

Bill's Building Blocks

What Will This New Year Bring?

I may be one of the only people you know who still gets a daily newspaper delivered to his home. While I will admit it is a pain to put on a coat and hat to go fetch the paper in the rain, there is a certain joy spreading the 12" by 22" pages of the *New York Times* out double across the breakfast table. Try that on a 2.5" by 4.25" cell phone screen!

Electronic versions of newspapers are programmed to present information in a linear fashion with hotlinks to supposedly related topics. Your eye and your brain absorb and process information differently in a linear context versus a graphical context. You amplify this effect by personalizing preferences on your phone to streamline the fire hose flow of information into quick snatches of data. Long articles are truncated. Interesting, unrelated articles on the opposite page are never seen. Whole sections of the paper are effectively turned off by your preference selection.

We live in a world today where standards and norms are rapidly changing...extreme weather conditions, the dawn of driverless vehicles, disrupted trade agreements, crumbling roads and bridges, uncertainty in the cost of healthcare for employees, the unknown impact of tax reform, information systems hacked, net neutrality in jeopardy, low interest rates with record setting stock indices, upsized military deployment with a downsized the State Department, political gridlock on many important issues, and more...Businesses are being forced to rethink their supply chain strategies and risk assessments, landed costs, inventory turns, and delivery lead times to stay competitive.

One important element of risk management is environmental scanning. Newspapers, both paper and electronic, are one source to be scanned. The value of this source depends upon the breadth of the sampling, the focus of its content, and the item associations and critical thinking made by you the reader. An early warning of a supply chain threat might just come from associating something from the Business section with something from the Science Times with something from the Front page. For example, if you participate in a retail supply chain, think about the business consequence of robotic picking in the distribution center combined with driverless transportation to the store combined with an "inventory-less" showroom having quick response from the DC.

Where do you get your information? What will this new year bring?

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