

■ EDITOR'S NOTE

Don Tennant

What, Me Worry?

I'M CERTAINLY not one to seek the spotlight, but perhaps you'd be interested in knowing what Jerry Seinfeld, Ellen DeGeneres, Dane Cook, Tracy Morgan, Joan Rivers and I have in common. Besides the fact that we're all incredibly funny, talented, entertaining people, I mean.

If you must know, the answer is that by the end of this month, we all will have been recent headliners at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. I know — pretty impressive stuff. The only difference is that while those other guys will have appeared in the part of the venue they call the Colosseum, I headlined on a makeshift stage in a nondescript room in the hotel's conference center. But I see no reason to get bogged down in details.

I'm proud to say I was the keynote speaker at last month's annual conference of IT executives from the property and casualty insurance industry, the event widely known as the PCI Information Technology Conference. Don't laugh. It's a big deal.

I spoke about the miracles that have occurred in the IT realm over the course of the 18 years I've been a journalist, and when I was finished, I said I'd be happy to take a few questions.

"What's the next miracle?" asked an earnest audience member who

apparently assumed that I have far more insight than I really do. I could tell I had the same look on my face that Sarah Palin had on hers when Charles Gibson asked her about the Bush Doctrine.

"I have no idea," I finally said. "It's whatever you guys in this profession do that we end up reporting on." If there were any groans, they weren't audible, so I moved on.

The next questioner appeared to be looking for some balance to the shamelessly upbeat thrust of my presentation. "What do you really worry about?" he asked.

It was an intriguing question. Even though I'm not a worrier by nature, there was no awkward pause this time. I knew exactly what worried me

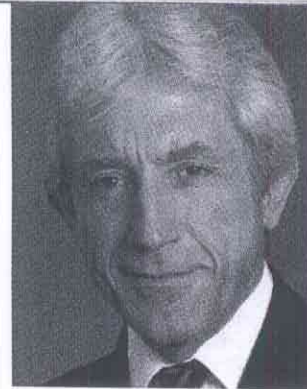
■ I'm worried that you don't realize that five years from now, the IT profession as you know it will no longer exist.

about the people gathered in that room.

"I worry that you guys don't recognize how fast this profession is changing," I said. "I'm worried that you don't realize that five years from now, the IT profession as you know it will no longer exist, and that you're not doing enough to prepare yourselves for that."

I went on to explain that I wasn't referring to the tired "IT doesn't matter" or "IT is dead" rant. What I meant was that in 2014, IT will no longer exist as the stand-alone sphere of activity it tends to be today. What I didn't want was for anyone in that room to find himself five years from now looking back and thinking, "If only I'd known."

That is, "If only I'd known that by now IT would no longer exist as a distinct discipline in the sense that finance and marketing and sales are distinct disciplines." Unquestionably, in 2014 there will still be people whose expertise lies chiefly in the information systems



that support the business. But they will be fully integrated into finance and marketing and sales and all the other departments in an enterprise.

I'm not for a heartbeat claiming that I'm spouting anything new here. Last year, for example, Forrester Research was already telling its clients that "over the next five years business will become so deeply embodied in technology, and the technology so deeply embedded in the business, that IT will need to be managed quite differently."

Forrester calls this new state — which it said is emerging from and being built on what's now known as IT — "business technology." BT, it explained, is "pervasive technology use that boosts business results."

So no, it's nothing new. But I wonder how many IT professionals are really taking all this seriously and are adjusting their career paths and their companies' organizational structures accordingly. This isn't one of those things that can be laughed off. There's just nothing funny or entertaining about obsolescence. ■

Don Tennant is editorial director of *Computerworld* and *InfoWorld*. Contact him at don_tennant@computerworld.com, and visit his blog at <http://blogs.computerworld.com/tennant>.