VLAS...

The changes in the ways we manage and enjoy our consumer lifestyle will seem somewhat rapid to casual bystanders over the next few years, argues **Ken Blakeslee**, Chairman of **WebMobility Ventures**. But to the digital lifestyle residents and immigrants of today it will all seem very natural and logical as new and existing industries will be led by consumers down a path of change

Discovering innovations with high potential must start with understanding what satisfies customer needs and desires. This has always been the key to revenue and profits. I usually start my quest by using my crystal ball to look five years out and then "backcast" to the present in one year steps. Only the right combination of technology enablers, commercial environments and consumer desire will cause the future to crystallize in the way we imagine it will. Based on this approach, here are a few of my insights for the next few years:

CONTENT WILL STILL BE KING, BUT CONTEXT WILL BE QUEEN

Content, applications and searchable info databases are now all in place. The breakthrough for continued enrichment of this asset will come from the wisdom of the consumer "crowd" who will progressively define and refine the big head and the long tail of content and applications. The mechanisms for this are inherent in the social and search capabilities that people use today. Access to info and content is a given and it is interactive and media-rich already. The ability for man or machine to search and find relevant snippets is well developed.

Mobile will enable this content to get a lot more "Pushy". Personalisation and context awareness are the keys to the transition from search ("Pull") to just-in-time discovery ("Push"). In the next few years people will have at their disposal info that enhances their awareness, well-being and competitiveness. Plus it will

come to them in a much more natural, timely and entertaining way.

PUBLISHING BECOMES PERSONAL AND INTERACTIVE

Getting everything in a much more personalised and timely way will cause monthly and even daily periodicals to become old news before printed. Colourful and descriptive magazines of today will be too flat and not interactive enough to satisfy the crowd. Already we are seeing the once growing racks of magazines in large bookstores dwindling in size as well as the thickness of the publications themselves. Newspapers? For the most part gone in as few as five years – maybe sooner. ePads and colour ePaper will become more dominant at home and on public transport. But the key to all this is the availability and constant production of rich and interactive content – something that magazine publishers aren't typically well endowed with right now.

INFINITE CONTENT, APPS MOBILITY AND THE CLOUD

Broadcasters, pay attention! Content creators and gatherers and applications developers can take it from here, with the consumer as their constant and reliable feedback loop. Tap into it!

One-wayness is no longer viable. The cloud will be bigger, better and become infinitely blessed with content and capability. And it is at the consumer's disposal.

Connectivity to the cloud is ubiquitous globally now and will improve to meet user needs. Technology has now put the consumer in charge of what he or she can choose to view. That's why things can and will happen fast, but the focus has to be on the personal value derived, not the underlying technologies.

SCREENS EVERYWHERE

Small is the order of the day with personal devices and rich interactive content on tap everywhere but still not as enjoyable as it needs to be

from a pocket-sized mobile device. It's the small device/large screen dilemma! People will carry less, but have more.

So especially of interest to me are the innovations in what I call the "Virtually Large, Actually Small" (VLAS) technologies - large screens in small packages - Pico projectors and video eyewear (glasses with the screen(s) onboard). I'm watching companies like Vuzix, Microvision and others. These are commercially available and consumer affordable and will constantly evolve to bring the value from the cloud into a user's line of sight, anywhere, anytime. In most cases these "virtual" displays are as large as or larger than the physical screens we enjoy at home, yet can fit in your pocket or bag or be embedded in the devices themselves.

YOUR CONTENT, ANYWHERE

The habit of time and place shifting infotainment is becoming totally second nature to most. The combination of affordable mass storage in the pocket, home and cloud plus connectivity everywhere means each person's rolling 'collection' and stream of content will be on tap at all times and enjoyed on whichever screen and speakers best suit the situation.

The large assortment of cable connectors on modern TVs is evidence that the separation of the screen from the source of content is inevitable. This is phase one, but two key elements are now iterating and becoming more mature.

Firstly, the cabling is going wireless for the task of getting from devices to screen. Secondly, the technology mix of the various connectivity boxes now found in the home will merge and take on a bit of applications capability. Operator inhibitions, not technology, have driven the design of the boxes we connect to our TVs. Slingbox and AppleTV are but two examples of innovations whose design was driven by consumer desire not historic business models. More will follow.

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3D FOR THE MASSES?

For most of us, we spend all our waking hours seeing things in 3D. So, it's not a surprise to me that 3D, done right for once has become quite popular in everything from sports to games to blockbuster movies.

User generated 3D content is also coming along rapidly thanks to new consumer priced digital cameras as well as facilities on YouTube, Flickr and other content repositories which now support both downloading and conversion to multiple 3D formats.

Some of the portable VLAS devices described above also support stereo 3D viewing natively due to the "virtual" large screen being made up of two tiny screens inside (left and right), offering 3D glasses that do not need to be aimed at bulky screens. What could be more personal than that? Mobile is an emerging channel for 3D content.

A MOBILE TECHNOLOGY INVASION?

The desire for personal mobility in the way we consume content has already changed a few industries (e.g. music and social networks). In some cases this has caused disruption to the historic industry structures, but in time has left the consumer with more and better ways to access personalised content and spend their entertainment budget.

Thanks to ubiquitous access, miniaturisation of everything and enablers like the VLAS technologies, we will be able to add line of sight information plus "sit down/feet up" entertainment to the list of things people will be equipped to do anywhere. People can be cool and connected at the same time.

All in all, a good outlook for consumers, but not without some industry disruptions I suspect…

But the inherent value of quality rich content remains. The challenges will be migrating to the new delivery channels and business models. ∎