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Brainstorm Tech 2010

Where the Fortune 500 and the innovators meet to shape the future of business.
(July 22-24, 2010)

The 50 smartest people in tech

July 9, 2010 7:00 AM

What constitutes tech savvy today? An alchemy of intellect, ambition, and that uncanny ability to peer around corners. Some of our choices may surprise you.

By [Jessi Hempel](#) and [Beth Kowitt](#)

"The empires of the future," Winston Churchill once said, "are the empires of the mind." Those words have never held more weight. Our greatest technological advances come not through physical might, tools, or cash but through intellect and imagination. As *Fortune* gets set to acknowledge these advances at our annual [Brainstorm Tech](#) conference in Aspen (July 22-24), we think it only fitting to introduce you to 50 of the field's brawniest brains. These are the people whose collective intelligence propels us into a future that looks nothing like the present. They've dreamed up phones that let us surf the Net, websites that help us feel more connected, and movie characters who step off the screen.

So what do we mean by smart? We salute intelligence, but also impact. Accel partner Jim Breyer is a bright guy, but he is worthy of inclusion on *Fortune's* list because he applies his mind to investments that have the potential to change lives -- or at least lifestyles. We're most concerned with the present. Thus, you won't find the Polish polymath Nicolaus Copernicus on our list, nor will you find Bill Gates. And this is not a ranking based on pure IQ. In the ecosystem that leads to commercializing technological advances, thoughtful business executives are just as important as engineering geniuses.

To arrive at this list, *Fortune* reached out to nearly 100 trusted advisers and experts to solicit nominations. Then we relied on analysts to help vet our list, evaluating candidates according to their contributions in 2010.

We learned a good deal about brilliance in the process: None of *Fortune's* smartest get by on brains alone. They are disciplined, hard-driven perfectionists. James Cameron (Smartest Hybrid) spent 15 years on his Academy Award-winning film *Avatar*. Likewise, they maintain the courage of their convictions, even in the face of great skepticism. When Mark Zuckerberg (Smartest Founder) introduced Facebook's News Feed, users revolted; now they consider it a core element of their online experience.

For every whiz in our survey there are many more who deserve consideration, and many we don't even know about. We've profiled a number of these future candidates along with the leaders in their fields. Let us know in the comments whom we missed. Perhaps they'll end up on next year's list.

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