

Same As the Old Boss

WHEN YOU SCRATCH THE SURFACE A BIT, SHIFTS IN technology usually turn out to be shifts in power. Digital media is now the source of some of the most disruptive and exciting shifts in business and society. Independent media is all the rage, be it from filmmakers whose work makes *The Blair Witch Project* seem polished, or lone bloggers whose weblogs enjoy more traffic than the websites of major newspapers. When filmmaker David Lynch makes time to track down daily weather data and then create video weather reports on his website, you know something weird (even for Lynch) is going on.



Contact Jimmy Guterman at jguterman@forrester.com

Most of what you read about the future of media maintains one of two stances: mainstream media is doomed (too old), or amateur media is amateurish (too young). The common denominator: power. Those who have it don't want to be displaced, and those who want the power don't intend to be denied. Swift changes in media technology have brought us to a truly disruptive moment in media, in which new and old publishers are fighting for power using new and old channels.

Individual instances of a technology come and go. You don't know anyone who still runs PointCast on his or her PC, but you know plenty of people who employ various forms of the push technology that it popularized. Key technologies, not flavor-of-the-day iterations, are what matter. RSS, wikis, and podcasting can feel like PointCast all over again. The

goal of this issue's "Skeptical CEO's Guide to New Media" (page 34) is to suggest where the technology behind today's buzzwords may stand in the long term.

Battles between the entrenched and the upstarts will always be with us, as surely as this year's rebels will be next year's establishment. This year's Google is next year's Microsoft. The mainstream and the alternative can't exist without one another. The open-source community needs the existence of a Microsoft to remain dynamic and cutting edge; Microsoft needs a vibrant open-source community from which to cherry-pick the most promising new talent and technologies. A company hits the sweetest spot when it seems young and hip but behaves just like the big boys. Apple Computer has been defying gravity by indulging in behavior that would get the Redmond giant crucified daily on the front page of Slashdot. In "The Five Rules of Cool" (page 58), our executive editor, Harris Collingwood, explores just that—and what you can learn from the Cupertino crew.

Bleeding-edge ideas in business and technology, especially if they enter the mainstream, eventually turn blunt and obvious. Everyone will have a graphical interface or a hybrid engine or a good-to-great plan. But the move from exciting to mundane is precisely the force that propels the next new thing. You can't be a rebel unless you have something to rebel against. Whaddya got? ●