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# Become a Future-Focused Leader: Use Three Megatrends to Grow Your Rural Business

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# Become a Future-Focused Leader: Use Three Megatrends to Grow Your Rural Business

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No one can predict the future; however, rural entrepreneurs and business owners can use a future-focused leadership approach, which includes examining megatrends, to shape the future of their businesses. Megatrends are global shifts that influence society, the economy and the environment. The purpose of this article is to touch on three megatrends shaping the future of rural businesses:

- 1) The Rise of the #GigEconomy
- 2) Living with Purpose and Meaning
- 3) The Decentralized Marketplace.

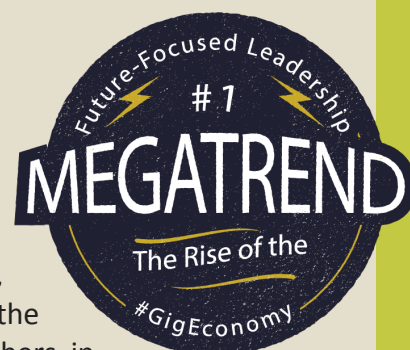
While many companies are struggling to keep up with the rapid rate of change, future-focused entrepreneurs are growing their businesses by blending technology with the human experience.

## Megatrend 1: The Rise of the #GigEconomy

Check out our video on Megatrend 1: <http://go.unl.edu/s4fe>

The emerging Gig Economy (#GigEconomy) will create new challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurs, businesses and communities. An emerging trend, the rise of global joblessness (International Labour Office, 2014), is supporting the growth of the Gig Economy while creating a need for the marketing of talents and skills in new and meaningful ways. The ability to sell, purchase and promote goods and services, as well as individual brands, on the web has created a need for entrepreneurs to add value to the lives of others in innovative ways. People are increasingly defining success for themselves, which does not always include a college degree and a 9-5 job. In many ways, it is now much cooler to be a successful start-up entrepreneur, famous blogger or YouTube sensation than a person working in a traditional office setting for 40+ hours per week.

Approximately 53 million Americans are engaged in some manner of freelancing, which is adding around \$715 billion to the economy (Edelman Berland, 2014). Further, the number of large employers is predicted to shrink in the future, causing people to find new and inventive ways to make a living. Self-employment has been identified as a vital economic tool for rural people and communities (Goetz & Rupasingha, 2014). The rising Gig Economy may be one megatrend that can benefit rural places if technology can be leveraged to reach both local and niche audiences interested in purchasing goods and services from freelancing entrepreneurs.



One common denominator will remain the same: Rural businesses and people need to be found on the already crowded World Wide Web. They have to build their brands and levels of influence to strengthen both credibility and success. Businesses like Fiverr.com and Iotronics are disrupting the traditional career and job search with technology. Need a logo, book review or video? No problem. Go to Fiverr and hire outsource experts in almost anything to help you. Services start at only five dollars! Iotronics helps people generate Twesumes (Twitter + Resume = Twesume), which are resumes in 140 characters or less) to land jobs or gigs (thus, the #GigEconomy). For example:



Connectivity is key. People living in rural places can participate in the Gig Economy as both entrepreneurs for hire as well as employers. Entrepreneurs can use Gig Economy tools to diversify their profit centers, contract with other entrepreneurs and generate income.

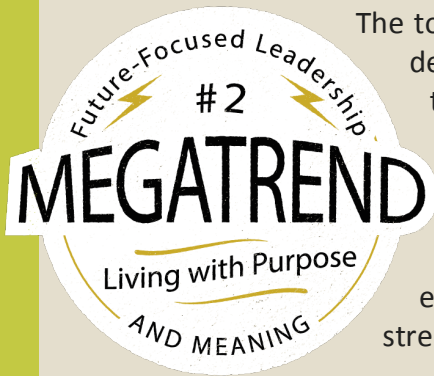
## Coaching Tips for Rural Entrepreneurs:

- 1) Consider marketing goods and services on websites that can help you test the marketplace, connect with customers and take payments. Amazon, Square and Etsy may be places to sell your ideas. Fiverr and Elance can help entrepreneurs find help or land gigs. Online marketplaces may be a way to begin selling on the Web. Make sure to do your homework first to ensure that you are working with a credible source. Check out Power of Business videos for information on how to stand out from the competition through marketing and how to improve web security.
- 2) Connect with other entrepreneurs inside and outside of your niche. Look for other entrepreneurs (both competitors and collaborators) on Fiverr and find gigs on places like Mom Corps, TeachersPayTeachers, Square and similar resources. LinkedIn is a great place to connect with like-minded entrepreneurs and industry leaders. Many states have an online marketplace focused on selling goods and services available in that state. For example, Grow Nebraska is a marketplace resource for Nebraska's entrepreneurs. Find more information, check out resources on effective networking and making time for social media on the Power of Business website.
- 3) Become vigilant and creative about building your brand. Blend online and offline worlds in ways that engage people in meaningful experiences. Have some fun and let your personality shine through! For example, a Twitter Party is a great tool to expand your brand online in real-time. Check out the Friday 15 live chat video: Utilizing Twitter Parties to Expand Your Brand.



## Megatrend 2: Living with Purpose and Meaning

Check out our video on Megatrend 2: <http://go.unl.edu/06ma>



The tools that have helped people create their own businesses and design their lives in ways that best suit them, have also fueled the Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend. Purposeful living is shaping everything from healthcare to education.

Our society is quickly evolving into an era characterized by shared purpose and meaning. Personal fulfillment is a growing trend in business and entrepreneurship. People are looking to decrease their levels of stress and strengthen their healthy habits while finding greater fulfillment.

Ben & Jerry's is an example of a company that integrates purpose and meaning into its core existence by creating "linked prosperity" for everyone involved with the business. The company supports "linked prosperity" by establishing and aligning social, product and economic missions ([benjerry.com/values](http://benjerry.com/values)).

The Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend will continue to grow as the global population increases and places more demands on the planet's limited natural resources. What does this mean for rural entrepreneurs? They may be able to grow by connecting to people through purpose and meaning. Technology may be one way future-focused entrepreneurs can holistically add more purpose and meaning to the lives of both learners and employees.

For example, a forecast by Carbone and Nauth (2012) describes the evolution of the "cloud" from a repository or information to an intelligent resource that can help make decisions and provide assistance. They discuss the cloud evolving from a place to store data to an intelligent resource that will actively help people improve their lives:

Virtual agents will migrate from being an automated form of phone-based customer service to a personalized form of support and assistance that provides information and—more importantly—performs useful tasks. For example, such agents might design a weekly menu based on a family's health profile, fitness goals, and eating preferences, and automatically order ingredients.

This forecast provides an example of how entrepreneurs can use technology to help their organizations innovate with a focus on the future. A transition from cloud-based computing to cloud-based living and learning might help rural entrepreneurs focus on new profit centers, customer experiences and employees in a more holistic manner.



Two trends supporting the Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend include: 1) life increasingly flowing together instead of being compartmentalized into work, family, recreation, etc., and 2) the quest for greater well-being, health and vitality. Minimalism is one of the trends shaping the Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend because people are seeking less stuff and more life. Trend-setting places like the Silicon Valley have embraced minimalism, and this approach to living is influencing everything from living spaces, to workplaces and web design.

People are increasingly learning and living on the go in both the virtual and physical senses, which blurs the lines between family, self-care, work and play. Research has demonstrated that happiness is a precursor to success. These findings question the view that hard work will lead to success, which eventually leads to happiness. Raising levels of positivity in the present creates a “happiness advantage” in the brain, leading to better outcomes in the areas of education, business and well-being (Achor, 2011).

How do these trends influence rural entrepreneurship? As more people want to connect with their purpose, find meaning in their lives, and increase their vitality, businesses and communities should take a more people-centered approach focused on meaning, well-being and the mind-body connection, supported by the right social networks, experiences and technologies. A few ideas might include:

- Integrating holistic, healthy living and self-care principles into business practices in an effort to create better employee and customer experiences and to create more value in products and services.
- Providing coaching for employees to help them uncover their purpose and to create strategies and structures to support meaningful actions designed to improve their careers and lives.
- Adding physical activity and fun into the workday in an effort to stimulate creativity, decrease stress, build camaraderie and strengthen overall wellness (an app or the intelligent cloud may be able to help).

It’s time to focus on the whole person and what life means to each individual. Helping people find their fulfillment, purpose and definition of success may provide future-focused leaders and entrepreneurs with tools to innovate their organizations and communities. Rural businesses should find new ways to add increased value to the lives of customers, employees and families. People can choose where they want to work, shop and live. They also choose how to invest their time and money. Businesses that add the most value, including those in rural areas, will have the competitive advantage.

## Coaching Tips for Rural Entrepreneurs:

1. Develop a clear purpose. Clarity of purpose creates a meaningful path to success. A great coaching tool to use: Create a vision board with your “why” in mind.
2. Define core values. A business should develop core values that truly represent its brand. Empowered consumers connect with brands and businesses that have core values similar to their own. Outline the core values of your business and what each value means. A great strategic plan can evolve from clear core values. Make your values public. Share them with world. They help tell your story!

3. Make self-care a priority. Physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being are all important. Successful entrepreneurs and their teams need time for creativity and a lot of energy to grow their ventures!
4. Get positive. A positive mindset has been scientifically proven to support everything from creativity and innovation to increased sales and employee engagement.
5. Practice gratitude. Keep a physical or digital journal to help. Tools, such the Gratitude 365 Journal App, can record daily gratitudes.
6. Share the stories that enhance your brand with your team and your customers. Use social media platforms to create and present meaningful content worth reading and sharing. People connect with experiences and stories behind the products and services they use!
7. HAVE FUN! Fun is absolutely invaluable. It decreases stress and improves relationship. Fun is also a foundation to creativity and innovation (Reimers-Hild, 2013).

## Megatrend 3: Decentralized Global Marketplace

Check out our video on Megatrend 3: <http://go.unl.edu/cxrp>

Business is in the age of the “Empowered Consumer” who has a buffet of buying choices. Empowered consumers decide how they want to purchase goods and services. Big Data [collecting information (data) from multiple sources to detect trends, identify patterns and make decisions] is one tool that can be used to develop marketing campaigns, study human behaviors and determine patterns. It is also being used to examine and redesign various areas of the consumer experience. Rural businesses can use Big Data to capitalize on consumer patterns and demands while creating more customized consumer experiences. Data is collected with every click, and some metrics can be used almost immediately. In 2014, Black Friday was November 28. Data from IBM’s U.S. Retail Black Friday Report was available almost immediately and was published on December 2, 2014. According to IBM, online Black Friday sales grew by 9.5 percent from 2013 to 2014. Retail ecommerce (orders via computer) and mcommerce (orders via mobile device) are predicted to increase by double-digit margins well into 2018 (eMarketer, 2014). Data demonstrates the continued growth of the digital marketplace, and rural businesses must find ways to capitalize on these trends.



The world is fast-becoming an “Add to Cart” society for anything and everything. Individuals are creating local, national and global communities of meaning and change that are self-selected and self-formed. Many of these same individuals are transforming commerce and communities in new and innovative ways. The definition of community is not limited to a physical location. Technology, combined with the need for meaning, self-expression and self-actualization, has created an increasingly decentralized marketplace.

People are choosing how to meet virtually, and when, where and whether or not to meet face-to-face. They are also connecting around common causes. Commerce, along with so many other areas of life, is becoming increasingly decentralized. Savvy consumers seek and create value they crave to transform their lives. Technology enables the delivery of information, goods and services anytime, anywhere, and from anyone in a way that makes sense while adding value to the lives of consumers.

For example, companies like Stitch Fix (<http://www.StitchFix.com>) initially get to know their customers with a personal style quiz and continue to gather information about the clientele every month by sending them personalized clothing selections. Orders are delivered to clients and customers pay only for what they keep. Stitch Fix tracks the feedback on likes and dislikes after every shipment and learns how to better serve its customers with the data it continuously collects.

Consumer demands are shaping the marketplace and future trends. Empowered consumers want unique experiences that add value to their lives. Future-focused leaders and entrepreneurs who ask and answer not, “What is the lifetime value of a customer?” but rather, “What value can we add to a lifetime?” will be in a better position to compete in the increasingly decentralized marketplace.

### Coaching Tips for Rural Entrepreneurs:

- 1) Work together online and offline. Build your support network to generate ideas and get help growing your business.
- 2) Get connected! Utilize the [National Broadband Map online tool](#) to determine how connected your community and providers are.
- 3) Get rid of assumptions and use data to make decisions. Take a few ideas from places having success in the rural marketplace, such as Stitch Fix.

### Future-Focused Rural Entrepreneurs: Take Action with Cooperation, Creativity and Purpose

Interestingly enough, the hottest jobs at Facebook require a “human touch.” Why? Facebook is looking for people who can close sales because its revenue relies heavily on ads (Anders, 2014). Perhaps the most future-focused entrepreneurial leaders are blending “high human touch” with “high-tech” in new and interesting ways that holistically add value to the lives of others.

Future-focused, entrepreneurial leaders in rural areas can use megatrends and technology to change the game of life. One person cannot do it alone in a world that continues to change at an increasingly rapid pace; rather, rural entrepreneurs should innovate in communities with a spirit of cooperation, creativity, and purpose. Together, with a common purpose, rural entrepreneurs can examine megatrends, utilize emerging technologies, and monitor analytics while creating meaningful experiences and innovating rural businesses in ways not yet imagined.

### Future-Focused Rural Entrepreneur Coaching Action Step:

Dare to take action! Identify one thing you can do to grow your business using these megatrends!  
Let us know at [PowerofBusiness.net](http://PowerofBusiness.net)!

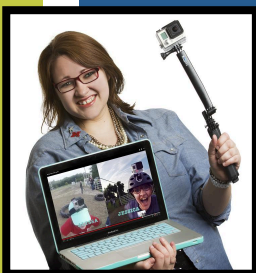
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