

Thursday, June 30, 2005

And the most useless technology ever award goes to...

Car Alarms.

I write this as I listen to one going off steady for about the last half hour. It brought back painful memories of my last apartment, on a residential street with lots of street parking for the local residents and there being about a half dozen repeat offender cars whose alarms were on a hair trigger. They would go off for no reason several times an hour, all day, every day.

In their most common form car alarms don't do anything to mitigate threats to your vehicle. They just piss people off. I wouldn't be surprised to find out they actually incite more instances of vandalism towards vehicles where they constantly go off for no reason than prevent a crime. (If this thing is still going half an hour from now, I will seriously consider dropping an old G3 out the window onto the damn thing's windshield).

Given the technology today, it can be done so much better. There are some systems that are better: silent, networked, tracking devices, GPS, etc. Yes, they can be circumvented but at least that's the car thief's problem. These ones are just goddamn ignored, and that's everybody's problem.

I would like to see a municipal bylaw that set fines for oversensitive car alarms. If one is going off for no reason you could just call the parking authority and they'd ticket the vehicle for noise pollution (or even better, tow the damn thing away).

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Tech Wreck 2.0 at 16:31

Thursday, June 23, 2005

It's scary....

I'm watching Larry Kudlow tear apart some senator on CNBC about the hysteria over the Chinese bid for Unocal. I'm agreeing with every word he says. Wow.

Larry is right, if the US are the champions of the free market, then they have to always champion it, not only when its in their interests to so, but when somebody else plays the same rules to their own advantage.

Right now, the US is making three demands on the Chinese:

1. Keep taking US dollars, even though their value is being deliberately watered down by rampant credit and monetary expansion.
2. Revalue the Yuan. In other words: while we ramp up the printing presses and devalue our currency, we want you to keep taking more of it.
3. Take more and more of this US paper, but whatever you do, don't use any of it to buy anything of value to us. Especially energy.

That isn't the type of environment mutually healthy trading relationships are made of. As Warren Buffet opined earlier today, if the US is going to keep consuming more than they're producing to the tune of 2 billion a day, then they have to be prepared to sell off valuable assets. What else are the trading partners going to do with enormous piles of US dollars which are rapidly losing value?

On other fronts my Fedex \$75 Puts expired worthless on friday and today they warned and plunged over \$6 a share. As the old adage goes: "The graveyards of Wall St. are littered with the bones of those who were too early".

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Venture Capital at 15:22

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

Prediction: June 6, 2006 conspiracy theories to surface

I noticed this on the plane out here on Monday, I looked at my phone and saw the date: 06/06/05. It occurred to me that next year the MM/DD/YY date strings on all devices worldwide will read 06/06/06.

This is all it takes: wait for a conspiracy theory to emerge around this date, it will be singled out as some sort of seminal moment in human history: WWII will start, asteroid hit, coup d'etat and imposition of martial law in the US, suitcase nuke somewhere, we're waiting for the "what" gets predicted to happen on that day, not "if" a wild theory will evolve in advance of it.

Remember my Law of the Expected Unexpected, whatever the conspiracy theory posits for 06/06/06, it will absolutely, positively not occur on that day in particular. (Douglas Adams had a name for it in Hitchhiker's Guide: a number whose value can be anything but itself, and its use in practice was that the given hour for a dinner party was the one moment in time where it was impossible for any of the guests to arrive).

The smart way to play 06/06/06, from a working conspiracy theorist's vantage point is to posit something that won't be immediately disproved by June 7th arriving without the world ending. Birth of the AntiChrist is always a good one. It still leaves years to write books, hit the lecture circuit and start a small cult of personality around the theory.

Proof of my theory that a conspiracy, apocalyptic, messianic meme around 06/06/06 will emerge will occur when George Ure's friend Cliff, over at the Web Bot Project picks up a lot of chatter around this theme. (Maybe this post will kick that process off

Gentlemen, start your hysteria engines.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Nutjob Watch at 09:51

Tuesday, June 7, 2005

Stupidity, mentors and bye-bye to the CIRA Board

I'm sitting up late in my hotel room in St. John's, Newfoundland having just completed two things:

- 1) A few hours ago I left my last Board meeting as a CIRA Director, aside from a short teleconference slated for next week, as of June 22nd, my term is over and I'm done.
- 2) Because I can't sleep, I just watched Albert Nerenberg's documentary Stupidity which just aired on CBC's Rough Cuts.

I'm glad I watched it. Something I've been trying to do over the last few years is come to grips with my own stupidity. Being on the CIRA Board didn't help. It was an honour and a privilege to serve on the Board, but it was also one of the my more intimidating experiences. The CIRA Board is stacked with incredibly smart people who really know what they're talking about and most of them are drawing from intellectual wells that are far deeper than my own.

I could go around the table and individually cite each person's acumen and intellect but that may drift this post into "fluff job" territory. Suffice it to say that there is a formidable array of intelligence there.

As for myself, I have a talent for seeing patterns amongst the obscure and an ability to extrapolate present conditions in a non-linear way to come up with unexpected and sometimes surprisingly compelling predictions or models. Because of these knacks I sometimes appear to be of above-average intelligence.

But I also have a problem with what I call being "oblivious to the obvious". I overlook things which are right in front of my face and from time to time I appear to be dumb as a post because of it. I suspect it stems from a variety factors ranging from a short attention span to genuine lack of comprehension skills but I've come to recognize it as my own personal disability and I have to constantly compensate for it.

My primary method of doing this is through trusted mentors and advisors who I constantly barrage with a steady stream of ideas and notions to "reality test" and "sanity check". My wife is the closest and first line of defense against my own dull-wittedness. Then I have layers of friends and advisors expanding outwards in concentric circles. Most of my stupid ideas will get null routed somewhere along those shells before they can hit the real world and do any real damage.

The documentary briefly touched on expectations driving results and in one interview scene a fellow described how he was branded an "idiot" as a child, and as a result he acted and felt like a dolt for a number of years. He managed to shirk the confines of those expectations and went on to become the president of the American Psychiatric Association (sorry, his name eluded me).

My childhood was driven by the expectations of intelligence. My parents nurtured my sister and I in an atmosphere of "can-doism". We were constantly reminded that we were exceptionally bright children and thus could accomplish anything we set our minds to. These attitudes spilled over into our school environments and we were both fast-tracked into enrichment programs for our entire primary through high-school careers.

I used to concur with all this and thought I was a pretty brilliant person. As of a few years ago (it started around the time I stopped drinking and smoking grass) I began to suspect that maybe I wasn't as smart as I thought. Today that "maybe" is a "probably". I suspect now that the expectations of high intelligence enabled me to rise to a higher station in life than had I been left to what would have otherwise been average potentials.

So in effect, expectation drove accomplishment which outstripped capability.

If it wasn't for awareness (or at least suspicion) of this, I would be a textbook example of the Peter Pyramid. Fortunately my friend and mentor Sieg, the Atavist explained the Peter Principal to me many years ago, when I was doing my first computing job for his courier company. He told me how 95% of the efforts of mid-to-top-level managers are spent hiding their own incompetence. I was younger and dumber then but I gleaned enough to promise myself that I would never fall into that, and if I found myself in at the apex of a Peter Pyramid, I would put a stop to it.

If I wanted to boil this down into the Lowest Common Denominator^{™}; I would say something banal like "Embrace Your Incompetence" and maybe even wrap a management theory around that and wait for someone like Fast Company to elevate it to a new management fad.

But more realistically, and less sensationally I will say "Be Aware Of Your Inadequacies" and deal with them. Part of the way to deal with them is to get help, seek mentors and bring on people who are smarter than you are to be part of your team^[1].

Closing the loop on this insomnia-powered post I can say that one of the factors driving my decision not to run for re-election on the CIRA Board was that at this time I don't think I'm smart enough to be sitting at that table.

The other thing is that now is the time for me to devote my full attention to running my own company. So...

[1] If anybody is interested, I'm currently looking for a Director of Marketing and a Director of Software Development to join my team. Qualifications are that you have to be a smarter than me. My email address is my firstname at my lastname dot net.

Friday, June 3, 2005

Domain name dispute in Canadian House of Commons

It'll be interesting to see what comes of the domain name dispute debate which took place in the House of Commons over same-sex marriage opponents who registered MP's names as domains and setup websites on them to drum up support for their cause. As Michael Geist comments, the actions are nebulous and under the current rules in place at CIRA, these do not constitute "bad faith" registrations and thus not really eligible for action under the CDRP. I don't expect this to be added to the agenda for next week's CIRA Board meeting in St. John's Newfoundland (my last one as a director), but we may get a few questions on it during the public forum. What eludes me in this day and age is how semi-public figures like politicians don't bother registering their own names as domain names as a matter of course. At the very least they can avoid situations like this and at best the clueful (and bold) ones can run blogs on their own domain names. Note: I later found out that this domain was registered and then allowed to lapse, where it subsequently washed out via TBR and was picked up by the current registrant. While there are, I am sure, other members of the politburo who have not adequately guarded their own named domains, this illustrates another point, that of formulating a coherent domain registration and retention policy within your organization, as described in our Domain Management Resources: 10 Domain Management Tips article.

Posted by easyDNS: Domain Industry Watch in via easyDNS blog at 13:07

Thursday, June 2, 2005

So long and thanks for all the...chaos

I've often wondered how Dave Lewis' Chaos-onomics could be so overlooked among the contrarian/libertarian/goldbug crew. I can best describe him as an "economic philosopher" of the highest calibre, but what do I know? Large swaths of his writing simply go over my head. I don't have the philosophical let alone economic background to understand a lot of it.

Yet in his columns I recognized something rare in this day and age. Something informed, not only from a deep repository of a well read individual but from his experience in the financial markets and his first hand accounts of financial hinge moments like the Asian Crisis. Contrast with the unreasoned, biased cheerleading of a Kudlow or the appalling non-thinking drivel of a Cramer, Dave Lewis' columns were grounded in an authenticity and depth of knowledge unheard of in mainstream financial commentary.

And now, it's over. Lewis has announced in his swan song post that he set out to research Peak Oil two months ago, wound up doing some philosophical soul searching, and arrived at the conclusion not to bother with it anymore! I am reminded of Thomas Kuhn's arguments in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* these days as I watch the dance of politics and economics, particularly the view that such transitions, from paradigm to paradigm, are not graceful. I am also reminded of the waning stages of any great ethical faith and Capitalism, like representative government, was, in my view, such a faith. In the early stages only a few believe but their belief is strong and pure. Then the faith is diluted but spread to many. In the later stages the faith is assumed, by which I mean, to use chivalry as an example, initially Knights aspired to be chivalrous, and in later periods, as that age was ending, they were merely assumed, by themselves more than by others, to be so. That the United States is often considered to BE a Capitalist economy, rather than an economy which aspires to follow those tenets suggests to me that faith in that system among the powers that be is virtually non-existent. If the powers that be don't believe in Capitalism as ethic to allocate resource any more, why should I waste my time thinking about the world in that paradigm. Of course, I could be wrong and all is well. In either case, regular commentary on the lines I had been following seems pointless.

It's a shame. I hope he'll keep his writings up, he has stated he will keep a closed mailing list going.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Venture Crapital at 21:43

Wednesday, June 1, 2005

Booktagged: I'm it

My friend The Atavist has tagged me in some booktag thing making the rounds across the internet faster than a Star Wars bootleg. Maybe one day Sieg will notice I've long since changed the name of my blog from Blah Blah Blog to Under The Radar

At any rate, here is my book tag thing: Number of books I own: A lot. At least a few hundred and when I figure the boxes in storage it may go over a thousand. I come from a long line of bookworms and now that I'm married to another one, it makes for lots of books piling up around the house. Most of mine are non-fiction, economics, history, futurism, social issues, technology, culture. Last book I bought: I go on binges. If I'm logged into Amazon, look out. Although I think the last one I grabbed was the Crossing the Rubicon: The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil. I'm about halfway through (watch this space for my review). Last book I read: I just finished Leading at the Speed of Growth: Journey from Entrepreneur to CEO and recently finished my friend Jim Carroll's What I Learned From Frogs In Texas. 5 books that mean a lot to me: Here's a few I remember devouring more than once over the years, off the top of my head (since I can't see my bookshelves from here) In no particular order:

Rees-Mogg and Davidson's The Sovereign Individual

Alvin Toffler's Future Shock

Financial Reckoning Day

Jame's Gleick's Chaos

Colin Wilson's The Occult

And 5 other bloggers I have to now "tag":

Ross Rader

Rick Segal, Post Money Value

Jim Carroll

*and my bandmates Noise, and Mark Collins.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 16:39