



THE  
**500-Year  
Delta**

*What Happens After What Comes Next*

Jim Taylor and Watts Wacker  
with Howard Means

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## First impressions of THE 500-YEAR DELTA

"I like [this] book. It's mind stretching and imagination expanding. While you tell us how difficult it will be to negotiate the ambient chaos if steered only by historic logic, you demonstrate that it will be eminently manageable with on-the-spot reasoning—like catching a very hot ground ball at shortstop, coming like a rocket over a rocky sandlot infield. I have a prediction—in 500 days you will have a bestseller."

—MARIO CUOMO

"If you are seriously concerned with preparing for the next 500 days, weeks, months, or years—read this book. The pages contain profound stuff and some readers may be frightened by the predictions offered by two very experienced, and respected, sages of our time. Unless we heed their advice to initiate a restructuring of nearly every aspect of our lives and embrace 'The Four New Freedoms (To Be, To Do, To Go, To Know),' our future may be bleaker than we imagine."

—DONALD C. JOHANSON, president and founder, Institute of Human Origins, author of *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind*

"Taylor and Wacker have assembled a wide-ranging chronicle, before the fact, of the coming century. I believe it is an accurate assessment of the challenges facing those of us who were taught to think in the twentieth century, yet find ourselves on the brink of something altogether different than what we've known. *The 500-Year Delta* deconstructs and analyzes the complexities of our uncertain future, in a simple and engaging language that even a middle-age white businessman could understand."

—DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF, author of *Ecstasy Club*,  
*Playing the Future*, and *Media Virus*

"This may be the most unconventional book about business ever written. In fact, it may be the most unconventional book about anything ever written.

"Taylor and Wacker have fearlessly created their own [system] for life here on earth. A grand system that takes in not only business, marketing, and advertising, but macroeconomics, government, politics, social organization, and family life. A system at the core of which is the conviction that virtually everything we believe about these institutions is a comforting myth, and that those who don't have the courage to give up these myths will be consigned to history's dustbin.

"If you want to be enlightened, startled, mystified, and infuriated—and often all on the same page—read *The 500-Year Delta*."

—BURT MANNING, chairman, J. Walter Thompson Co. Worldwide

“An absorbing book that vastly enlarges the conceptual landscape of business. These postmodern futurists share invaluable knowledge that can turbocharge how we imagine the future and locate the strategic white space within it.”

—JOHN KAO, author of *Jamming: The Art and Discipline of Business Creativity*

“Taylor and Wacker have produced a dazzling array of gargantuan concepts, searing insights, and pithy observations about societal change and social values. This provocative book should be of keen interest to those whose bent of mind, quality of life, or nature of work require radical breakthrough thinking about how to live (and, incidentally, how to market) in these intellectually and morally tricky times.”

—JERRY WELSH, president, Welsh Marketing Associates Inc.

To Judy and Katherine and to Betsy,  
for putting up with a production many years in the making  
amid great skepticism,  
and to John E. Means

Only connect!

—E. M. Forster, *Howards End*

How can you connect in an age where strangers, lovers,  
landlords, your own cells betray?  
Or bind the fabric together when the raging, shifting winds of  
change keep ripping away?

—Jonathan Larson, *Rent*

## Acknowledgments

Every book is a collaboration of sorts—between writer and reader; between information, imagination, and audience; between past, present, and future—but some are more collaborative than others. This is one of them.

We are grateful beyond expression for the patience of our families as we worked on this and grateful as well for the many others who supported us. Raphael Sagalyn of the Sagalyn Literary Agency served as navigator on this project, always keeping us pointed in the right direction. Kim Schneider and Allison Strack juggled—and re juggled—complex schedules to bring us together, and Kim saw to our watering and tending as we worked. Mary De Vito made us justify our speculations. Christine Griencewic searched our copy for land mines. And Gateway 2000 and SRI Consulting were generous in granting us time. In outline, a book that ranges as broadly as this requires a leap of faith, but Adrian Zackheim, the publishing director of HarperBusiness, believed in it and us wholeheartedly from the start. Harriet Rubin needs mentioning, too; without her early encouragement, this book may never have come to fruition. Thanks to them all.



And thanks to those authors, mentors, and thinkers—Alvin Toffler, the late Thomas Kuhn, Jerry Welsh, and Bradley Greenberg among them—who helped prepare this ground for us. We plant where others have plowed.

Lastly, we need to thank each other—for listening, for considering, for arguing, for amending, for enriching. We did more than collaborate; we connected. And in our own collaborator, Howard Means, we found someone who could help give voice and shape to our ideas.

*JT*

*WW*

*Winter, 1996–97*

## Introduction

**This is a book about the near-term and long-term future of business and** how business leaders must reposition themselves and rethink the arenas in which they compete. It is a book about understanding every element of a business—from product through customer and marketplace—not as we wish them to be and not as they long have been assumed to operate, but as they are now becoming and as they will be over the next five hundred days, the next five hundred weeks, the next five hundred months, even the next five hundred years.

This is a book about history and the direction of the future, about the qualities and frames of mind that will sustain us and those we must jettison if we hope to cope with what lies ahead. It is a book about taking the blinders off, about seeing things whole and clear. But most of all, this is a book about change, change so rapid and so massive that by century's end it will have swept away nearly the entire underpinnings of modern life. And thus this is a book not just for businesspeople but for anyone who wants to know where society has been and where it is going.

What is this change we are talking about? It is not simply the accel-

erating rate of change, though that is a part of it, nor is it simply the attenuation of existing trend lines. Neither is this change just a transition writ large—from an agricultural to an industrial economy, for example, or from an Industrial Age to an Information Age. Rather, we are talking about a convergence of changes, each profound in its own right and collectively so powerful that they can be thought of only as meta-change—the change beyond which there is no more.

We have reached, in short, one of those fulcrum points in history where everything that was is tipping over into everything that will be.

## The Convergence of Change

What are the elements of this convergence of change? The three most dominant forces are laid out in Part I of this book, titled “Triple-Witching Hour”:

- The shift from reason-based to chaos-based logic
- The splintering of social, political, and economic organization
- The collapse of producer-controlled consumer markets

Each of these forces, in turn, is both affected and enhanced by a constellation of lesser changes that are themselves flowing together as the twentieth century draws to a close. We take those up in Part II, “Millennial Convergences”:

- The waning of victimhood and the rise of authenticity and responsibility for oneself as the values of the Me Generation and Generation X yield to the values of the new Millennialists.
- A rise in principles as the driving motivational force of behavior and a simultaneous diminution in the drawing power of celebrity as the Age of Access makes celebrity self-attainable.
- An expansion of perspective as borders disappear—between nations, between peoples, between work and leisure—and governments fade into the background with them.
- The transformation of communication as the old commercial models fall to connectivity and corporate hierarchies are dissipated by e-mail, fax, and the miniaturization of time.

- The growth in the economic value of information sharing, the decline in the value of information withholding, and the rise in the value of the intellectual property people claim for themselves.
- The breakup of mass consciousness into individual realities and the emergence of situational lifestyles.
- The establishment of a new empathy, based not on historical guilt but on individual powerlessness.

Intuitively, we contend, most people understand this convergence of change is taking place. Most of us know we are straddling worlds, between what has been and what will be. We know that the old rules we learned to live by—loyalty given is loyalty received, for one—no longer apply. Our separate experiences teach us that collectively we have come to a precipice. Just as cause has come unhinged from effect, so attitudes and behaviors today are moving in different directions. Anxiety has become the dominant emotion of our times. We take this up in “Cultural Schizophrenia and the Noble Truth of Pain,” the opening chapter of Part IV, “The Search for Meaning.” And from there we move on to limn the outcomes of this flood tide of transitions:

- The fusion, *not* fission, of these swirling particles of change to create, through the dislocation of our own times, both consensus materialism and an epoch of extraordinary vitality.
- The creation of demand-based markets.
- The rise of tribalism and the need for tribal marketing as society reorganizes itself to fit the new realities.
- The movement away from conspicuous consumption to stealth wealth and “downward nobility,” with its demand not for many things but a few good things.
- The absolute necessity in a chaos-driven world for companies to effectively manage the risk of their customers.
- The emergence of privacy management as one of the great growth industries of the next decade.
- The rising currency value of personal energy as time compresses and intersects with stress, and the imperative on corporations to preserve their human-energy resources.

- Thrival strategies and skills that can help position you and your company for the world that lies beyond.

Along the way, we simply have fun because we mean for this book to be that, too: entertaining as well as illuminating, useful in the short term as well as thought-provoking in the long term.

Part III, “Unreal Realities,” is a catalogue of both the acceleration and massive accumulation of change—a catalogue, we should add, that surprised even us—as well as an overview of the sustaining myths of our times. Part V, “New Rules for a Chaos World,” is a distillation in practical terms of the larger argument of the book. In Part VI, “The 500-Year Delta,” we take the gloves off and begin to detail the world as it will be in five hundred days, five hundred weeks, five hundred months, even briefly in the next five hundred years. Happily for us, we won’t be around in the year 2500 to live with our predictions if they are wrong, but we fully expect someone born in the year 2500 to have a perfectly valid expectation of living to the year 3000 and beyond. And in all honesty, we don’t expect our predictions to be wrong in any event.

Happily, too, we do expect to be around to see much of what we foresee come true, not because we want to gloat over our accuracy, but because we foresee an epoch of pure possibility that we want to be a part of. More about that in the penultimate section of this book, “The Age of Possibility.”

Finally, we end the book with “A New Vocabulary of Change”—a glossary for the new age rising: “disharmonious conjunctions,” “ecomagnetics,” “endotruths,” “latent personalization,” “nulture,” “oxymoronic future,” “pagan capital,” “sisbertize,” “wrebel,” and many more. Without the words to talk about this world that is forming, it will always float just ahead in the mists.

## **Who We Are**

Who are we? How do we claim such powers of divination? How do we purport to see through the fog and murk of time to come? In fact, we claim no special powers whatsoever. Everything we know about today, everything we know about where business and society have been and where they are going, has been learned in the trenches.

We'll come later to more details of our life stories, including some of the rough stuff. For the moment, let this introduction suffice: We are both former editors—and in one case a former majority owner—of the *Yankelovich Monitor*, the nation's premier predicting tool. Watts Wacker today is the resident futurist for SRI (formerly, the Stanford Research Institute), one of the nation's leading think tanks. Until recently, Jim Taylor was managing director of Hill & Knowlton, among the leading public-relations firms in the world. Today he is worldwide marketing director for Gateway 2000, a company that understood demand-based markets long before anyone knew what they were.

We are number crunchers and content analysts. We have pored over survey data and created hundreds of surveys of our own. We have also been given an extraordinary opportunity to see the world of affairs from deep inside the beast. Working separately and together, we have advised top executives of nearly every Fortune 100 company in America—as well as a vast number of leading international corporations—on how to position themselves for the world that lies ahead. Our client list runs from Volvo to MCI and Radio Shack; from Tambrands to Sears and the Canyon Ranch health spas; from Ralston Purina to Bacardi and Charles Schwab; from Pepsi to the U.S. government, the U.S. Olympic Committee, Mont Blanc Pens, the DreamWorks movie studio, and Nike athletic wear.

Just as important, we have been given an extraordinary opportunity to see the world of affairs from its farthest fringes. We have panned on the streets of Manhattan, sat with Rastafarian prophets on a Jamaican mountaintop, wrangled mustangs in the wild hills of southern Montana. Why? Because often it is only from the edge that you can truly comprehend the dance at the center.

We have both had gifted lives. But maybe the greatest gift of all has been this: We have been allowed to immerse ourselves in the tumult of our times, have been allowed to dance with chaos, and we still have been able to see hope shining clear as a freshly risen sun on the horizon.

## **The Four New Freedoms**

Lamenting the world this steadily accelerating, steadily accumulating change has presented us with has become a popular parlor sport these days. There's no more shared reality, people say. Loyalty has disappeared;

trust is on the wane. Through connectivity, so much information pours in on us that it all turns into static. If the kids get their information off the World Wide Web, they'll never learn basic research. If the grown-ups move from job to job, from marriage to marriage, from town to town, they'll never put down roots. If we can't cut through the white noise of information, we'll become trapped in it, immobilized by input.

Alvin Toffler was the first writer to identify the accelerating rate of change, in his 1970 best-seller *Future Shock*, but by the time he got to his most recent book—*The Third Wave*, published in 1980—Toffler was openly despairing about where this change was leading us. For our part, we look out on the same landscape, see the same phenomena, the same rising distrust in our institutions, corporations, and social structures. And yet we draw precisely the opposite conclusion.

We look at the World Wide Web, the Internet technologies, the massive mountains of data waiting for electronic retrieval, and we see not a rising tide of casual information-mongering but rather a global “freedom to know”—a world in which for the first time in human history caste or schooling or economic circumstance no longer limits access to knowledge, a world in which knowledge itself is less important than the skill to access it.

We look at the dissolution of borders, the collapse of national identity, the disempowering of governments, and we see not a world order in peril but rather the rise of a global “freedom to go”—a world in which for the first time true global citizens will have true global mobility.

We look out on the collapse of corporate loyalty and see the rise of deal-making—a global “freedom to do” in accord not with professional processes or bureaucratic structures but with one's own intuition and entrepreneurial zeal.

And we look out on a splintering reality and see the opportunity to create one's own reality, a global “freedom to be” whatever one wants to be *and* the obligation to exercise that freedom.

We look out, in short, on this landscape of the present and see not the abrogation of old freedoms but the rise of four new ones: to know, to go, to do, to be. And we see just ahead of us, just beyond the coming millennium, an Age of Possibility such as the world has never known. The terror, we contend, lies only in getting there.

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