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Waste of Time

by Tim Love

Current lack of consistency for how time is interpreted and communicated internationally is inhibiting greater understanding between cultures. Additionally, the current global time zones do not optimize energy efficiency or allow for potential improvement in productivity. The hypothesis here is that a more efficient time zone system would make the world a more efficient place, helping create sustainable economic recovery with positive effects on climate change and our well-being. This calls upon the advertising industry to adopt a global standard for communicating time and to lead scientific analysis in time optimization.

An Internationalist's Perspective

Internationalists have a uniquely developed marketing perspective. This comes from their everyday practice of working in an increasingly globalized marketplace — across nations, economies, time zones and cultures.

How can corporations and governments create a new social compact to help improve life against some of the most prevalent public issues: economic instability, climate change and human wellness?

An evolved marketing perspective is needed. The framework of the past 35 years — "Think Global/Act Local" — is rendered less relevant by advances in communications technologies. Web 3.0 will require us to assume a more extra-environmental frame-of-reference to address the needs of a more connected global marketplace. In earlier writings I have called this extra-environmental frame-of-reference: "Think Like The Sun." (See lectures from Oxford's Said School of Business 2007-08 at **www.timlovesworld.com.)**

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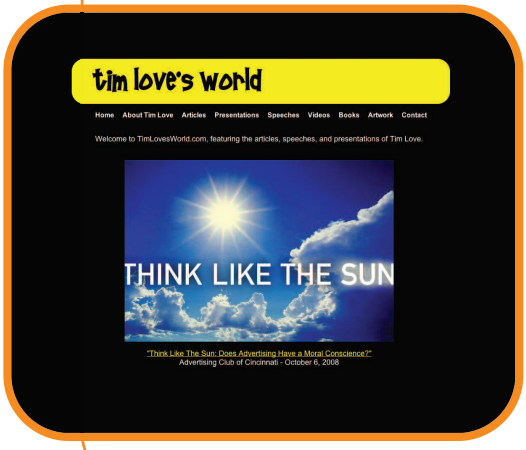
Adopting the perspective of "Think Like the Sun" reveals the idea of a "flat world,' though helpful, is insufficient for fully understanding individuals and their needs in the emerging global marketing landscape. The flat world concept reflects how compatible technologies and platforms yield greater access and speed of idea transfer; space and time between places is a straight line, thus making the world flat again. However, it does not reflect the polycultural and contextual aspects of individual human perception. These are constantly changing, revolving like our round planet. "Flat" does not adequately provoke examination of the full range of strategic opportunities that are available in an interdependent world economy, where individuals are creating content from their own, circadian point of view. "Think Like the Sun" allows us to challenge our accepted beliefs and habits about time and sunlight optimization. The relationship between sunlight, water and agriculture for human sustainability will continue to be a key imperative.



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World population growth (conservative projections are for 9-billion on the planet by 2050) demands that we look at making changes to better enable this sustainability.

The "24-Hour Clock" versus the "12-Hour AM/PM Clock"

Globalization has increased the need for interacting people to communicate mutually comprehensible time references to each other. People engaged in international marketing have long observed some curious aberrations when it comes to the way different geographies and cultures talk about time. Most international cultures use the "24-hour clock," which means that they do not use AM/PM designations. For example, 14:00 hours is more of a global standard time reference than 2:00PM.

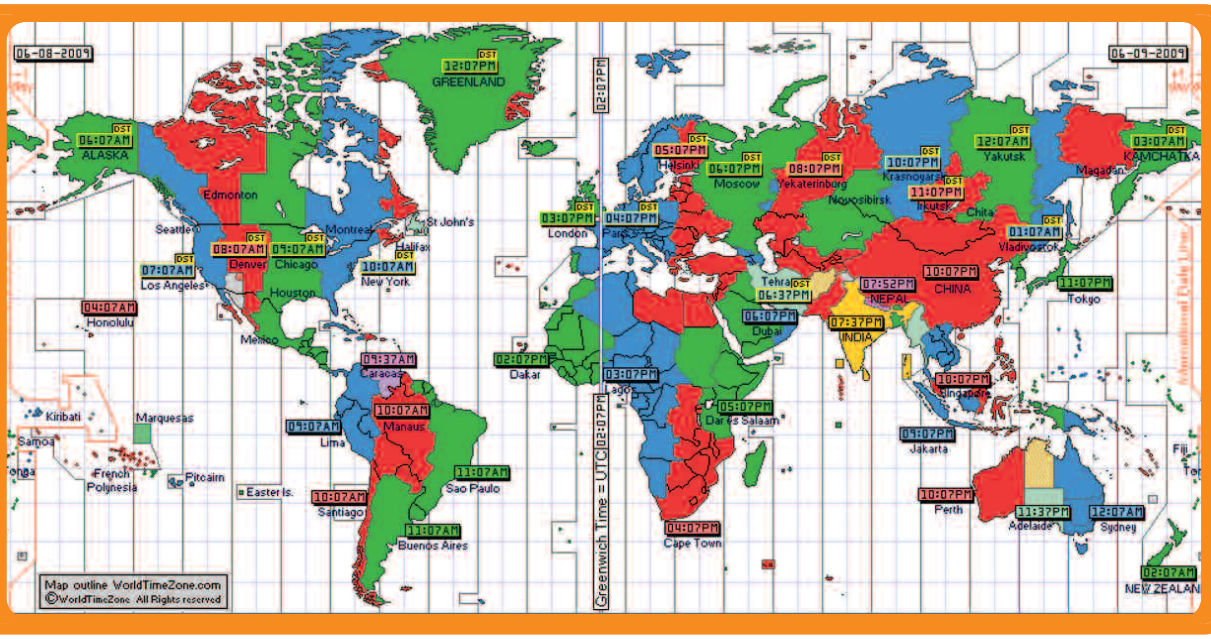
The 24-hour clock nomenclature is an essential, unifying communications concept for many industries engaged in international activities. It has long been used by airlines and the maritime industry. Most militaries, including the US, use the 24-hour clock.

As the US becomes less isolated due to communications technologies and the interconnectedness of economies, its habit of using a 12-hour am/pm system is increasingly out of sync with the rest of the world. An efficiency loss analysis would confirm there is a cost impact from this misalignment. Since the US already adopts the 24-hour clock with its, transportation and military systems, it should not be difficult, or threatening to its sovereignty, for global industries like advertising to move to the 24-hour nomenclature in business communications.

Time Zone Optimization

The current system of time zones are imprecise and not scientifically scaled to solar energy potential. Originally, societies used mechanical clocks tied to estimated local solar time. as extrapolated from a sundial. The use of local solar time became increasingly awkward as railways and telecommunications improved, because clocks differed between places. This problem could be solved by synchronizing the clocks in all

World Time Zones



localities. However, in many places the local time would then differ markedly from the solar time to which people were accustomed. Our time zones today are a compromise, relaxing the complex geographic dependence, while still allowing local time to approximate the mean solar time.

Each nation on the planet has historically had their own system of time. The question of bringing order through a system of standard time was actively discussed in the 1870's. The UK and the US were primary proponents of a system, which involved adopting a 24-hour clock and 24 time zones, each zone at 15-degrees longitude, each one hour apart. The 180-degree meridian (12 hours) was established as the "International Date Line," because just to the west of this line, countries are one calendar day ahead of Greenwich.

Developing a means of providing for more efficient utilization of daylight was first suggested by Benjamin Franklin in a humorous article he wrote in 1784. However, it was not taken seriously and put into practice until 1915 during World War I, when Germany adopted "daylight savings." The UK soon followed in 1916. The US Congress, also as a result of the war, passed legislation to advance standard time one hour on the last Sunday of March and set back an hour on the last Sunday of October. This law was repealed in 1919, after the war, due to opposition from farmers, who insisted that cows could not adjust to a new milking time and that it would hinder farming work. Some parents joined in opposing daylight savings time; because they felt children would not easily go to bed with the sun still shining. (Imagine using these arguments in northern latitudes like Sweden or Scotland where the summer sun does not set until well after 22:00, or in Alaska, the "land of the midnight sun.")

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To increase productivity during World War II the UK put into effect a double daylight savings of two hours in advance of Greenwich Mean Time. Similarly, in 1942 the US adopted "War Time," an advance of one-hour in standard time, continuing through 1945, when the war in the Pacific ended.

Today, most countries adopt, as an internal policy, time zones within their own borders. Mainland U.S. has five time zones. India which falls between two time zones, decided to go with one zone for the whole country and split the difference between the two. This yields a half hour ahead of Pakistan on its western border and a half hour behind East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on its eastern border. (There are well-known social and political reasons for this difference.) China, which could have 5 time zones on the standard originally envisioned, has only one time zone. Further evidence of the lack of solar adherence to time zone policy is that the UK and Portugal have a one-hour time difference from Western Europe, but sit geographically on the same basic longitude.

Looking at a map reveals the way that time zone policy has evolved from nationalistic interests. With a more connected, borderless world, we have the opportunity to reexamine time zones with an eye towards better utilization of natural resources, like the sun and optimization of communications between connected peoples. A more efficient time zone system would make the world a more efficient place. This could have a positive effect on climate change projections and our health and well-being, including work-life balance.

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Circadian Rhythm and The Photonic Revolution.

Circadian rhythm is a 24-hour cycle in the biochemical, physiological or behavioral processes of living entities. These rhythms are affected by external cues, the primary one being daylight.

What is the possible economic and environmental impact if the U.S reduced the number of time zones, instead of the five it has now, or if Portugal and the UK were aligned with Western Europe? Such a change might produce benefits which could be measured. Cows will get used to it. Cows don't wear watches. Their biorhythms of milk-giving are tied to the context of learned signals they receive from the farmer and presence of daylight. Circadian rhythm is adaptive.

What We Can Do About It

The international communications industry can improve its ability to communicate by following the 24-hour clock, by far the most acceptable time conveyance format in the world. Further, an examination of time zones with a view towards time zone optimization could improve how an interconnected world consumes energy, maximizes the use of solar power and leverages the wellness attributes of light.

These are just one person's thoughts on how to optimize time, but I live across time zones.

Where are you? What do you think?

To continue operating with our current system risks being a waste of time.