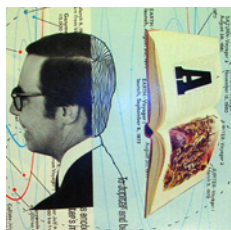


Predicting the Future

by Chris, August 2007



In his 2001 book, [Time Travel in Einstein's Universe](#), astrophysicist [J. Richard Gott](#) includes a chapter on predicting the future based upon the current length of a phenomenon's existence. The idea, based upon the [Copernican](#) concept that, as observers, we are looking from a non-special vantage point, proposes that one can determine with a 95% rate of accuracy the future span of existence for any phenomenon.

Gott realized this during a 1969 visit to the Berlin Wall, when it occurred to him that he could make a guess as to how much longer the wall would exist based upon knowing that it had already existed for 8 years. He reasoned that since there was nothing special about his visit, he was observing the wall at some random point in time between the beginning and end of its existence. To play it safe, he speculated that there was a 95% chance that he was observing the wall during the middle 95% of its existence (or in other words, that there was a 95% chance that he was **not** viewing the wall during the first 2.5% or last 2.5% of its existence). Ok, so what's so special about that? Gott reasoned, then, that he could use these percentages relative to the amount of time the wall had already existed to predict how much **longer** it might exist.

Phenomenon and its Starting Date	Longevity (years)
The Internet (1969)	.75 > 1,209
Microsoft (1975)	.58 > 975
Humanity (200,000 years old)	5,100 > 7.8 mil
Newfangled Web Factory (1995)	.30 > 468 .38 > 600*
	* 2010 prediction

* Figures borrowed from Time Travel in Einstein's Universe
by J. Richard Gott

Left is a diagram of several phenomena and their potential future lifespans based upon Gott's Copernican prediction method, which he submitted for the January 2000 issue of Time magazine. He uses the 95% chance that (in the year 2000) he was observing these things from a random point during the middle 95% of their existence to estimate how much longer they might exist. According to this method, the internet, based upon its 31 years of existence in 2000 was 95% likely to exist for more than .75 more years but less than 1,209 more years. I have added Newfangled Web Factory with today's 2007 predictions to the list. According to this formula, Newfangled will have a greater potential future lifespan in 2010 because it will have existed for longer than it has now.

Note that **the longer something exists, the longer it is likely to exist!** As Gott puts it, "Things that have been around for a long time tend to stay around for a long time." Incidentally, he cites the original list of the 7 Wonders of the World, cited in approximately 150 C.E. during the time of Antipater of Sidon, as an example: "Two of the Seven Wonders (the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Colossus of Rhodes)

no longer existed at the time the list was made, but five still did: the statue of Zeus at Olympia, the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Pharos of Alexandria, and the pyramids of Egypt. Of the first four wonders that had each been in existence for less than 400 years at the time the list was made, not one is still here today. But the oldest, the pyramids, which were then 2,400 years old, have survived."

I'll take this opportunity to point out that Newfangled's 12-year lifespan puts it in 'pyramidian' scale in terms of web development companies!