

*We all wonder what the future will bring.
How will the world in which we live change?
What new ideas, inventions and
technologies will shape this change?*

Who will lead the way?



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THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY IS PLEASED

TO INTRODUCE THE MATH, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY (M/S/T)

PROGRAM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJORS



At the college of New Jersey we know that a new paradigm consisting of mathematics, science, and technology literacy is necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century. While most people understand the importance of mathematics and science in the general education curriculum, technology, as a critical force within our society, has only recently been recognized. The new integrated major in M/S/T will create teachers who know how to tap and develop the potential of generations of innovators to come.

CIRCLE NO. 1 ON READER SERVICE CARD

The Fall Of Webvan

by Jonathan Weber

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I should have been a huge fan of Webvan. Not only do I hate going to the supermarket, I live in an apartment on the side of a hill that has no street access. What could be better than a store that would lug the groceries down the steps and down the path and up to my apartment? I'm sure I was among Webvan's least-profitable customers – it seemed inconceivable that they could ever make money carrying beer and canned goods and gallons of water to my inconvenient door – but that was their problem.

And the service was excellent. I found the Web interface well-designed, the deliveries always on time, the deliverymen cheerful and loyal to the policy of not accepting tips. The products were good, and if the prices were high, they weren't that much higher than Safeway.

Yet I hardly ever used Webvan.

The basic issue was, well, basic. I couldn't be bothered to plan my grocery purchases in advance. The process of ordering, moreover, was tedious, even with the good interface. And I could avoid the grocery store hassle by doing most of my shopping at our excellent corner market.

The lesson here is extremely prosaic: It takes a long time to

get consumers to adopt a new way of doing things. Eventually, as I invested in creating lists and favorites, I'm sure I would have used Webvan more often, as I'm sure many of Webvan's hundreds of thousands of infrequent users would have, too. But habits are habits, and they don't change in Internet time.

The other lessons of Webvan are basic as well: Don't invest a billion dollars in a national rollout until you've proved your concept in one or two or three markets; don't underestimate the difficulties associated with physical distribution of goods; don't think that a big market cap and a list of blue-chip backers guarantees success.

This all seems obvious now. But some of the smartest businesspeople I know were huge believers in Webvan, right up to the end. In its ambition, the company embodied what the Net could mean not only for the information elite, but also for the consumer masses. To alter something so fundamental as how we get our food – that was the revolutionary promise of new information technologies.

In this moment of schadenfreude, as the Krogers and Safeways of the world gloat and people come to realize that erstwhile Webvan CEO George Shaheen will not get his huge

severance package after all, it's easy to conclude that the revolution was a false promise. Certainly, in some of its ugly extremes, it was.

But again, the true lesson is more prosaic than that. No, the Net isn't going to change our lives overnight. It's not going to displace all the old ways of doing things. It's not going to eliminate the supermarket.

What it will do – and already is doing – is introduce a lot of new services and products and potential new habits, some of which will be very popular and some of which will be less so.

I certainly expect to be able to order groceries online in the future. Will 5 percent or 20 percent or 50 percent of the population do the same? I have no idea. But no matter what, this will be a good business for someone.

Just as the great can be the enemy of the good, the revolution can be the enemy of a profitable evolution. To me, that's the real lesson of Webvan. ●

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