



## 090. THE DECADE BACK

**Rick Gibson** reflects on a decade wrought with changes—some good, some bad.

I CONSIDER MYSELF a student of entrepreneurship. Thus, it makes sense now to look back 10 years and reflect on how much business has changed. In 1995, my family had recently made its move from the craziness of Los Angeles to lovely and peaceful Tucson, Ariz.

I like to muse about how much the nation's big industries have changed in the last decade. In the 1980s, business stalwarts included the Big Eight accounting firms, the Big Four automakers, the airline industry and the big department stores. Back then everyone thought these firms would all last forever.

Today, the Big Eight have dropped to two. Phoenix lost several offices in the condensation of Price, Waterhouse, Coopers and Arthur Young, Ernst and Lybrand, while Tucson barely has one big accounting office. In 1994, it wasn't customary for all airlines to be in bankruptcy.

instantly buy a stock online for five bucks? Who needs a travel agent when it's faster planning your trip online? It's time to flinch when Blockbuster steals the NetFlix model, with new ads telling you to pick up videos by driving to your own mailbox. Of course, we all watched Amazon change the rules of the book business. However, in spite of all these changes, Tucson's own Bookman's has carved a niche as a leading used bookstore chain.

Remember the astounding Sony Walkman in the 1980s, enabling us to carry along our own personal music? Last week, I found myself reminding my 12-year-old to be content with his Apple iPod Mini because a thousand songs should hold him over. He recently chided me that video game revenues (which barely existed in 1995) have now surpassed the movie industry.

business? China now has more Internet users than the U.S.—and a billion more people.

Unfortunately, business also is affected by the negative things in the world. Today AIDS kills 5,500 people each day in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the AIDS epidemic began in 1981, in 1995 the first protease inhibitor was approved by the FDA. By the end of that year, there were 23 million people living with AIDS. Now there are almost 40 million. Many drug companies have reduced costs in order to increase access by third-world nations.

In the last 10 years, health care has become business's biggest and fastest rising expense area, as well as one of the most popular investment sectors. Since then, Arizona has sprouted TGen, built to revv up cures for major diseases, and will include buildings at both ASU and UA.

A new word—cooperation—comes to mind. This year, it was announced there's going to be a new FDA-supported drug development center in Tucson. At the same time, though, Phoenix has developed into a world-class chip-manufacturing center. And the University of Arizona now claims the No. 3 spot in MIS programs, and is ranked No. 1 for its entrepreneurship program among public institutions.

Last, there is terrorism. Since 2001 several industries have grown up in response to new threats of dirty bombs, hijacked aircraft and biological warfare. Less severely, we also face a glut of corporate mergers, security issues and new threats of spam.

Alas, I am an optimist. I expect the next 10 years to offer further growth in business and technology and yes, better solutions to the problems we face today. And we will be the wiser for it. (Suggest you keep an eye on India, China and Brazil.)

*Rick Gibson (rick@clearblueventures.com) is president of Tucson-based Clear Blue Ventures (clearblueventures.com), a new "venture-lending fund" and also is managing director of HOTventures, LLC.*

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Can you name one today that isn't? In the early 1990s, we had megachains like Macys, Federated, May Co., Allied and Dayton-Hudson. Now we hear they might end up as one single company. Except for the biggest, the result of the merger between Sears and Kmart will become Sears Holding Corp. All this to compete with Wal-Mart. Did Martha Stewart approve this?

The PC and Internet have certainly wrought the biggest changes on major industries. Consider the stock market: Who needs a broker when you can

Since 1995, we have been obsessed with making communication faster and more mobile. Key words these days: Palm Pilot, Treo and BlackBerry. Back in 1994, no one knew what bigger bandwidth was, and PDA sounded like a new political party in Bolivia.

Social and political changes have affected how we do business, and our world has morphed dramatically. Who would have thought India would become a world leader in software development (not to mention telemarketing), and China a world leader in any