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The Smart List 2012: 50 people who will change the world

By [Wired UK Staff \(/search/author/Wired+UK+Staff\)](#) | 24 January 12[\(/topics/magazine-features\)](#)

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Welcome to the first Wired Smart List. We set out to discover the people who are going to make an impact on our future --by asking today's top achievers who, emerging in their field, they'd most like to have a leisurely lunch or dinner with. So we approached some of the world's brightest minds -- from Melinda Gates to Ai Weiwei -- to nominate one fresh, exciting thinker who is influencing them, someone whose ideas or experience they feel are transformative.

Some suggested names you may be aware of, others might be new. Either way, they're all people you really need to know about. And wired will be inviting all nominators and nominees to a giant dinner party...

Richard Branson -- entrepreneur selects

Lesego Malatsi -- designer

Lesego Malatsi has a business called Mzansi Designers Emporium, based in Johannesburg. The company was mentored at the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in South Africa and it finds fantastic local fashion designers who are beginning to take their business overseas. It's doing great -- it

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recently showcased its fashions at London Fashion Week. Organiser Fashion's Finest described the collection as "hotter than hot".

Niklas Zennström -- founder, Atomico; cofounder, Kazaa and Skype
selects

Markus Alexej Persson aka Notch -- creator, Minecraft

Notch saw a chance to create computer games in a different way, and executed it brilliantly. He does what all great technology entrepreneurs do: think globally, seeing the true potential for an online business, while understanding his customers. He's modest but confident in his area of expertise, and is always engaging. Besides, he is a fellow Swede who is creating an international success story.



Aaron Koblin -- creative director, the Data Arts Team at Google

Creative Lab

selects

Sid Meier -- game designer

As the creator of *Civilization*, Sid Meier has deconstructed the forces behind historical events and used computer simulation to recreate iterations of those rules and systems in an immersive and engaging gaming experience. Without Sid I'm not sure I would have begun to respect how fascinating our history and our cultures really are; or how much I could really enjoy a good video game.

Geoffrey West -- theoretical physicist

selects

David Krakauer

David Krakauer is a true polymath, full of ideas and creativity. He comes out of evolutionary biology at Oxford and was at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, for several years before becoming a colleague of mine at Santa Fe Institute. He has written papers with fellow biologists Martin Nowak and Mark Pagel and was recently recruited to run the new Winsconsin Institute for Discovery -- it's broad and trans-disciplinary in outlook, though centred on the biosciences.

Alain de Botton -- philosopher

selects

John Armstrong -- philosopher

The writer and philosopher John Armstrong [author of *In Search of Civilisation: Remaking a Tarnished Idea*] is a very bold thinker, arguing that capitalism has gone wrong not because there aren't enough regulations on businesses but because there isn't enough education of consumers. In his eyes, the task is not to ban McDonald's, but to educate our desires so that we might "freely" consider alternatives. This is thinking at once boldly left- and right-wing.



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Jane McGonigal -- game designer

selects

Vincent Horn and Rohan Gunatillake -- The Buddhist Geeks

I'm a geek. I'm also a practising Buddhist. That's why, of everyone on the planet, I'd most like to lunch with the founder of Buddhist Geeks, Vincent Horn, and the cofounder of the Buddhist Geeks conference, Rohan Gunatillake. What's a Buddhist geek? It's someone with an interest in technology and Buddhist wisdom who wants to figure out how to use technology to reinvent a thousands-year-old spiritual practice to be more accessible, more relevant and easier to integrate into our lives. They're asking big questions, such as "How can social media support meditation practice?" "How can design thinking change the way ancient wisdom is taught and passed on?" "Can videogames lead to enlightenment?" I'm particularly passionate about that last question!

John Brockman -- president the Edge Foundation

selects

Jennifer Jacquet -- postdoctoral researcher

She is intellectually fearless, deeply serious about science, personally effervescent and always curious. Her interests are environmental sustainability (particularly fish), the evolution and function of guilt, honour and shame, and the role of IT in shaping environmental action -- all of which fall under a broad interest in the tragedy of the commons. Penguin publishes her *Is Shame Necessary?* soon.

Esther Dyson -- investor and entrepreneur

selects

Nathan Eagle -- CEO, txteagle

Nathan Eagle is not just smart; he applies his intelligence to the real world, with both vision (mobile phones as capital equipment enabling millions of people around the world to become productive), and a business model (get them to collect data and market research for large companies). His company, Jana (in which I've invested), employs thousands and, ultimately, he employs millions of people in emerging markets as market researchers.

Juan Enriquez -- life scientist

selects

Ed Boyden -- optogeneticist

Ed Boyden's research at MIT founded the field of optogenetics. Now we can observe how a brain reacts as it hears, feels, sees, smells, remembers, loves. But perhaps more interesting, scary and weird is that he's developed ways to promote or suppress memories and feelings by using fibre-optic light. Eventually, people may even be able to upload or download their memories.

Joi Ito -- director, MIT Media Lab

selects

Cesar Hidalgo -- network scientist

Hidalgo is a young academic bringing economics, networks and data science together to help understand the various complexities of economic growth.

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**Daniel Kahneman -- psychologist and Nobel Laureate**

selects

Sendhil Mullainathan -- professor of economics, Harvard University

Sendhil Mullainathan is a rising star in behavioural economics. His work on the psychological traps of poverty may introduce a new paradigm for joining psychology, economics and policy.

Rohan Silva -- senior policy adviser to David Cameron

selects

Carlo Ratti -- director, SENSEable City Laboratory, MIT

Carlo Ratti is at the forefront of thinking about the way in which technology can be used to rewire cities, making them more energy efficient, reducing traffic congestion and stimulating new entrepreneurial activity. With half of the world's population now living in urban areas, Ratti's work could have an impact on the lives of billions of people in the years ahead.

Carlo Ratti -- director, SENSEable City Laboratory, MIT

selects

Salman Khan -- founder, Khan Academy

Higher education urgently needs to be reinvented while the world is trying to cope with an unprecedented demand from youth in emerging countries. It's vital that all of us -- researchers, teachers, academics -- look at how new technology can help with this. Mr Khan is one of the people doing exactly this, through his online Khan Academy (khanacademy.org).

Esra'a Al Shafei -- internet activist, founder and director of MideastYouth.com

selects

Yana Buhner Tavanier -- human-rights activist

My choice is a Bulgarian activist and investigative journalist working to expose the inhumane treatment of children and adults with disabilities and mental illness in the Balkans. She's also a prominent member of the Bulgarian LGBT-rights movement but her influence expands beyond Bulgaria. We met at TED. She is dedicated and committed to making change, which she will achieve.

Fabiola Gianotti -- particle scientist, Cern

selects

Nima Arkani-Ahmed -- theoretical physicist

Now at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, he is one of the most outstanding theorists in fundamental physics today, in spite of his young age. For instance, he has proposed pioneering ideas to reconcile gravity with the other forces. Not only a brilliant thinker, he's also lively, full of ideas and energy, and has a good sense of humour. A very enriching person to be around.

Julia Hartz -- president, Eventbrite

selects

Leila Janah -- winner, World Technology Award for social entrepreneurship 2010

Leila inspires me as an entrepreneur because she's truly bold in the risks she takes to help alleviate poverty, empower women and take advantage of technology to achieve her mission. Through her social business, SamaSource, she champions microwork: small, computer-based tasks that generate life-changing income for women all over the world -- empowering them with marketable skills. What is genius about her approach is the way in which she leverages the newest, most effective technology, such as Facebook, iOS and

CrowdFlower, to extend her reach to anyone around the world. The winning ingredient of her business model is the ease with which her customers connect with the microwork network through lightweight applications. I've had the pleasure of meeting and working with her and I find her to be incredibly humble, focused and relentless in her pursuit to change the world.

Jimmy Wales -- founder, Wikipedia

selects

Andrey Andreev -- founder, Badoo

I'm intrigued by Badoo's growth to over 120 million users in an under-the-radar way. Its founder, Andrey Andreev, has been called secretive and mysterious, but when I met him (once, at Founders Forum in the UK) he seemed neither; just your typical smart, serious, interesting tech geek on a mission to create something that people like. I've tested Badoo which, as a dating site, isn't something I'm in the market for myself, but I'm impressed with how it works, and fascinated by the game-like business model.



Danny Hillis -- inventor and entrepreneur

selects

Jehane Noujaim -- documentary director

In a world of increasing polarisation, documentary film-maker Jehane Noujaim (Startup.com, Control Room and Pangea Day) seeks the understanding that comes from empathy with multiple perspectives. One of the great battles in the world right now is between the self-righteous monoculturalist (Rush Limbaugh, Michael Moore) and the open-minded multiculturalist. People tend to listen to those who reinforce their view: I see Noujaim as a game changer because she makes films that encourage you to see other viewpoints. In the battle for the mindset of our future civilisation, I'm rooting for Noujaim.

Catherine Mohr -- roboticist and doctor

selects

Marilyn Waring -- human-rights activist

Marilyn Waring is an extremely clear thinker about the disastrous consequences of using measures such as GDP as a surrogate for "progress" or "wellbeing" in a country. She has also analysed how economics as it is currently practised as a "science" is radically defective and that it drives decisions in globalisation that have unintended but terrible consequences for the world. We must realise that we can't tackle the problems in health care, environmental issues, food security, democracy and women's rights in isolation; they must be seen as a set of interrelated issues, and anyone who wants to make a difference in the human condition must look at all of these factors. Waring has taken these issues head on, with the courage to call for new measures for what we call progress so that we stop rewarding moving away from what should be our global goals.

Yossi Vardi -- entrepreneur

selects

Shai Reshef -- educator

Shai has revolutionised the way higher education can be provided to millions of young, capable people in emerging economies. He is using internet tools to provide free online higher education over the net. After having had a successful for-profit career in supplementary education, he is dedicating his life and resources to this new social initiative. He will change the outcome of many youngsters.

Stephen Emmott -- head of Computational Science, Microsoft

Research Cambridge

selects

Drew Purves -- Computational Ecology and Environmental Science Group (CEES), Microsoft Research Cambridge

Drew is an absolutely amazing once-in-a-generation young scientist whose work is set to completely shake up science, intergovernmental policy and technology in what is arguably the most important societal challenge we face: climate and ecology. An immensely inspiring, original thinker and a gifted and technologically/computationally savvy scientist, his ideas are unquestionably going to be influential both in science, policy and technology. In my opinion, Drew should be on wired's front cover, let alone on wired's radar, because he will be one of the key influencers in the science and the technology of climate and ecological science.

JR -- artist and photographer

selects

Marco Berrebi -- photographer

Berrebi is a visionary because he always clearly separates the financial interest and the artistic vision of any project. An idea for him should be like an equation: either it works, or it doesn't; but there should be no compromise. The beauty of his work is getting to this equation; it's a long road but maybe, for him, this is the art.



Lisa Randall -- physicist

selects

Zohar Komargodski -- scientist

Komargodski has made several important contributions to developments in field theory. With Adam Schwimmer, he proved a result that had been conjectured for years about how a particular quantity changes with energy. He has also made developments in what are known as supersymmetric theories, proving exact results or coming up with new interpretations in what were thought to be well-trodden regimes.

Yves Béhar -- industrial designer

selects

Issey Miyake -- fashion designer

Issey Miyake is exactly what I look for in a designer: industrious, groundbreaking and an inventor at heart. Transcending his field and inspiring architects and designers is a huge contribution in itself, but he also creates his own world of industrial, structural and visual language that can be worn to amazing effect. His creativity never stops and he continues to search for more.

Reid Hoffman -- founder, LinkedIn

selects

Joi Ito -- director, MIT Media Lab

He has had amazing influences upon the web -- he and I invested in Flickr -- but he'll make an important transformation of education with Media Lab. He'll work with the faculty on a curriculum to integrate a bias to action as part of preparation for life, similar to "be the entrepreneur of your own life". And he'll work on connecting academic and industry research programmes for strong mutual value -- eg. open-source hardware.

Paul Smith -- designer

selects

Jonathan Ive -- senior vice-president, industrial design, Apple Inc

I see Jonathan a few times every year, but unfortunately he mostly pops in during one of his London visits and we never really have enough time for a leisurely lunch due to both of our schedules being very hectic. I would choose him because I enjoy the way he thinks about things and the observations that he makes. We all know what amazing things he has achieved at Apple.



Clay Shirky -- internet evangelist

selects

Amira al Hussaini -- journalist and blogger

Operating as @JustAmira, Al Hussaini covented the curated, personal news feed as a journalistic form. The thing that sets her apart from peers such as Sultan Al Qassemi and Andy Carvin is that she became an actor in the events she covered. She exhibited scepticism that the Arab Spring would come to her native Bahrain, but as the Al Khalifas' reactions to the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt became more strident, she questioned their motives and suggested that they should not be afraid of sharing political power with their people. But her calls for openness became too much -- she was added to a list of enemies of the state, went into hiding, and was eventually spirited out of the country to Berlin, where she continues to write about the Arab Spring. I admire her for her intellect, for her sense of what new media forms make possible, for her political commitment, and for her bravery. I communicated with her last spring to wish her well when she was a wanted woman, but we've never met. She's the name I'd add to this fantasy team.

Iain Sinclair -- writer

selects

Don DeLillo -- writer

"It takes time to lose interest in things," DeLillo wrote. And time, American time, at home and abroad, looking out and looking back, is what he has and what he trades in. Historic time leaves you in difficult places: borders, transits, waiting rooms, deserts, runways, oceans, cities. DeLillo has such an instinct about where to start, where to position himself in the room. I admire the way the work gathered itself over the years, building up to the big wave, and then took time -- time again -- to study patterns left in the sand. Aftershocks and meditations in stripped-down sets. In other words, that mystery of craft...

June Cohen -- executive producer, TED Media

selects

Pattie Maes -- founder, MIT Fluid Interfaces Group

Maes is one of the most original and influential thinkers exploring how humans and computers interact, and how machines can augment human intelligence and experience. She is not a public-facing intellectual. It took me four years to convince her to speak at TED, but it was worth the effort: her talk has been one of our top five most-viewed for three years. In the 90s, she pioneered what was then known as collaborative filtering -- the now-common practice of a system generating recommendations for a consumer by comparing them to similar consumers. I'd be fascinated to hear her thoughts on some philosophical questions: how do you capture the intelligence of a single human? How can computers bring us closer to those we love? How can ubiquitous computing help us make better decisions and live happier lives? I, for one, would like to know...

Juliana Rotich -- programme director, Ushahidi.com

selects

Deborah Estrin -- computer scientist

Deborah Estrin is trailblazing the development of embedded networks by laying the foundations for the internet of things, participatory sensing and the future of smart cities at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The promise of merging the internet of things with crowdsourcing could boost further collaborative, participatory sensor data and crowd-intelligence-based forms of problem-solving and civic engagement.

Peter Diamandis -- chairman, X Prize Foundation

selects

Jeff Bezos -- CEO, Amazon

I first met Jeff in the early 80s when he was at Princeton. He has an underlying passion: opening up the space frontier. He's also one of the few individuals with sufficient wealth to actually pull it off...



Leila Janah -- founder, Samasource

selects

Robyn Scott -- cofounder, OneLeap

She figured out the best way to affect Aids in Botswana was to tell a story that

would compel people to act. The story in her memoir *Twenty Chickens For A Saddle* was hers, but it was motivated by interest in others.

Tina Rosenberg -- Pulitzer prize-winning writer

selects

Srdja Popovic -- social activist

Popovic is the executive director of the Belgrade-based Center for NonViolent Action and Strategies (Canvas). He was one of a handful of students at Belgrade University who, in 1998, established Otpor ("resistance"), a political movement aimed at overthrowing Slobodan Milosevic. Instead of marches and speeches, Otpor relied on street theatre and pranks -- their guiding spirit was Monty Python's Flying Circus. After two years, Otpor had 70,000 members, and Milosevic fell.

Now Popovic travels the world teaching these methods to other democracy activists. Early victories came with the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and, recently, many of the tactics in Tahrir Square were taught to the April 6 movement by Canvas. Popovic argues that nonviolence is not only the moral choice for overthrowing a dictator, it's also more effective than taking up arms. His ideas deserve to be known around the world.

Tim Brown -- CEO, IDEO

selects

Wendell Lim -- synthetic biologist

Wendell runs a lab at the University of California, San Francisco, focusing on synthetic biology, which in my opinion is likely to be the next technology wave after the social internet. What makes Wendell especially interesting is that, alongside his laboratory science, he is studying how design might impact his work and how his work impacts design. He has even had a team of industrial designers working with him in the lab on some experiments. He's going to be an important voice in this new science.

David Deutsch -- quantum physicist

selects

Hagar Gelbard-Sagiv -- scientist

Research into aspects of human brain function is deeply important and is going to expand rapidly as technology progresses. But it's an area that is prone to being led down blind alleys by bad philosophy. I'd want to grill Gelbard-Sagiv on whether she understands the role of philosophy in fundamental science, and whether she gets it right.

Melinda Gates -- cofounder, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

selects

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus -- Minister of health, Ethiopia

Dr Tedros has used innovative techniques to save the lives of millions of Ethiopians. Rather than building expensive hospitals, he has set up programmes to train 35,000 health workers. The workers then go on to provide care in nearly every community across Ethiopia -- especially for women and children, who are often the most vulnerable and underserved. As a result of this, women have access to family planning and are now able to plan the timing and spacing of their children. And children now receive life-saving vaccines and treatment for deadly illnesses such as pneumonia, malaria and diarrhoea. In five years, his work has reduced the death rate of Ethiopian children under five by 28 per cent. Does it get more inspiring than that?



**Jill Tarter -- astronomer**

selects

Margaret Turnbull -- astrobiologist

Maggie Turnbull has made the most detailed census of our immediate solar neighbourhood to create a "finding" list for the son-of-terrestrial-planet-finder and the discontinued Darwin study. And she's trying a grand experiment in freelance astrobiology from the woods of Wisconsin.

Robin Chase -- founder, Buzzcar

selects

Ash Mahesh -- social technologist

Ash Mahesh is an astronomer who changed career to address problems as diverse as traffic, public health and economic development. He combines business, politics, pragmatism and social vision in improbable ways and produces scalable results that he then puts into open source. If you ever think a problem is intractable, you just have to look at Ash's work to be inspired.

Nicholas Christakis -- social scientist

selects

David G Rand -- lecturer, Harvard Biology Dept.

David is doing brilliant research in biosocial science, an area that promises to reshape how we see the world. He is investigating the origins of human co-operation and is spearheading efforts to invent new ways to research social science online. (Full disclosure: I have already had lunch with him in the past, but I'd welcome the chance to continue our conversation.)

Carolyn Porco -- planetary scientist

selects

Sam Harris -- author and neuroscientist

Harris's brave, full-throated criticism of God-belief, backed by an impressive knowledge of neuroscience, the contents of the "holy books", and the tenets of the world's religions and philosophies, have helped bring to the fore the irrationality of belief in a supreme being. He has made major waves in our thinking on this subject and there's no end in sight to his contributions.

Lily Cole -- actress and model

selects

Hazel Henderson -- futurist and evolutionary economist

I recently came across Hazel Henderson's work. She has been writing and speaking for many years about the practical, philosophical and political ramifications of our economic system, offering an intelligent critique of the rules of our peculiar game (the social and environmental consequences). She also posits that there are alternatives beyond our general -- and somewhat blinkered -- assumption that this is the only way. Her work seems especially pertinent in light of the global economic crises, and perhaps offers space for optimism concerning other possible ways.

Nancy Lublin -- CEO, DoSomething.org

selects

Adam Braun -- founder, Pencils of Promise

Pencils of Promise is a non-profit which builds schools in Laos and Guatemala. It raises all its money online from kids in \$25 (£16) increments. It's the official

charity of Justin Bieber, but in the end Adam Braun will be the bigger rock star.

Graeme Le Saux -- broadcaster

selects

Vanessa Berlowitz -- series producer, BBC

Vanessa Berlowitz is responsible for programmes such as Planet Earth and Frozen Planet. Her commitment to using technology such as aerial and time-lapse photography have revolutionised the way we view and understand the natural world. She is shaping the thoughts of the viewing public, and by doing so motivating them to protect the natural environment.

Nicholas D Kristof -- Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist

selects

Chen Guangcheng -- human-rights activist

I'd like lunch with Chen Guangcheng, an amazingly brave Chinese human-rights activist. A blind man who trained himself in law, he exposed a series of abuses and was jailed in retaliation. He served a four-year sentence, but China has kept him under extra-legal house arrest with no contact with the outside world. Security forces beat up those who approach his house, and reportedly tortured him when he smuggled out word of his situation. He's indomitable.

Randi Zuckerberg -- internet entrepreneur

selects

Tina Fey -- comedian

I'm inspired by Tina Fey -- she is a great example of somebody who can be both an entertainer and a serious businesswoman, and has made a career out of pursuing her passions. She also balances being a mum, an entertainer and a media mogul with grace and poise.

Aza Raskin -- entrepreneur

selects

Tom Coates -- technologist

One of the earliest bloggers -- he started in 1999 -- Coates is a surly Englishman who has a rare mix of design ability and future-think. He's predicted and embodied the blog revolution, location services, and the internet of things. He will change the way we think about and understand cities.

James Dyson -- inventor and entrepreneur

selects

Aidan Dwyer -- scientist

Every designer has an enquiring mind. They observe the world around them and constantly ask themselves how to make it better. Nature is the ultimate engineer. While out walking in upstate New York, Aidan Dwyer, 13, became curious about why the tree tops tangle in a seemingly random way. His studies revealed that trees grow their branches in a pattern dictated by the Fibonacci Sequence: $1+1=2$, $1+2=3$, $2+3=5$ and so on. He noticed that, even in nature, function guides form.

Aidan then challenged the boundaries of his learning. He took his scientific knowledge of photosynthesis and applied it to the problem of solar-energy collection. He built his own tree-inspired model of solar panels and tested it in his back garden. Hands-on investigation at its best. It was hailed as a breakthrough -- then denounced by the media for little errors. To focus on failure here is to miss the point. Aidan was observant. He challenged the norm. He asked why. In the process this teenager made an entire industry stand up and take note. Inspiring. The only person who should focus on the failure is Aidan -- it will lead him to better things.





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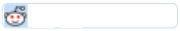
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First thing on the list:

"Richard Branson -- entrepreneur selects..."

What sane person would read beyond that? I came via a link and now I remember why it's been years since I read anything in this magazine. Utter rubbish.

Dan | Jan 29th 2012

Please get rid of these f---ing galleries, just show the f---ing list.

nina | Jan 30th 2012

typical "lead you into a sight and then you search and search for the content while being BOMBARDED WITH ADVERTISEMENT...bullshit!

Mark Robinson | Jan 30th 2012

The lack of musicians and filmmakers on this list bothers me. Their impact and influence on culture is undeniable, yet entrepreneurs and guilt-ridden "activists" dominate the list.

Money.

Morad Moazami | Jan 30th 2012

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