

"MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE"



The gales of Creative Destruction were never better felt than in 2004. From powerful design and luxury for the masses that forced even the most mundane organizations to deliver an experience, to BRIC powerhouses (that would be Brazil, Russia, and above all, India and China) making themselves heard, this is not exactly a business arena for the fainthearted. The real story however, and one that is still on page/screen one, is the 'New Consumer': at the core of each of our and other trend watchers' mega/meta/macro trends are the new consumers, who create their own playgrounds, their own comfort zones, their own universe. It's the 'empowered' and 'better informed' and 'switched on' consumer combined into something profound, something TRENDWATCHING.COM has dubbed **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE**. At the core is control: psychologists don't agree on much, except for the belief that human beings want to be in charge of their own destiny. Or at least have the illusion of being in charge. (Thank you, Tom Peters.)

And just because they can now get this control in entirely new ways, aided by an online, low cost, creativity-hugging revolution that's still in its infancy, young and old (particularly the young) consumers now weave webs of unrivaled connectivity and dig instant knowledge gratification. They exercise total control over creative collections, including their own creative assets, assume different identities in cyberspace at a whim, wallow in DIY / Customization / Personalization / Co-Creation to make companies deliver whatever and whenever on their own terms, and so on.



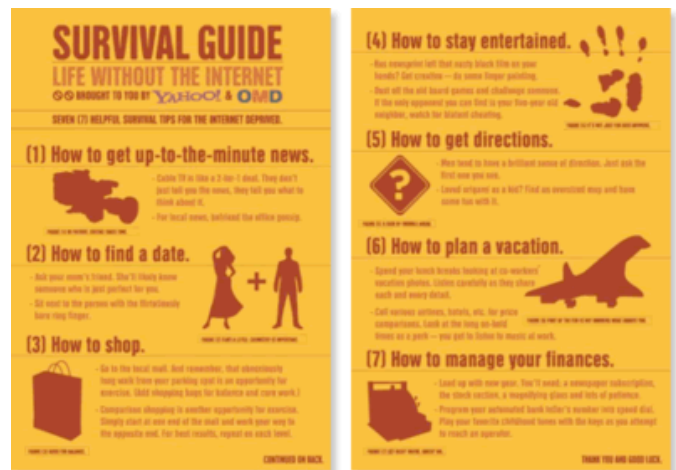
Needless to say, it's not a done deal. Not all power has or will shift in its entirety towards every single individual on this globe, but neither will the current hierarchies, in which consumers may now and then still find themselves on the bottom rung, survive. Eventually, consumers will stop at nothing to achieve and enhance their **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** status, and corporations have

no choice but to facilitate this process. When technology, societal norms, demographics or any other fundamental force unlocks basic, deep human needs and desires in new ways, all the average company can do is to assist and serve.

As always, to bring all of this down to earth a bit, we have compiled a long list of **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** statistics, spottings and services. As this concept slash trend is so massive, part II and III are to follow in upcoming editions. Buckle up for Part I's, random proof, examples and ammunition:

BREATHLESSLY ADDICTED

MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE are now officially addicted to online access, the fuel that keeps the **YOUNIVERSE** going, a phenomenon which we dubbed **ONLINE OXYGEN** a while ago. How connected and addicted are consumers? Well, consider the fact that 812,000,000(!) human beings are now online worldwide (Internet World Stats, September 2004), with Asia claiming most users, and China, with close to 100 million **ONLINE OXYGEN** addicts, boasting more online citizens than any other nation except the US. The word 'amazing' would be an understatement. Which also goes for the fact that close to 100% of all teenagers in countries like The Netherlands, South Korea and the US rely on online oxygen to shape their budding **YOUNIVERSES**.



Case in point: two months ago, a Yahoo/OMD [Internet Deprivation Study](#), which involved 12 US based families going without any kind of online access for two weeks (backed up by a survey amongst 1000 online users), found that 'regardless of age, household income or ethnic background, all participants in the ethnographic research study experienced **withdrawal and feelings of loss, frustration and disconnectedness** when cut off from the online world'. Furthermore, participants described their time offline as 'having to 'resist temptation', missing their 'private escape time' during the day, and **'feeling left out of the loop'**. The latter should dispel most people's fears about **MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** being egotistical: lack of communications figured most

prominently in the withdrawal process. However, the most telling finding: 'It was incredibly difficult to recruit participants for this study, as people weren't willing to be without the internet for two weeks,' according to Wenda Harris Millard, Yahoo!'s chief sales officer. Take away ONLINE OXYGEN, i.e. confidence, security, social networks and empowerment, and entire **YOUNIVERSES** will implode.

Talking about empowerment: with humankind's collective knowledge now at everyone's fingertips, it shouldn't come as a surprise that a poll conducted by MSN Search found that search engines are the first port of call for nearly half of men seeking advice. Male **MAS-TERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** talk to their search engines more than their girlfriends, colleagues or even their families. And yes, TRENDWATCHING.COM knows that both Yahoo! and MSN have a vested interest in these outcomes, but does anyone really believe the online revolution is anything short of, well, revolutionary?

As ONLINE OXYGEN becomes essential, so do the various devices associated with it: they simply cannot be shared. Just witness how the concept of privatized ownership has invaded the family nucleus when it comes to cell phones, iPods, game consoles, computers, BlackBerrys, digital cameras. In the US, families can buy packages with up to five free cell phones (FamilyTalk, FamilyTime etc), while in the EU, 80% of all kids aged 15+ own mobile phones. However, once **MAS-TERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** have their tools, they're definitely willing to share the *content* associated with it, as long as it's on their own terms: the iPod, for one, is easily turned into a jukebox, playlists get exchanged, and sharing is the new giving. It's all about control, not necessarily isolation: controlling one's space, time, content, communications, one's **YOUNIVERSE**.

FREEDOM, MOBILITY & INDEPENDENCE

In a not-too distant past, the automobile was the ultimate symbol of coming of age: a way out from parents (and friends' parents), from siblings' prying eyes, from geographical constraints. No longer: for hundreds of millions of consumers worldwide, 'The Cell Phone is the New Car' (as the Economist cleverly stated earlier this year). Consider these similarities between the automotive and wireless/handheld industries:

- Model and customization define the owner
- Replacement is frequent
- Choice is massive
- Branding and design are key
- Competition is global
- Anticipation of new models is enormous

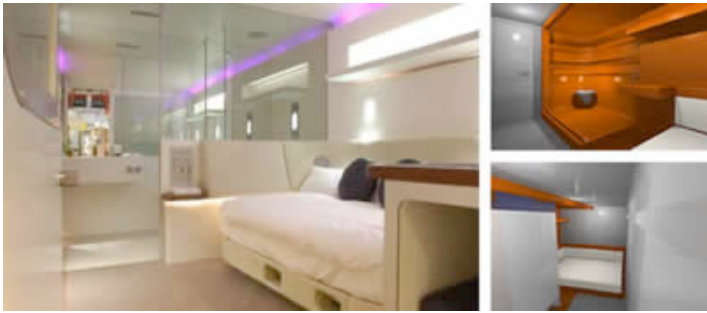


For **MAS-TERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE**, FREEDOM, MOBILITY and INDEPENDENCE rule, and the cell phone delivers these benefits to the youngest of generations. Want (staggering) numbers? The worldwide number of mobile cell phone users is estimated at 1,6 billion people in 2004 (from 1,3 billion in 2003). A staggering 320 million of these users can be found in China. The global number will rise to 2,1 billion in 2009 (source: Ovum, July 2004). Close to 30% of all tweens (age 6-15) in Hong Kong, Australia, Japan and Singapore own a cell phone. This number is 50% for most European nations. Germany and Sweden, with 65%, have the highest score. In The Netherlands and Japan, close to 100% of all 14 year olds possess a cell phone. No wonder that in the UK, a group of teens who recently agreed to go without their phones for two weeks as an experiment (Manning Gottlieb OMD), told researchers that **their social lives had fallen apart** (source: Independent).

The biggest related story for 2005? ONLINE OXYGEN (UMTS, WiFi etc) meets Freedom! With the average **MAS-TERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** now having spent years online, the online mindset is deeply ingrained and stretches outside the office desk; it's 24/7, on the way home, when in the park, during boring business seminars ;-)... So are you and your company still in a car-mindset or a phone mindset? Have you thought about learning from or partnering with the wireless industry as that's where the action is, that's where **MAS-TERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** find their kicks these days!?



But wait, it's not ALL virtual and online: thanks to the low cost revolution, the new car is not only the cell phone, it's also... the plane! Giving an entirely new meaning to 'getting away from it all', inspecting the various corners of one's real-world **YOUNIVERSE** is now more accessible than ever, as low fare airlines like [AirAsia](#), [RyanAir](#), [Tiger Airways](#), [AirArabia](#), [GOL](#) and [JetBlue](#); and **NO FRILLS CHIC** hotels like [Yotel](#) and **NO FRILLS** [easyHotel](#) will soon span the entire globe, creating a unheard of low-cost ecosystem enabling **MAS-TERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** to travel and reside anywhere in Europe, Asia Pacific, South America, the Gulf Region, Africa, North America at prices any member of the **MASS CLASS** can afford.



Please also re-read our [PLANNED SPONTANEITY](#) trend, which further deals with this go-anywhere, get-everything, go-anytime mentality, and **MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE**'s associated expectations of instant gratification, which will transcend the world of travel and eventually become the standard for all B2C industries.



NOW STARRING

Accommodating 6,396,000,000 individuals of which at least 1,000,000,000 (from Stockholm to Singapore) have the means to be aspiring **MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE**, is no easy task in the real, physical, resource challenged world. Creating one's own (virtual) **YOUNIVERSE** and multiple identities in cyberspace is, however, no problem at all. Millions of consumers now 'live' in online communities, play multiplayer games, chat with anyone and everyone. A quarter of American households owns a Sony PlayStation, [Halo2](#) sold USD 125 million worth of copies on its launch date a few weeks ago, the related [Xbox Live](#) service includes 24 countries, and more than one million paying subscribers, and Lineage, the world's most popular online multiplayer game, has 3.2 million monthly users, of which 2.2 million in South Korea, where the game was developed.



How are these virtual worlds/games impacting daily life? Consider the following fascinating **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** learnings:

- In games, the individual is always the star. Which then translates to gamers expecting to be a star in the real world, in daily life, in the workforce, wanting to lead and to stand out.
- In games, there's always a solution, gamers just have to find it. Pounding on a problem until it gets solved may then translate into more persistence and optimism when not behind the console as well.
- In games, failure is part of success. Anyone who tries a new game fails multiple times before getting it right, so the Gamer Generation is more willing to take risks. (Sources: USA TODAY and 'Got Game', by John Beck and Mitchell Wade.)

It is exactly this kind of behavioral change that make the **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** concept so exciting: whenever human beings' expectations change, the nature of consumerism and relationships with brands and companies are bound to change as well.



And how about wanting to be three **MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** instead of just one? Fully 56% of online teens in the US have more than one email address or screen name and most use different screen names or email addresses to compartmentalize different parts of their lives online, or so that they can experiment with different personas. Boys report having multiple email addresses or screen names more often than girls. Sixty-one percent of boys have more than one address, almost a quarter have four or more. Half of online girls (50%) have more than one screen name or email account and nearly one in five girls have more than four online identities. The oldest boys (15 to 17) are the most likely to have more than one address, with two-thirds reporting multiple addresses. The most active internet users are the most likely of all to have multiple addresses. Of those teens with multiple addresses, nearly one-quarter say that at least one of those addresses is a secret address that teens use when they do not want their friends to know that they are online (sources: [Pew Internet](#) & American Life: Teens & Their Friends).



BUY, BUY, BUY

OK, so let's talk consumer empowerment. Is there a single consumer left in Cape Town, Seoul, London, Vancouver or Dallas who does NOT check a plethora of opinionated or know-it-all websites before spending serious money on camcorders, hotel rooms, golf gear, cars, dating, or vintage sneakers, online AND offline? Is a **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE**-in-purchasing-mode's first stop NOT www.planetfeedback.com or www.askanowner.com or tripadvisor.com or www.dooyoo.co.uk or www.guenstiger.de or www.mm.co.kr or www.buscape.com.br or epinions.com or ebay.com or www.elcheapo.nl or amazon.com or kelkoo.com or the thousands of other curators (read: blogs), forums and bulletin boards striving for the kind of transparency that should scare the ... out of every business professional?

Fact is, the debate about your prices and your offerings and your services and your quality has moved online, with millions of consumers joining the conversation. And they talk to each other, not to you. By the way, this phenomenon too is going mobile, 24/7: consider Amazon.com Japan's new 'Scan Search', which enables consumers in any real-world store to point their cell phones at any product's barcode and then get instantly directed to Amazon.com.jp on their phone screen where they can view the (no doubt lower priced) item, and have it sent to them straight away? It's the tip of the iceberg, with Google now sending users any answer they desire by SMS, Yahoo rolling out a new mobile portal, etc. (Pictures courtesy of engadget.com.)

Only solution to avoid total commoditization in a **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** world: to be unique, one of a kind, to let the customer personalize, customize or even better co-create with you your goods, services, processes and experiences. Easier said than done? Re-read our [CUSTOMER MADE](#) for inspiring ideas, and to find out what horrible things may happen to those stuck in a pre-transparent **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** era.

More on consumer empowerment and [GENERATION C \(MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE\)](#) are actively claiming their right to self expression, to creativity), [CURATED CONSUMPTION](#), NICHE MANIA, new ways of branding, and [TWINSUMER](#) revolutions in the upcoming Part II of this trend.

OPPORTUNITIES

The bad news: most companies don't get the above. Yet. The good news: most companies don't get the above. Yet. We know YOU get it, and no doubt while reading this trend description you've come up with plenty of other indicators, observations or manifestations of **MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE**, be it the blogging revolution or TiVo or Dan Pink's free agents, or Richard www.trendwatching.com

Florida's Creative Class or the hundreds of thousands of consumers making a living on eBay. So may we humbly suggest you start collecting these observations? Create your own **MASTER OF THE YOUNIVERSE** file, box, folder, or whatever works for you and start connecting the dots. Use the above (and upcoming parts II and III) as the start of a framework, then closely observe your own changing behavior and that of others when it comes to connecting, buying, selling, creating, communicating, learning, entertaining and so on.

Understand that no longer will companies be able to see themselves as the centre of the universe. Their proper place is amongst the many planets, suns, comets and what have you, facilitating and delighting **MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE** by letting them do their own thing and handing them more control. Which means hard work now, and lots of profit in the future. As always, there's more to come (we're obviously tempted to dedicate an entire book to this topic)!!



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