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IBM Thinks Minds Will Control Machines Within 5 Years

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

Controlling a device with your mind. Powering your home with the energy of your own activities. These are two of the developments that experts at IBM think will become reality within the next five years.

The technology company has released its latest "5 in 5" report. The experts think people will soon be able to control many electronic devices simply by using their minds. Scientists at IBM and other companies are researching ways to do this in a field of science known as bioinformatics.

They say people will soon have a way to just think about calling or e-mailing someone in order to make it happen. Bernie Meyerson is IBM's vice president of innovation.

BERNIE MEYERSON: "[It's a] simple ability to command a system to do something for you without actually doing or saying anything, literally thinking and having something happen as a result that's accurate. Something with really deep capability so that a person, for instance, a quadriplegic, a paraplegic can actually utilize brainwaves to make things happen and basically run their own lives independently."

Another prediction is a way for people to power their homes and offices using energy from activities like walking or running. Bernie Meyerson says this is known as micro-electronic generation.

BERNIE MEYERSON: "For instance, you can have somebody in the third world who has access to a phone or a smartphone but doesn't have access to the power grid, which is a very common thing, and literally in a shoe has something that recovers energy from walking and can charge the battery to enable that person to actually become connected with the rest of the world."

Another prediction: passwords could soon become a thing of the past. IBM says developments in biometric technology could soon make passwords unnecessary. Some of the most common biometrics used to identify people are fingerprints, face and voice recognition, and iris scans. The iris is the colored part of the eye.

Bernie Meyerson says this technology will soon be more widely used by money machines and other devices.

BERNIE MEYERSON: "Imagine that things recognize you. You walk up to an ATM [automated teller machine]. [It] takes one look, says, Yep, you're you."

Another prediction from the experts at International Business Machines: better technology to prevent unwanted e-mail.

BERNIE MEYERSON: "The device, as you act upon it, as you eliminate mail, you don't read it, you just look at it and kill it, after a while it learns your habits and works for you as as your assistant by eliminating stuff you never wanted anyway."

The fifth prediction on IBM's 5 in 5 list is an end to the "digital divide" between those who have technology and those who do not.

BERNIE MEYERSON: "Think about the digital divide today: the haves and the have-nots, people who are and are not connected. We anticipate within five years, better than eighty percent coverage of the world's populations by cellular to smartphones. At that point, imagine having, for instance, the ability to speak openly with anybody anywhere, anytime and any language -- real time translation. Literally, the old 'Star Trek' idea of the universal translator coming to be, and how the world would change if there were that kind of communication and openness."

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report. What are your predictions for the next five years? Share them at voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Steve Ember.

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