

January 2008 | Yup, it's time for endless predictions. And while most of them are rather dark and gloomy, with economies around the world going downhill, there are still plenty of trends out there that are begging to be applied profitably, both now and long-term. Enjoy!

Half a dozen consumer trends for 2009



Overview:

- 1. "NICHETRIBUTES"** (Low-cost, practical tributes to the zeitgeist)
- 2. "LUXYOURY"** (In 2009, you define what constitutes luxury)
- 3. "FEEDBACK 3.0"** (Think we've reached full transparency?)
- 4. "ECONCIERGE"** (Savings are the new green)
- 5. "MAPMANIA"** (Why maps are the new interface)
- 6. "HAPPY ENDING"** (The silver lining of each downturn)

1 "NICHETRIBUTES"

Low-cost, practical tributes to the zeitgeist



Let's begin with NICHETRIBUTES, which is about the power of **making products and services relevant by incorporating 'attributes' and features that cater to distinct (if not niche) consumer lifestyles and situations.***

This is not about **NOUVEAU NICHE** or the **Long Tail**: NICHETRIBUTES are attributes / features / additions to *existing* products, making them more practical for specific user groups, while at the same time signaling to those users that the brand 'gets it', that it cares, and in some cases even *pays tribute* to their lifestyle. Some random examples:

- Anything prefaced by 'i' continues to be fair game for NICHETRIBUTES: **Dots Gloves** are knit gloves with metal dots on the fingertips that won't scratch iPhones, iPods or other touch-screen phones or devices, while **Etre Touchy gloves** keep hands warm and dry while operating electronic gadgets by baring only the wearer's index finger and thumb. And how about the first hands-free cell phone glove for winter sports, the GX-1 by **Swany**?
- The **INQ1** is the world's first social networking mobile phone and will be launched on the **3** network in the UK. Online services like Facebook, Windows Live Messenger, Skype and Last.fm are integrated into the phone's operating system, allowing a user to—for example—access their Facebook contacts from the phone's address book and to see a friend's profile picture when they call.
- For more tech-inspired NICHETRIBUTE examples, incorporating online lifestyle elements into existing (physical) products, do check out our recent **OFF = ON briefing**.
- But it's not all iPods and smartphones: **Estée Lauder** developed its 'Super Flight Creme Continuous Hydration for Face and for Eyes' for frequent flyers, helping them improve their skin's recovery from dry cabin air and jet lag.

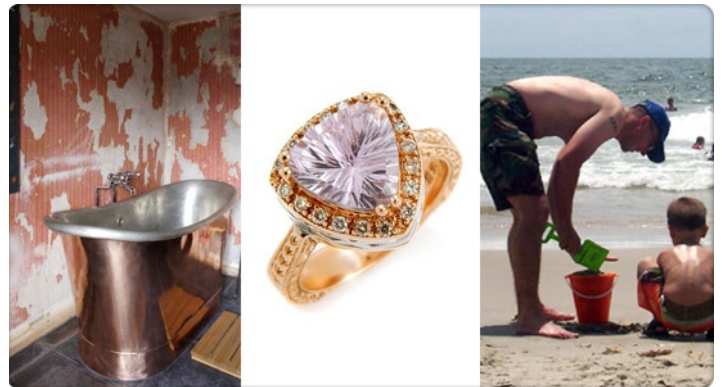
Why NICHETRIBUTES is an important and recession-proof trend:

1. For consumers, anything practical and useful will go down well in more austere times, while anything that speaks their language (and thus ultimately shows that a brand cares about its customers' interests) will be reciprocated with appreciation and goodwill. Which in today's harsh business climate is like, well, gold dust.
2. For businesses, NICHETRIBUTES can often be imagined and introduced at very low costs (which doesn't hurt when budgets are tight); the only resources needed are creativity and a good feel for the consumer trends that matter most over the next 12 months.
3. Most important of all: ultimately this is not about gimmicky fingerless gloves: it's about integrating the 'now' into your activities this year, achieving relevance for and goodwill from your customers, in an environment that has never been more about the 'now' than, well, now ;-)

* NICHETRIBUTES is decidedly **not about advertising**, i.e. tailoring a mass product's message to a specific audience; it's about tailoring the product itself to that specific audience.

2 "LUXYOURY"

In 2009, you define what constitutes luxury



On to every brand professional's favorite topic (or so it seems at times): The Future of Luxury. How will luxury brands fare this year? What will define luxury over the *next few* years? The answer to a large degree is, 'luxury will be whatever you want it to be'. After all, what constitutes luxury is closely related to what constitutes scarcity. And while scarcity in traditional consumer societies was for decades defined by the biggest, the best, and the most expensive 'items', the '2009 consumer arena' shows a bewildering number of 'scarcities', some of them invented purely to overcome the abundance now found in traditional sectors. More than

ever, scarcity is in the eye of the beholder, especially those beholders who are desperately trying to be unique.

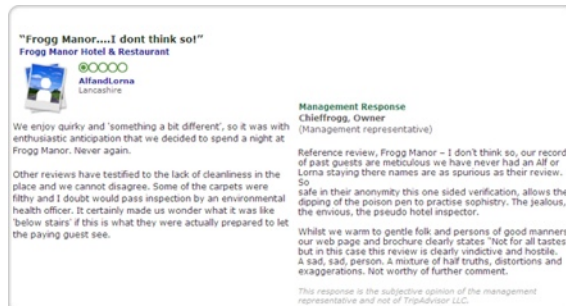
So in the next 12 months, instead of worrying about missing out on the next big thing in luxury, focus on defining it. Declare that the end is nigh for anything that's getting a little too affordable, too accessible, or just too well-known. Then introduce something very different (if not the opposite), appealing to the in-crowds ready to jump ship anyway. Two fun and very 'now' examples from the hospitality industry:

- Named after the 'rough luxury' trend that was coined by the hotel's owner, Rabih Age, [Rough Luxe](#) is a new London hotel with small, funky rooms, some of which share a bathroom, while also offering fine wines, plush bedlinen, carefully curated art, and top-notch personal service. From their site: "Rough Luxe is a new way of looking at luxury as part of time and not only part of an object of consumption. Luxury is an enriching personal experience and not only an ownership or consumption of an expensive object. Therefore, the Rough Luxe definition of luxury is: time for reflection, personal encounters with people, nature, architecture and environment as well as food and social and cultural experiences linked to geographic locations."
- Along the same lines, though a little bit more 'Deluxe Bohemian' than 'Rough', is the soon-to-be-opened [Ace Hotel New York](#). Its 'resourceful rehab' approach will include (re-upholstered) furniture from salvage shops and flea markets.

Want something to play with? How about DISCREET-CHIC? RECESSION-CHIC? FRUGALITY-CHIC? UNDERSTATED-CHIC? Or anything that's commissioned? Access? Secrets? [Stories](#)? Time with one's loved ones? Time for oneself? All things local? Peace and quiet, if not escape? Eco-friendly? Human-friendly? Caring? Empathy? [PERKONOMICS](#)? Craft? Friends? Having a larger-than-life perspective? Households of six or more? Eccentricity? Appointment-only? Opinionated? PREMIUMIZATION? Fuck You Money? Philanthropy? Bespoke? Knowledge? Skills? Health? Etiquette? Or a mix of any of these?

Whatever angle you may go for, luxury in this new year will comprise much, much more than ostentatiously flaunting wealth (which, by the way, will still enjoy considerable popularity among emerging middle classes around the world). Find the right (status) trigger for the right audience, then coin it and build on it. This one is all yours. Downturn or upturn.

③ "FEEDBACK 3.0" Think we've reached full transparency?



tripadvisor's 'management response' feature

Which major consumer trend will continue to give (or take?) in novel ways in the next 12 months? Try [TRANSPARENCY TYR-ANNY](#). Big in 2007, bigger in 2008, and even bigger this year. To get a feel for *all* transparency sub-trends, get your hands on our [2009 Trend Report](#) (not free), but for now, let's focus on FEEDBACK 3.0, which is one of the trends-within-a-trend that is starting to make waves. Basically:

- FEEDBACK 1.0 (one of those early web phenomena) saw outraged individuals posting scathing reviews, feedback and complaints, often to the delight of other netizens. Brands remained **unaware** or chose not to listen, dismissing these outbursts the way they'd dismissed any kind of customer dissatisfaction for decades.
- FEEDBACK 2.0 (which we're in right now) is about these rants—and some raves—having gone 'mass'(no, make that MASS!). The long-predicted conversation is finally taking place, albeit amongst consumers and not, as intended, between corporations and consumers. Companies have started to take note, but to a large degree still choose to **listen, not talk back**, trying to 'learn' from the for-all-to-see review revolution. Which is surprising, to say the least, since a quick and honest reply or solution can defuse even the most damaging complaint.
- FEEDBACK 3.0 (which is building as we speak) will be all about companies joining the conversation, if only to get **their side of the story** in front of the mass audience that now scans reviews. Expect smart companies to be increasingly able (and to increasingly demand) to post their apologies and solutions, preferably directly alongside reviews from unhappy customers. Expect the same for candid rebuttals by companies who feel (and can prove) that a particular review is unfair or inaccurate, and want to share their side of the story.

Examples of FEEDBACK 3.0 in action

- Tripadvisor's [management response feature](#) allows representatives of hotels, restaurants and attractions to respond to reviews written about their properties. Local business review site [Yelp](#) allows business owners to manage their own page with detailed information, and lets them respond privately to reviewers. The latter is also offered by product ratings and reviews provider [Bazaarvoice](#), which allows owners direct contact with posters of negative reviews. [HomeAway](#), the vacation rentals marketplace, has an owner-response feature that allows property owners to publicly post in response to reviews.
- There's also a self-organized 'right of reply': we've argued (for years, really) that setting up one's own conversation website for customers is the most amazing way to prevent damning reviews from popping up all over. It's been happening for quite a while on sites like [Dell Ideastorm](#) and [My Starbucks Idea](#), where anyone can post suggestions, with Dell and Starbucks actually replying for all to see. Starbucks also [Tweeters](#) about the latest happenings on My Starbucks Idea. Two conversation-expert firms that can get you started with this kind of FEEDBACK 3.0 are [Feedback 2.0](#) and [Salesforce Ideas](#), which powers Dell and Starbucks.
- Also, check out [GM Facts and Fiction](#), a theoretically interesting approach by GM to tackling the many 'myths' about the company and its current problems. Pity they don't allow for any kind of real conversation... Last time we checked, the comments feature was turned off.

FEEDBACK 3.0 side effects



For some, it will be too late to start a conversation

- **Consumer reviews** | Given the importance of RIGHT OF REPLY, we'll soon see more companies keeping close track of incidents, complaints and other less-than-great customer interactions, gathering evidence to defy unfair complaints or half-truths. And just like customers, management will increasingly resort to visual/audio 'proof': candid, on-the-spot photos, videos and recordings.

Remember, though, as a brand, there's one thing that beats an active FEEDBACK 3.0 strategy, and that's *preventing* complaints! How? By performing better, of course ;-). And if complaints arise, go out of your way to solve the issue(s) on the spot. Each time you do, there will be one less negative review to deal with.

- **Consumer suggestions** | This year, many more big brands will jump on the 'open conversation' bandwagon, asking for user suggestions and ideas in the process. Sadly, many of these brands will only do so because of their own deteriorating prospects; suddenly they'll be willing to listen to their customers, begging them for ideas to avoid bankruptcy. Needless to say, those pleas will fall on the deaf ears of indifferent customers who have been neglected all too long. In fact, the reason so many companies are struggling is precisely because they've *never* had these conversations. Whatever you do this year, don't wait until bad times really come knocking to kick-start the inevitable co-creation lovefest (you've had [since 1999](#) to prepare!).

All this could be yours within the next 5 minutes:

12 month access to an exclusive Trend Database

100+ slide/page 2010 Trend Report

trendwatching.com's Premium Service.
Can you afford not to know?

More information: www.trendwatching.com/premium/ »

4 "ECONCIERGE"

Savings are the new green



No, there will be no 'eco fatigue' in 2009, mainly because it's hard to ignore or to dismiss the mind-boggling fortunes (and the accompanying power shifts and reductions in pollution) that are in store for those who figure out how to get the world off its addiction to oil and coal. Which means a steady stream of eco sub-trends. While we hope the likes of [ECO-EMBEDDED](#) and [ECO-ICONIC](#) are now firmly on your radar, here's one more to start the new year with fresh, green brainstorming inspiration:

ECONCIERGES are firms and services dedicated to helping households go green in any possible way. And while any advice that reduces a household's (harmful) consumption is beneficial enough, the fact that such advice leads to savings makes this a very 2009 development. In the coming 12 months, count on cash-strapped consumers to embrace sustainability with a vengeance, but first and foremost for monetary reasons. Next? How about helping consumers to **make money** by being green, by for example letting them generate and sell excess power to the 'grid'? Anyway, some examples:

- For GBP 199, London-based [Green Homes Concierge](#)'s inspectors will come to a customer's home, toting heat-detecting cameras and other devices to help them evaluate energy leaks, wall insulation and appliances. Afterwards, inspectors recommend ways the home's owner can reduce CO2 emissions, and hopefully save some money in the process. Significantly, GHC's services don't end there. For a full year the firm will act as a helpful concierge. Should customers wish to make the inspection's recommended improvements, GHC will help them locate contractors and suppliers able to do the work or tell them where to buy low-energy light bulbs and other environmentally-friendly items. Sure, in the US and elsewhere, energy companies have long encouraged homeowners to reduce utility bills by offering counseling and rebates on fuel-efficient appliances. But sorting through the paperwork to qualify for rebates and tax breaks can be a major chore for homeowners. While start-ups modeled on GHC's services might not benefit from the municipal subsidies available in London, the companies' real income could come from commissions earned through contractor referrals as well as project management fees.
- [eco:Drive](#) is a new Fiat-branded widget which aims to improve driving efficiency by up to 15%. This means a smaller carbon footprint at the same time as saving on fuel. The widget can be transferred onto a USB stick and plugged into Fiat's Blue&Me technology (which features a USB port on the car's dashboard). The software then evaluates driving and gives a mark out of 100. Tutorials subsequently encourage drivers to improve their driving, their score and ultimately, reduce their carbon emissions.
- [3TIER](#) sells detailed reports to new-energy entrepreneurs and consumers who are serious about generating their own power. Those reports show just how much wind or sunshine an area is likely to receive, based on years of meteorological data, plus plenty of other important 'have-to-knows'. The company advertises its reports via a free interactive map. Preliminary information from the map helps entrepreneurs determine whether a windmill or solar-panel installation at a chosen location would make good financial sense. For now, 3TIER's data is limited to US locations. But the company has plans to expand to other nations, a move it hopes to help finance with country-based sponsorships.
- [FreeGreen](#) offers free, downloadable green house plans. Free Green's team of engineers and designers works with industry-leading product manufacturers to create home designs that incorporate different combinations of

products, materials and vendors. It also provides 3D images, energy simulations and extensive descriptions to help consumers find the right fit for their lifestyles. Consumers who download FreeGreen's plans get not just the very detailed plan set, but also an energy report specific to the town or city they select. FreeGreen's team can also modify or customize any of its plans. The company relies on paid placement from product manufacturers, but it takes pains to be transparent about the products it displays.

Rest assured that more eco-*anything* trends will follow in our free monthly Trend Briefings. In the meantime, figure out which ECONCIERGE services you could or should be offering your customers, or which of the new players out there you should be partnering with. Helping your customers save money by helping the environment has never been a more tantalizing proposition.

Will this year be the year in which all things 'contextual', 'app', 'local', 'urban', 'tags', 'lidar', 'smartphone', 'convenience', 'Cell ID', 'spontaneity', 'infolust', and 'GPS' finally come together in one orgasmic celebration of map-based tracking, finding, knowing and connecting? Embraced by eager consumer masses who will flock to anything from friend-finders to lowest-gas-price-locators? Aided by services that already know which street users are on?

Judging from increased levels of MAPMANIA, we're nearing that destination. As the Googles, Nokias (who expect half of their handsets to be GPS enabled by 2010-2012), MapQuests, Navteqs, Openstreetmap.orgs, Apples and TomToms of this world continue to build the necessary infrastructure, devices and apps, any consumer-focused brand would be stupid not to be partnering or experimenting with map-based services. Why? Geography is about everything that is (literally) close to consumers, and it's a universally familiar method of organizing, finding and tracking relevant information on objects, events and people. And now that superior geographical information is accessible on-the-go, from in-car navigation to iPhones, the sky is the limit.

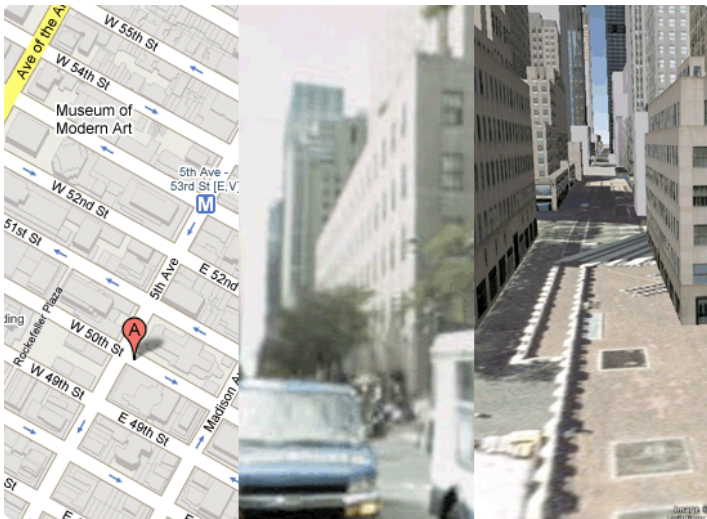
Where to start? First, see what's new on [Google Maps](#) (they keep adding functionalities, so really explore for a few hours), Yahoo's [FireEagle](#) and [Nokia Maps](#). Then dive into the maps-meet-social networking by visiting (and trying out) services like [Loopt](#), [BrightKite](#) and [Plazes](#). Traditional brands will love the partnership opportunities with widget platform [Where](#) and friends-meet-reviews-meets-location platform [Whrrl](#).

Then check out the numerous smaller—yet very B2C—sites and 'mapplets'. A few recent and totally random MAPMANIA examples as featured on our sister site Springwise: [BreadCrumbz](#), [SeeYourHotel](#), [Ushahidi](#) and [Eatbite/NYC](#).

MAPMANIA is one of those 'the time is now' trends: the dust is settling, uptake is inching towards mass, and creativity still often trumps big budgets when it comes to popular consumer applications (all hail the App Store, Android Market and the upcoming BlackBerry Storefront). Add to that the still-early shift from 'flat maps' to digital 3D representations of the real world (think [augmented reality](#) or—more hands-on—Google Android's [Enkin](#)), and an ongoing push to tag anything and everything, and it's safe to say that you're not too late to make the most of MAPMANIA.

In Q2 of this year we'll dedicate an entire briefing to this trend, focusing especially on how non-tech brands can make the most of it. But in the meantime, best to just get started on *something* MAPMANIA.

5 "MAPMANIA" Why maps are the new interface



6 "HAPPY ENDING"

The silver lining of each downturn



The umbrella trend for the next 12 months? HAPPY ENDING!

- 2009 is an excellent year for those businesses keen on showing consumers that they really care. Much more on 'caring' in our upcoming February 2009 Trend Briefing, which will focus on GENERATION G, but for now: offering respect and relevance (NICHE TRIBUTES), listening to real-time needs and wants (FEEDBACK 3.0), helping people to save money while being green (ECONCERGE): all of this will *not* be forgotten by consumers that are currently feeling the heat.
- At the same time, this is a great moment to innovate: shrinking budgets and diminishing revenues from existing offerings normally bring out the best and most creative in business professionals.
- But the most important side effect of more austere times is probably that consumers start questioning what truly makes them happy, which more often than not steers them towards the realization that happiness ain't (just) about traditional consumption. Expect pockets of consumers to switch to lower-consumption models with surprising ease, and to look for different and less costly sources of happiness and thus, ultimately, status. Any way you can help them with that will be a guaranteed winner.

Last but not least, to apply* these six trends, ask yourself if they have the potential to:

1. Influence or shape your company's **vision**.
2. Inspire you to come up with a **new business concept**, an entirely new venture, a new brand.
3. Add a **new product, service or experience** for a certain customer segment.
4. **Speak the language** of those consumers already 'living' a trend.

* For more tips on how to spot and apply trends in 2009, do check out our [5 Trend Tips](#).

Good luck, and rest assured that many more Trend Briefings will come your way this year.

trendwatching.com is an independent and opinionated consumer trends firm, relying on a global network of hundreds of spotters, working hard to deliver inspiration and pangs of anxiety to business professionals in 120+ countries worldwide.

More information at www.trendwatching.com