, value wise, of the DVD, than they ever sold on paper.

The Industry is still on an "e-wave", started about 1990, which grew exponentially (driven by greed).

Suddenly big decisions were made. *Marconi* (for example) ditched its Aerospace and Defence work, and stocked up for the Telecomm boom, but look at them now…. They have wonderful factories, experienced people, and no work!

In the last 18 months $4,000Billion has been invested in Telecoms and IT – (it would take 128,000 years to count that amount out 1 dollar/second).

So, why the world recession? Most has gone into areas like 3rd Generation Mobile Licences – which should theoretically churn back from Government coffers into the Industry. Suddenly everyone came down to earth with a bump – industry people "in the trough of disillusionment" are getting scared.

Graham expects the trough to bottom out late 2002. "We should be preparing capacity to recover, expecting new and possibly disruptive technologies appearing. This has happened before, with the arrival of such as Steam Power, Railways and automobiles, pushing us in unlikely directions. We live in an Information age, and must adapt".

"People are no longer excited by being connected – what they want are novel services, new facilities, making it easier for our customers to do their business – extracting the complexity".

Graham continued …. "There is no such thing as Information Overload – Information is precious – we must do all we can to help our customers effectively use it".

"Business is increasingly being run by a new generation – they don't know "it won't work " – they just go and do it"

He gave as an example the 13yr old teenager in the 'States who set himself up as a day Trader in Stocks and Shares – making $800,000 until the regulatory body stopped him. He still cannot see what he was doing wrong.

Another 15year old dispenses free legal advice on the Internet; beating time served Solicitors 95% of the time.

This sort of entrepreneurism will become more common.

Soon almost everything will have "chips" in it, and when these machines really start communicating to each other the real revolution will start.

The big challenges are how we use these opportunities.

12th November 1998 saw BT's network carry more data calls than voice, and data calls is accelerating out of sight, giving us the real challenge.

Future network developments will open the floodgate, with customers needing a lot of help to cope. The nature of work has changed forever. More and more will work remotely – but will demand instant, reliable connection.

Access to Information is becoming less of a privilege. Our role is to make that information palatable and easy to access – allowing the power of the digital world to come to us all.

Customers have the ultimate power – they can turn away from our services at the click of a mouse. *Time Warner* and *ATT&T* have merged to give one network access across the U.S. - they are coming this way!

NTL and *Telewest* have merged – they are coming this way!

If we are expert at "low technology areas, Graham suggested "We should share it with partners, if someone else is expert in "High Impact" areas – let's co-operate with them"

If only we are expert in a particular area – this becomes potentially our most profitable area. Developing areas no one else can do".

He continued, "Soon we will all be carrying full personal information – with our entire DNA, tissue type information, credit details etc.

Smart Cards to hold the information will be come universal, with readers appearing on computers".

But, "What happens if you lose it?" Perhaps a chip could be implanted at birth, behind one ear perhaps – to couple into a phone.

When you go to a doctor anywhere, and system will know you what drugs it can safely prescribe – gone will be the chemical sledgehammer approach to drug prescription.

Everything will become truly mobile. Graham predicted that by 2010 "the mobile device would have 10 times the processing power of current desktop PC's. The phone will learn your

preferences – as you walk down the High Street, it will tell you of Special offers in the shops. It could also guide you around supermarkets – the Store system having scanned in your requirements as you walked in".

Flexibooks will appear to become interactive, foldable maps – suddenly information will fit the human body like paper!.

Everyone, from cradle to grave, will have one messaging address – perhaps this will even be put on the birth Certificates.

Strange things are already happening…. *Kelloggs* web site let you build your own breakfast Cereal – and then sent you a sample. (*Kelloggs* marketed 5 new products as a result).

Pop band *"Merrillion"* was being offered 10p/CD by *EMI*. When *EMI* dropped this to 8.5p/CD they got fed up, and opened a WWW site, inviting fans to buy a CD (still to be produced) on line – with the promise to deliver in under a year.

This attracted £250,000 working capital in 2.5 weeks. They have now set up their own Studio complex, and are going great.

Many are just sitting on top of the network, and making a killing – we should do the same.

Security is crucial – however Graham said that "There is no Security of present – because of the fascile nature of password requirements – we all now have many requiring constant updating and remembering. – most of us probably write them down."

Fingerprint readers on Smart Cards may be the answer – but surely Iris recognition Technology is the best answer. If we can make the network truly secure and easy to access people will demand to do more and more on its interface"

Graham finished his talk by saying:

"Unless we are working for a Company which can really give our customers what they want then we are all out of a job – and there is NO FUTURE IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS"

Written by Howard King, from an IBTE Lecture Given by Graham Whitehead, Tuesday 11th September 2001