

2006 trends that will change the world

BY MICHAEL TCHONG

THERE'S no question that technology continues to transform the trend landscape in 2006.

From the Internet to digital television to the mobile phone and Apple Computer's iPod, a slew of societal changes are taking place propelled by rapid advances in technology. In the eye of the tech hurricane lies a huge ubertrend, one I've dubbed "The Digital Lifestyle."

The Digital Lifestyle

In 2006, Intel plans a huge push for a new technology it calls Viiv (rhymes with "live"), which turns the PC into a home entertainment hub.

The first PC wave revolutionised office productivity with word processing, spreadsheets and databases. Now, the PC is poised to lift entertainment productivity, a much larger market, given that just about anyone listens to music or watches television.

For the second year in a row, North American holiday gift buyers said consumer electronics were the top shopping item, mentioned by 60% of consumers. Topping their own wish lists was the flat-screen TV, a trend that's being propelled by the global adoption of HDTV, which will get a big push in 2006 as the FIFA World Cup is broadcast in HDTV in Europe.

Fashion Notebooks

Notebook computer prices are set to plunge, so expect more fashionable notebooks, like the widescreen Sony VAIO FJ, available in red, green, blue and white, to become an extension of your persona in 2006.

Podcasting

The Digital Lifestyle has certainly lifted Apple Computer's boat. Witness the massive changes that have taken place since its 2001 launch of the iPod.

Since then, more than 30 million iPods have been sold worldwide.

The iPod's enormous popularity has created an aftermarket that now numbers more than 1,000 products, effectively creating an "iPod Economy."

The newest trend propelled by the iPod is "podcasting," which lets you listen to radio-like programmes on your iPod. After Apple added podcast downloading to its iTunes Music Store this past June, podcast subscriptions soared to five million in just three weeks.

Apple upped the ante this October with the launch of the video-capable iPod.

Massively Collaborative

One medium that delivers instant gratification is the Internet. And the big trend for 2006 is "massively collaborative" media – sites that rely on consumers to contribute user-generated content.

In July, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp paid US\$580mil (RM2.2bil) to acquire music community MySpace.com, which, at the time, had 22 million registered members.

In just six months, MySpace.com has nearly doubled in size and now boasts some 42 million members.

Another hot, collaborative trend is "content tagging" – the ability to add "tags" or labels to interesting online articles or websites, which helps visitors find topics of interest faster.

On Dec 9, Yahoo! acquired content tagging pioneer, Del.icio.us, one of the hottest "social web" start ups. Del.icio.us' 300,000 registered members slap tags on everything from CSS (cascading style sheets) articles to entertainment sites, thereby creating a useful hierarchy of information.

That same collaborative trend is behind the groundswell of weblogs, or blogs, now numbering 23.2 million worldwide, a figure that's growing at a rate of 70,000 each day.

An iPod on display at the Apple Store.



Skype Me!

eBay's recent purchase of Skype is making the VoIP market soar like an eagle. More than 66 million people have joined the service since its 2003 launch, with an average of 175,000 joining each day, attracted by free phone calls over the Internet.



Single wallpaper

One German entrepreneur, Susanne Schmidt markets "Single Tapete" or "single wallpaper" featuring life-size photographs of people designed to give single people "virtual company."

Tourism trend, which has made Thailand's top private hospital, the Bumrungrad International, a magnet for expert medical attention at low cost.

Fountain of Youth

If you've correctly identified the force behind the Fountain of Youth as aging Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, and numbering at least 450 million worldwide, you're an accomplished trendwatcher.

While wishing to remain young is not limited to boomers, they're the first generation to reap the rewards of dramatic advances in biotech, pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals and alternative medical care designed to stem the

ravages of time. The quest to relieve stress has driven an estimated 17 million Americans to practice yoga, up 43% from 2002. The Fountain of Youth is also propelling other forms of exercise. Health club members over 55 grew by 343% from 1987 to 2003, while 35-54-year-olds increased 180%, reports the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association.

And the quest for mental rejuvenation has also led to a global spa boom. In the past five years, the number of spas has more than doubled to over 12,000, according to the International Spa Association.

Hot on the horizon are "medspas" – facilities that offer physician services to accommodate the dreams of an ever more demanding clientele.

Medspas are part of the Medical

Unwired

If 2005 is any indication, 810 million mobile phones were sold worldwide last year, and 2006 should be another banner year as the Internet goes increasingly mobile, further propped by such cool advances as videophones and smartphones. Already some 1.8 billion people use mobile phones worldwide.

The next big trends in mobile phones are so-called "hybrid" phones, mobiles that handle both GSM and Wi-Fi, so they can switch seamlessly to Wi-Fi once near a base station.

Another hot trend is smartphones, which feature full-size keyboards to simplify texting and e-mailing. Expect smartphone to explode in 2006.

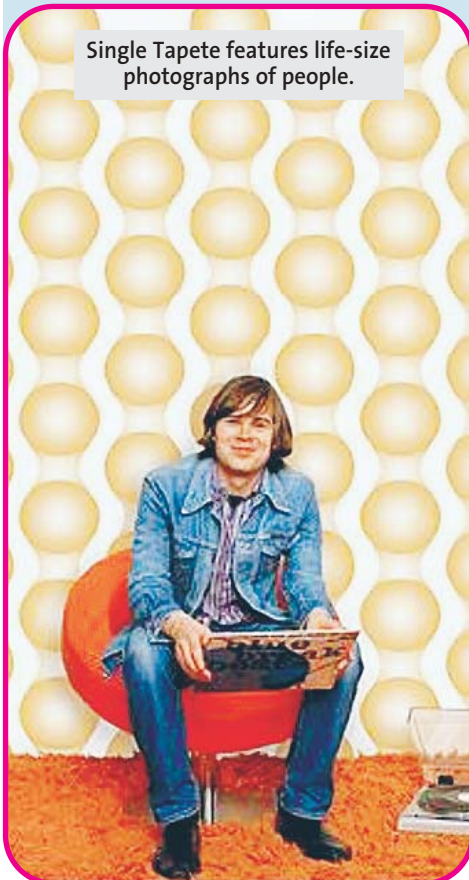
Most exciting is the progress WiMax is making in Asia. Unlike Wi-Fi, WiMax provides wireless coverage of citywide areas, with a range measured in miles. Intel says WiMax trials in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines are expected to start by the end of 2005.

On the mobile phone pop culture – in May 2005, the "Crazy Frog Axel F" became the first tune created for mobile phones to cross into mainstream music charts.

These hot trends are going to turn 2006 into a year of massive opportunity for those who know how to ride the wave early.

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Single Tapete features life-size photographs of people.



The Crazy Frog Axel F set to turn 2006 around.