



TECH STAR



Daniel Burrus: Technological Visionary

[By Akbar Ali]

Predicting the future is a tricky (some might say implausible) business, but for Daniel Burrus, founder and CEO of Burrus Research, a research and consulting firm that tracks scientific and technological trends, his track record in predicting technology trends during the last 20 years has been remarkably and uniquely accurate.

Burrus first ventured into the technology field in the early 1980s when, after spending a year researching the coming global influence of technology, he arrived at a realization that was both difficult and exciting: the dominant social institutions had no idea what was coming and also had no plans for advancement. He said, "I could see that business, government, and education were unprepared for what was to come." So Burrus did what few were doing at the time. Marshalling his technology expertise and his desire to implement technology in a way that would prove socially beneficial, he set out to help other individuals and businesses understand the revolution that was about to hit them: "I knew I could help them shape a more-positive future through insights and understanding based on my research."

The strong, driving affinity for technology that Burrus has felt for most of his life is something that stems from his understanding of science and the idea that "we all spend the rest of our lives in the future." Burrus's enthusiasm for science and technology first helped him earn his bachelor's and master's degrees in science while he attended school in Wisconsin. He recalled his university time fondly, saying, "I will always look back at those years with a smile." Though most would never assume a technology expert to be in possession of

great artistic or creative talents, Burrus is an accomplished guitar player. He actually financed his college education by playing lead guitar in a very popular blues band, which, he lamented, left little time

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Playing and composing music, motorcycling, kayaking, sailing, power boating, nature photography, filmmaking, hiking, adventure travel, the list goes on...

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. I don't use CDs anymore; I listen to MP3s. *The Allman Brothers Band.*

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Science Magazine.*

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. I don't watch TV shows; I would rather watch movies.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr.—they had the courage to stand up for what they believed in.

for a conventional social life. During his third year of college, he became one of first undergraduate students in the nation to direct a federal research grant. He also started a co-op called the Academic Advancement Cooperative, which he referred to as "basically a co-op of the mind with students sharing best practices."

He began his career teaching biology and physics, always maintaining an interest in the potential impact of emerging technology. This, he acknowledged, was the true beginning of his professional journey. After spending seven years as a professor, Burrus left teaching to fulfill his ambitions as a businessperson. And ambitious he was, starting five companies, two of which attained national-leader status within the first year.

In 1982, he sold all five companies to start Burrus Research, the pioneering company that he heads today. Of that critical time in his life he said, "I went full circle back to teaching, but in a different way—authoring six books, consulting, and delivering [more than] 2,300 keynote speeches worldwide." Burrus Research is most noted for a powerful and revolutionary methodology developed in 1983 which predicts the future of technological change. Among the many noteworthy predictions Burrus has made are



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the following: PCs in every classroom by the mid-1990s (1983), the digital revolution of the 1990s (1983), fiberoptics as the broadband medium of choice (1983), sequencing of the human gene code by 2000 (1984), interactive television (streaming video) by the mid-1990s (1986), rapid growth of the wireless Web in the early 21st century (1996), and that XML would revolutionize the Web in the early part of the next decade (1997). More generally, he predicted the advent of numerous technologies which are now indispensable parts of modern life, including the Internet, fiberoptic networking, microwaves and wireless networking, superconductors, advanced communication satellites, flat-panel and advanced video displays, bio-chips, mobile computing, lasers, wireless communication, and quantum computing and digital electronics.

In spite of this unprecedented success at forecasting technological trends, Burrus is able to pinpoint a few select moments of memorable achievement. Some of his most noteworthy accomplishments include his guide to understanding the future of

technology, *Technotrends*, becoming an international bestseller in 1994, being inducted into the Council of Peers Award for Excellence Speaker Hall of Fame, being honored at the White House for his professional contributions, and having four books covering four different fields of technology published in the span of one year: *Medical Advances*, *Advances in Agriculture*, *Environmental Solutions*, and *The New Tools of Technology*. He also garnered a notable endorsement from *The New York Times*, which recently named him one of America's top-three business gurus. His successes aren't limited to technology predictions: he also served as a test pilot for an airplane he designed and even made an independent film which won first place at a film festival.

Of all the lessons Burrus has learned throughout his career, the most important lesson Burrus has learned is one that he taught himself. "Turning my back on other peoples' definitions of my success has allowed me to reinvent myself many times. Getting outside of my comfort zone and meeting fear head-on has always left

my fear in the dust, allowing me to move forward faster. I find meaningful lessons in most of my experiences because I look for them," he said. He also added that many individuals have played critical roles in his success, among them one of his college professors, Dr. Larry Campbell, who became an important mentor in his life. "He helped me see a bigger picture of me than I could see," Burrus said. He also added, "All of my colleagues influence my career because I ask questions and listen."

To young technology professionals just starting out he said, "Find your passion and wrap your career around it. Understand that you have multiple talents, but you have only one true gift. Discover your gift and focus on getting better at it." After 25 years of hard work, research, and seeing predictions become realities, Burrus has used his gift for the benefit of the future.

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