



Futurist Jack Uldrich's Predictions for 2017

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(Editor's note: These predictions are offered in the spirit of light-hearted fun and are not intended to be taken literally. Each merely reflects a broader trend that readers can expect to see, experience or read about in the coming year. For a more realistic perspective on each trend, click on the embedded links. Enjoy!)

- 1 Amazon's Virtual Mall Becomes Reality: After its **2014 acquisition of Switch** and its **quiet move into virtual reality in 2016**, the online retailer has now put all of the pieces of the puzzle together and unveiled "The Mall of Amazon." Users can now don a pair of virtual reality goggles and browse "the Amazonian Mall of the Future"—a virtual mall and that puts the physical Mall of America to shame in terms of the sheer number of items available for purchase. To make matters even more concerning for traditional retailers, Amazon Prime customers purchases are shipped within 15 minutes.
- 2 Power Plant Hack Edges Country Toward First Cyber War: In what was believed to be the first verified cybersecurity breach of an American nuclear power plant, utility officials in New Jersey were forced to shut down the Salem Nuclear Power Plant for three days. The outage affected 3 million people in southern and central New Jersey. Government officials are praising the fast actions of **artificial intelligence platforms** in rapidly locking down the reactors and preventing an even greater human tragedy. President Trump is reportedly weighing appropriate response options.
- 3 The City of Columbus to Add Autonomous Cars to Public Transportation Fleet: Fast on the heels of being awarded the **\$50 million Smart City grant**, Columbus has announced plans to **add autonomous vehicles to its public transportation fleet**. The small experiment is being run in conjunction with Uber and is designed to help lower-income citizens in the inner city travel to jobs in the suburbs which are currently not well served by the city's buses.
- 4 Hormel Acquires Major Stake in Major Artificial Steak Company: Hormel, the maker of Spam, announced its was **acquiring a majority position in Beyond Meat**, an innovative new company specializing in using plant protein to produce artificial meat. "At least this new "mystery meat" won't involve the wholesale slaughter of innocent animals," quipped the director of communication for PETA.
- 5 Chatbot to Aid the Unemployed: In an irony not lost Josh Young, a banker whose job was taken by artificial intelligence, was guided through the state's new unemployment system by a **Chatbot**. "I hate to say it but the Chatbot—or

the algorithm of whatever it was—was great, and it answered all of my questions and clearly explained the benefits I was eligible for,” said Young. “My only question is this: Is the state employee formerly responsible for guiding people through the unemployment line now also out of a job?”

- 6 Drones Put the “Over” in Drug Overlord: Always quick to use the latest technology –be it pagers in 80’s, smartphones in early 2000’s or nowadays, social media — drug overlords in Mexico are now using **drones to courier drugs** to clients. The drones are used in remote areas not easily patrolled by police or drug enforcement officials. “After we receive the patron’s Bitcoin payment, we snapchat the drop off location to the customer and our drone operator takes of the rest,” said an unofficial spokeswoman for the drug cartel.
- 7 Microgrids Go Major: Following on the heels of **the Port of Los Angeles announcing** its intention to power its facilities using a new microgrid, scores of other manufacturers, hospitals, educational institutions and hotel chains have announced their intention to switch to microgrids that allow them to disconnect from the grid. “This is a major problem for the industry,” said the president of a leading public power company.
- 8 Gene Editing Cuts Obesity Down to Size: Utilizing **the latest CRISPR technology**, Editas announced this month that it had selectively removed the Gene GAD2 in a morbidly obese patient. Seven weeks after the procedure the patient had already shed 35 pounds. “The test appears to have been successful,” said Editas’s chief scientific officer, “but there is still a danger that the patient is losing weight too quickly. He will remain in the hospital under observation until his weight loss has stabilized.” Obesity is estimated to cost the U.S healthcare system \$190 billion annually.
- 9 Supercomputing Computes (For Some): Less than a month after acquiring **Nvidia’s new \$129,000 supercomputer**, a leading hotel linen delivery service reported the computer paid for itself in reduced labor and fuel costs by optimizing the delivery schedule for all 350 trucks in its fleet. In related news, five union drivers from the company received their official layoff notices.
- 10 State Farm Augments Augmented Reality: Shortly after seeing how the **Pokemon Go phenomenon** caused millions of people to take to the streets in search of elusive digital Pokemon, State Farm seized upon augmented reality games as a way to encourage people to engage in consistent exercise. To incentivize this healthy behavior, they are providing a 20 percent discount on health insurance to those customers who walk more than 20 miles per month



in search of the companies “Good Hands” icon which are often in “healthy” destinations such as the fresh produce aisles at grocery stores.

- 11 Do You See What I See: In its latest revelation, Wikileaks is reporting that DARPA has already produced **a contact lens that can record** whatever the wearer is seeing. It is believed that government informants and sleeper agents inside ISIS cells have already been fitted with the devices and are capturing valuable intelligence. In a related development, reports have surfaced that legitimate ISIS supporters have been executed by their own leaders solely for the crime of wearing contact lens.

- 12 Blockchain Unblocks Electronic Medical Records: To ease concerns over the security of Electronic Medical Records, Mount Sinai Hospital, and the Mayo Clinic are engaging in **an experimental program to secure the medical records** of their patients using Blockchain, the new digital ledger technology. “If successful and we are assured the patient’s records can’t be hacked or shared without their permission, we will move to wide scale adoption,” said the Mount Sinai CIO. “The technology has the potential to save hundreds of lives, improve health outcomes for thousands, and slash millions of dollars from the bloated administrative systems.”

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