

## ESMERK Topics: about Current Awareness

### Finland: Understanding weak signals is important

*Talouselämä, 13 Dec 2002, p.28-29:-*

A weak signal is an important tool for predicting the future. Finnish Leena Ilmola is writing her thesis at the Helsinki University of Technology on detecting weak signals. Ilmola says success often weakens a company's ability to detect changes. Success brings with it a strong vision of how the world will go, and how the company will succeed in it. Inconsistencies on the markets may prove fatal especially to small companies that base their operations on one product group or technology. Creative manager Jari Koskinen of Focus MRM says that strategy work may be superficial when the operations are guided by the need to make results every quarter of the year. He says that it is important to look at the issues from several sides before strategic planning and operations.

Weak signals are quiet information that exists in every company. Ilmola says the power of an expert is the strongest filter for weak signals. Often organisations do not allow dissidents, even if the entire organisation should monitor signs of change. Ilmola is a partner in Fountain Park that has developed a software tool to filter out signs of change. The user of the software determines what kinds of weak signals he sees and how important they are. The company has used for instance Nokia and Shell as pilot companies in developing the software.

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### UK: Financial phobia effects 9mn

*Guardian, 27 Jan 2003,-:*

Women and young people are particularly prone to a new condition discovered by researchers at Cambridge University called financial phobia. The psychological condition effects 9mn people in the UK and is characterised by anxiety, guilt, or boredom when individuals need to manage money. A survey of 1,000 people found that 15% felt immobilised when the need arose, while 12%, 11% and 38% felt ill, dizzy and bored respectively. Some 18% of men suffer from the condition, but the figure rises to 23% for women and 30% for adults aged 16 to 24 years old. Financial upsets, such as being mis-sold a savings product, is thought to activate the otherwise dormant condition.

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Photo by: Sanna Liimatainen

# Media Agency Dagmar Needs Current Awareness Every Day

**A media agency's work is based on a fourfold table that includes advertising agencies, advertisers, media agencies and the world of the media. - When a change takes place in one of them, it is immediately visible in media agency, says Information Service Manager Raija-Liisa Ahlgren from Finnish media agency Dagmar.**

**- A media agency has to monitor several topics all the time, says Raija-Liisa Ahlgren from Dagmar.**

**M**edia planners have to have a deep understanding of the customer's business area, Ahlgren emphasises. They have to understand much more about their customer's sector than is needed in daily planning work. The planners have to link different issues and signals correctly, and to be able to see far enough into the future so that, at the right time, they can offer the customer opportunities that he would not otherwise think of seizing.

## Actively Influential Role

Ahlgren considers media agency's actively influential role important. Media agency has to take an active role in influencing issues, trends and commercial practices in the media sector.

- We are happy to relate to a customer our view of what will contribute to success and which issues may affect the sector negatively, she says.

Dagmar's staff systematically considers changes that take place in the sector, and thus they can react to these changes. They are also reflected in the company's strategies and aims.

In addition to continuous monitoring of news, signals on the development of the

sector are obtained for example from international conferences and Dagmar's own regular internal training sessions in which everyone shares their knowledge. Good questions often come up in the discussions. Information is also collected from visiting media sales representatives that supply new information on their own sector and research.

- One way of influencing the sector is active participation in the development of research and in analysis work, says Ahlgren. Media agency is an expert in analysing e.g. target group data.

In addition, Dagmar is a member of several research and other organisations of the sector. Dagmar publishes a weekly magazine called The Media Newsletter, that not only presents signals on the development of the sector, but also provides research information to advertisers.

## Customer Relationships are Based on Confidence

- The customer's media strategy and media visibility usually aim far ahead and they are created in close cooperation with the customer. A customer relationship is always based on confidence. The customer provides his media agency with plenty of inside information on the company as well

as sector information that is not available anywhere else, Ahlgren states.

Ahlgren considers vigorous internationalisation and strategy know-how as trends in the media sector.

- Customers are becoming more international, but Dagmar is well prepared with its network of partners.

HANNA-KAISA TURJA  
TRANSLATED BY ANNA-MAIJA LEHMUS

## Dagmar

Dagmar is the leading independent media agency in Finland. Dagmar is part of the Salomaa Group. Dagmar caters to a wide range of advertisers, providing media strategies and planning, buying and co-ordination services in all media. In addition, Dagmar provides market research, information services and an analysis team.

Dagmar was founded in 1973, and today it has 115 employees.

## How Dagmar Uses Esmerk

At Dagmar, all media planners and assistants can create their own profile for Esmerk Reports, that includes topical information on different business sectors. There is a direct link from Dagmar's intranet to Esmerk's ElQuest service.

# Weak Signals are Signs of the Future

Even if it is not possible to see the future, there are various weak signals in the air on possible new trends of the future. Successful monitoring of weak signals requires continuous work.

**M**ika Mannermaa, Finnish Docent in Futures Studies, says weak signals, or wild cards, as American researchers call them, are cultural, financial, and such phenomena developing somewhere under the surface. Often, they have no history or other clearly recognisable direction. However, they might become central phenomena and trendsetters of the future.

Mannermaa adds that weak signals usually develop in the periphery, seldom in the core of the action. They live only for a little while, and furthermore, they are often ridiculous, even absurd.

- For instance, environmental questions were not always taken seriously in the 1980s. Now all companies compete with the number of environmental certificates they have. Likewise, the markets were unable to forecast the strong breakthrough of PCs and the Internet, even if there were signs of their arrival.

## Need for Continuous Monitoring

Weak signals do not come in any fixed form; they can be figures, or even qualitative expressions. New ideas may spring up nearly anywhere, and detecting the signals requires continuous monitoring. The task cannot be automatised, thus,



Mika Mannermaa, Docent of Economics, is the Managing Director of FS Mannermaa Ltd. He works also as a Docent in Futures Studies at the Turku School of Economics and Business Administration.

Photo:  
Lehtikuva

companies need to find committed personnel for the job.

Mannermaa calls for "propeller heads" who question the existing facts and general knowledge. These troublemakers read for instance the small articles in the papers. They are also willing to look at matters from a broader perspective.

- Expertise in only one's own field is not always enough. For instance, meetings between honorary counsellors and corporate management easily become clubs where the participants sing praises of their own excellence. Consequently, they are in a sense places of anti-monitoring of weak signals.

## Systematic Recording and Reviews

The signs of weak signals should be recorded carefully for instance in the corporate intranet, Mannermaa says. They have to be reviewed systematically, say four times a year. Furthermore, the company should create various scenarios, i.e. systematic descriptions of future possibilities and opportunities, a couple of times a year.

- Nevertheless, companies have to remember that not all crazy ideas grow into something significant. The hundreds of ideas created when brainstorming may

eventually include only one or two good and feasible operating models. And still, they may never develop into future trends.

## Weak Signals Develop to Mega-Trends

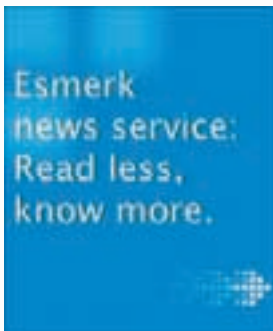
Even if it was trendy in the 1980s to declare the death of all kinds of trends, Mannermaa estimates that there still exist some mega-trends, major phenomena that are powerful, and that we can believe in.

Mannermaa lists three mega-trends that could have been detected already a decade ago: the need for ecologically sustainable development, the information society and advances in it, and globalisation. - The fourth mega-trend could be that human being is by its fundamental nature creative and inventive. Constant curiosity drives us to create better and more advanced solutions.

- We are gradually shifting from the information society to biosociety. Biotechnology will become the next mega-trend in some 10-20 years' time. There are already several weak signals on this development. For instance, in the USA genetically modified food is already part of the everyday life. The same will be true in Europe in 5-10 years' time.

TERHO REHMENEN  
TRANSLATED BY SANNA TERMONEN

# Esmerk Update



## Banners

We have published a web site for Esmerk banners. Banners in this site can be used in the client's intranet as a link to the Esmerk news service. Visit address [www.esmerk.fi/banners](http://www.esmerk.fi/banners) to see samples of the banners.

The Banners were designed to create awareness of the existence of the news service. It increases the number of users in the intranet. If you cannot find a suitable banner, we will modify a banner to meet your needs.

For more information about other solutions, visit Esmerk home pages [www.esmerk.fi](http://www.esmerk.fi) and [www.esmerk.com](http://www.esmerk.com).



Nokia 9210 Communicator

## Esmerk People:



Photo by: Michael Blackburn

**Sandra Banac**  
- Eastern European Analyst

### Sandra talks of her role within the Esmerk group and about growing up in Vukovar, Croatia before the war in 1991.

I started working for Esmerk UK in the Production department for the Eastern European team in July 2002. Everything turned out for the best as Esmerk gave me the opportunity to use my own language again. It is my responsibility to cover the former Yugoslav countries, which include Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia & Herzegovina.

On a more personal note, I came to the UK in 1992 at the age of 16 with my parents and younger brother after the war in 1991 completely destroyed my home city, Vukovar in Croatia. I went to College in

the UK for four years before I began working. My main interests include drawing and sports such as cycling, kickboxing, sailing and car racing, however my greatest passions are travelling, languages and meeting people.

Before the war, Croatia was one of the most popular countries for holidays in the sun, mainly due to its friendly people, great food and wine at cheap prices and a wide choice of beautiful places to visit. The tourist industry is starting to recover now, but slowly.

Vukovar was a historic town with a castle and a number of old buildings, which dated back to the 13th and 14th Centuries. Its population was very mixed with Croats and Serbs, Hungarians, Romanians, Germans and a small number of Albanians. The city life was lively and had several nightclubs that attracted visitors from larger towns near by. Vukovar was also popular in the summer due to its location on the river Danube where people went swimming and camping and had no need to travel to the Adriatic. Sadly today, the city is dead and it's very rare to see children playing in the streets or young people in general. Most have gone in search of a better and prettier life, as the memory of what's left is just too painful. Older people remain in the hope to have its history back the way it was.

BY SANDRA BANAC

## Esmerk Mobile News

Esmerk offers also a mobile distribution solution. The Esmerk abstracts can be read for instance on Nokia 9210 and Nokia 9210i Communicator. Esmerk delivers the Esmerk Reports to the mobile phone in HTML format. You can react rapidly and easily to changes in the business environment as you receive abstracts of the key news over the wireless media. The abstract format is highly suitable for the Communicator where space is limited. In addition to the traditional Esmerk news service, Mobile News is a good way to alert the key persons of changes in corporate images.