

# Here today, gone today

At first glance, innovation and novelty are pretty much the same. But on closer inspection, they require very different operational skills and brand strategies and it's dangerous to confuse the two.

The perceived wisdom is that brands have to innovate to stay ahead of the game, so marketing directors must spot and adapt to customer trends as they emerge. Or must they?

Ten years ago, Faith Popcorn published her bestselling book *Clicking*. She announced the discovery of 17 trends, which she called "long-lived forces that are shaping our society and shaping our future". These included: cocooning, clanning, fantasy adventure, pleasure revenge, anchoring, ergonomics, female think, mancipation, 99 lives, down aging and icon-toppling. Ten years on, how many have really shaped your brand's trajectory?

Over recent weeks, Trendwatching.com has been marketing its latest report, *Trends 2008*. It investigates over 20 trends, including the 'really real' and the 'unreal' (where the fake or the make-believe 'really excites' consumers); 'story ingredients'; 'uber obscure' (having what nobody else has); MIY (make it yourself); 'insperiences' (using professional grade gizmos for day-to-day consumer functions); 'bling endurance'; 'status despair' and so on.

But just how important are these 'trends'? And why stop at 20? You can even buy a book called *The 100 Best Trends: Emerging Developments You Can't Afford to Ignore*. Yet if you gave serious attention to even half of them, you would have no time to do anything else.

By contrast, when Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos was asked how he prioritises his company's efforts in a world of rapid change, he said he focuses on "things that won't change". It's unlikely, for example, that in 10 years' time customers will want higher prices or slower, less reliable deliveries, he observed. So if Amazon keeps on developing 'flywheels' that improve these aspects of its service, "10 years from now it'll be spinning faster and faster".

So just how important are 'consumer trends' when it comes



**Instead of chasing after every new trend, it is often wise to look at far-reaching values that remain constant, says Alan Mitchell**

to staying close to customers? Of course, for some brands, novelty is key. If you're not 'in', you're out. Demonstrating 'in-touchness' is also more important for some aspects of the brand-building process than others. Advertising agencies earn their keep by finding new ways to say old things, for example. So for them, trendspotting may be an important aid to effective communication. Examining trends in other categories or geographic markets can also be a useful way to rise above the daily mundanities of your own particular category. It's a way to keep fresh and alert.

On the other hand, there are probably only a tiny handful of trends that truly fit Popcorn's requirements of having long-term, society-changing substance. Candidates for this include: the changing role of women in society, growing environmental awareness, changing family structures and changing patterns of time use. They're the opposite of 'trendy'. They unfold slowly, reach very deep and seep into everything most brands do.

We have to remember the misaligned incentives that drive the trends industry. For consultants and agencies, prowess at trendspotting has become akin to a peacock's tail: dazzling

proof of one's fitness as an insight provider but with little further use. Just an advertisement, in other words.

If you're in business to sell trendspotting, guess what? The more trends you can spot, the better. If there aren't enough trends around (because real trends take years to mature), you have a strong incentive to invent new ones or to exaggerate wisps and eddies and call them gales.

Most brands probably only have a handful of trends they really need to worry about. The rest are a distraction from Bezos' wise advice. It's far better to focus attention and resources on a few key customer requirements that won't alter over time than chasing 'trends' that are always changing.

In other words, as with all strategy, the trick lies in the vast amounts of stuff you choose to ignore. It is, after all, the only way you can really focus. ■

[asmitchell@aol.com](mailto:asmitchell@aol.com)

Copyright of Brand Strategy is the property of Centaur Communications and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Disponível em: <http://www.ebscohost.com>. Acesso em 11/4/2008.