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Virtual immortality

Martine Rothblatt envisions you uploading a digital version of yourself that could live forever online. It's not her first far-out idea.

By Tricia Bishop
November 18, 2008

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"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

Mohandas Gandhi quote posted on CyBeRev.org

Traditional religion's ethereal immortality doesn't strike Martine Rothblatt as much of a trade-off for dying.



Dr. Martine Rothblatt

Digital rebirth

Prolonging lives, perhaps eternally, has long been the stuff of science fiction. Martine Rothblatt's vision of using computers and software to do this is the latest incarnation. Her projects include:

terasemweb.org

Terasemweb.org is the Internet home base for Rothblatt's Terasem Movement Transreligion Inc. It describes Rothblatt's religion as one that believes that "technology will soon enable joyful immortality."

lifonaut.com

A social-networking Web site launched by Rothblatt, it claims about 7,500 members.

cyberev.org

On this site, people can post pictures, video and more. Theoretically, researchers can use this information to create a digital "mindfile" of the person, which could be broadcast into space or turned into software.

unither.com/utcabout.asp

Rothblatt founded this biotech company to find a treatment for her daughter's rare, life-threatening disease. Today, Silver Spring-based United Therapeutics has a stock market value of about \$2.6 billion.

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To the millionaire entrepreneur, who launched both [Sirius Satellite Radio](#) and one of Maryland's largest biotech companies, death is both tragic and, through not-yet-invented technology, avoidable.

Rothblatt embraces a more tangible immortality, a digital, downloadable one - a "transreligion for technological times." And she's asking you to join in, by uploading everything about yourself to the Internet so researchers can spend the next couple of decades figuring out how to create a digital version of you to transfer to an alternate body when your current one dies.

As she says in a 2006 video, "Our goal is to capture the mannerisms, personality, recollections, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and values of as many people as possible, store this information, transmit this information into the cosmos and ... have it combined with mindware that will allow the individuals to be revitalized and continue to live in a joyful immortality."

Think of the Fountain of Youth, [Count Dracula's](#) story, the *Bionic Woman*. For as long as there have been people, we've imagined ways to prolong our lives, perhaps eternally, by melding with the mystical or medicinal. Involving computers and software is just the latest incarnation.

But to consider it outside the realm of the fantastical and ask others to do the same is still a tough sell, especially when you factor in the many components bundled into Rothblatt's goal: She's also shopping a science-fiction movie based on the idea to distributors now and has an Internet radio station beaming messages about mind-uploading into space.

It's a tough sell, that is, until you

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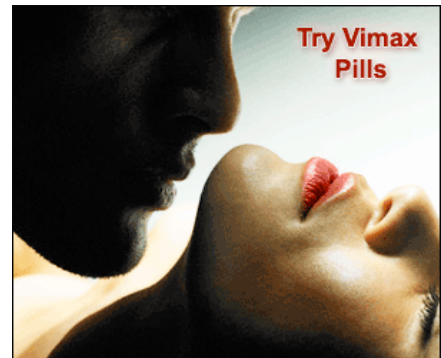
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consider the other seemingly impossibilities Rothblatt - who has a doctorate, a master's degree in business administration and a law degree - has already achieved.

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Ideas become reality
When she was young, she dreamed of tiny satellite antennas that could fit on the tops of cars; she later launched Sirius Satellite Radio and won recognition as one of the inventors of the medium. She was born male, but felt female, and in the early 1990s underwent a sex change operation and became an advocate for transgender rights. With no drug development background, she started a biotech company to find a treatment for her daughter Jenesis' primary pulmonary hypertension, a rare, life-threatening disease that elevates the pressure on blood vessels in the lungs. Today, Silver Spring-based [United Therapeutics](#) has a stock market value of about \$2.6 billion and gave Rothblatt a compensation package worth \$25 million in 2007.

"She's a pretty interesting person in her own right," said Bruce Duncan, a professor with a film background.

He was teaching at the University of Vermont about three years ago when he began scouting around for a new project. He spotted an ad on Monster.com for a managing director position with the Bristol-based Terasem Movement Foundation, one of two organizations Rothblatt created to carry out her plans. He scored the job.

In September, he was on assignment at the International Film Festival in Toronto looking for a film distributor ("All world rights are still available," he said) for Rothblatt's movie, *TransBeMan*. He also shopped the film in Cannes, France, and hopes to show it at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah, along with the Berlin International Film Festival.

"Because of her business, she's always interested in the leading edge of where technology and biology and computer sciences is going," said Duncan, a recent convert to Rothblatt's way of thinking. He happily admits it's all intriguing, even if the premise sounds a little odd.

Though technology is already merging with biology through artificial limbs attached to nerves and the like, a complete merger is definitely still a science-fiction kind of concept. Rothblatt, 53, seems to understand this.

TransBeMan is described as a "post-modern fable about the world's first Bio Electric Hybrid Human, society's reaction and the emergence of 'Fleshism' as a new form of racism." It stars James Remar (*Dexter*) and [Kevin Corrigan](#) (TV's *The Black Donnellis*). It's meant to be entertaining, but also educational. "Advance copies of the film for critics and industry professionals should be available by the end of the month, Duncan said.

The media-shy Rothblatt declined to talk on these topics, saying she spends less than 1 percent of her time on the issues, though she's invested more than \$1 million in them by funding the foundation, according to 2006 tax records.

Instead, she designated Ray Kurzweil her spokesman. He's on the board of directors at United Therapeutics and producing/directing a movie version of his most recent book - *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* - through one of Terasem's many divisions.

He "is extremely credible, more engaged than me & Im totally in sync with him," she said in a message sent from her [iPhone](#).

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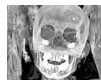
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