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IS THE WORLD FLAT?

As we are all aware, changes are taking place in the world all the time. Some are obvious and some are happening so gradually that we barely even notice them.

There are the hugely topical environmental changes causing concern for those who take time out of their hectic lives to think about them and there are the technological changes which affect each of us in our daily lives. Not even Nostradamus or his peers could have predicted that, by the turn of the century we could sit in an office in London watching live footage of the effects of global warming on a rainforest in Central America, with the mere click of a button.

In his latest book, *'The World is Flat'*, Thomas L Friedman, three – **times winner of the Pulitzer prize and winner of the Financial Times/Goldman Sachs Business book of the year**, explores how an increase in globalisation is 'flattening out' the world in which we live.

Contradicting the discoveries made by Columbus in the fifteenth Century and the theory that the World is round, Friedman documents his visits to the 'New World' and the surprises and discoveries he uncovers. As bold as it may be, he decides that **the world is in fact flat!**

In an old battered car, at the end of pot-holed, sandy tracks in Bangalore, India, Friedman enters India's own 'Silicon Valley'. There, in the offices of a world-renowned software development company is a wall completely occupied by a flat screen TV. Its purpose? **Video conferencing**. From here the Indian software writers, the American designers, the Asian manufacturers and the British marketers can all meet without even leaving their desks...amazing!

Friedman is of the opinion that the World has been flattened by ten forces working over a period of time.

“The Bible tells us that God created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested. Flattening the world took a little longer. The world has been flattened by the convergence of ten major political events, innovations, and companies. None of us has rested since, or maybe ever will again.”

The ten influencing forces according to Friedman are:

1. The fall of the Berlin Wall which consequently rocked the world's power balance. Prior to November 1989 the world was not thought of as a whole but as two separate halves.
2. The World Wide Web enabled us, in the early 1990s, to obtain information instantly from all over the now newly opened world.
3. Work Flow Software meant that companies could work internally and externally together on the same systems and productivity increased.
4. Uploading has enabled the world to share and exchange news and information through 'blogging' and 'Wikipedia' is replacing the traditional encyclopaedia. The information is current and can be accessed from anywhere in the world – and it takes up far less space on the shelf!
5. The development of technology has enabled companies to take advantage of India as a “developing country with a developed intelligence”. In many cases it has now become more cost effective and time effective to have a team working in India than at home.

“In the early 1990s, an American health company outsourced its medical transcripts to Bangalore. It could take weeks for the notes to be available when the system in place was the Doctors taking handwritten notes and then dictating them to a Dictaphone for a secretary to then transcribe. The solution came in the form of Satellite which, along with a PC with a voice system, enabled someone in Bangalore to transcribe the notes in the matter of hours and with the time difference between India and America, this often meant that the finished work was on the Doctors' desks the following day.”

This was an important breakthrough and the start of Outsourcing for many companies. **If something as important as medical notes could be done overseas and successfully, then what else could be?**

6. Although there are similarities, Offshoring is different to outsourcing in the sense that “**outsourcing means**

taking some specific, but limited function that your company was doing in-house and having another company perform that exact same function for you and then reintegrating their work back. Offshoring in contrast is when a company takes one of its factories and moves elsewhere.”

China has been a key player in the offshoring game. So you see already by the mid 1990s, the world was becoming flatter and America, India and China were on the same map so to speak.

7. Supply Chaining “**Supply-chaining is both enabled by the flattening of the world and a hugely important flattener itself.**”

8. Insourcing came about once the world went flat. “The small could act big.”

9. Informing: How many of us now use the word ‘Google’ in our every day vocabulary? As in “I’ll Google it”. The on-line search agents such as Google, Yahoo and MSN have become like an online education programme. If it’s not on-line, it’s probably not worth knowing anyway!

10. The ‘Steroids’ the development of digital, mobile, personal and virtual devices has enabled us to ‘stay in touch with whomever, wherever.

‘The World is Flat’ teaches us and helps us to discover all sorts of things happening in the world of which we are not fully aware. **Will you now see the world in the same way as Thomas L Friedman?**

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