"READY-TO-KNOW"

First published: January 2005 | Repeat after us: there is NO information overload. Sure, Google indexes 8 billion+ documents, images and items, and that same Google has announced it may scan up to 50 million books currently only available in old-world universities like Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, University of Michigan, and the NY Public Library, yet for consumers craving relevant information on everything and anything, there is still a massive information shortage.

After all, consumers, or, as we pointed out in our previous publication, MASTERS OF THE YOUNIVERSE, depend on extreme transparency to maintain control of their private and commercial lives. From instant price comparison and extensive product information, to independent reviews & opinions & recommendations. They're on an ongoing quest for the Best of the Best, the cheapest of the cheapest, the healthiest of the healthiest: they want to make informed choices, with knowledge of food ingredients, carb levels, medicines, production methods (environmental impact, child-labor free, animal friendly) and so on. On top of that, mature Experience Economy consumers crave any kind of context just for the sake of a story, for something that engages them. When it comes to compelling stories, no amount of interesting information can ever be enough.

And all this information should be available 'on the go', i.e. accessible in the offline AND online (wired and wireless) world: think of it as the Google effect (demanding and getting instant answers) permeating all aspects of daily life. TRENDWATCHING.COM has

dubbed this phenomenon READY-TO-KNOW: demanding consumers are in a constant 'Ready To Go, READY-TO-KNOW' state of mind, expecting any information deemed relevant to be available instantly, at their own terms. The latter is crucial: we're talking pull here, not push. Expect to see more click-and-know, more point-and-know, more text-and-know, more touch-and-know and more snap-and-know than ever before.

As always, we've compiled a number of spottings that should not only make the above more tangible, but should also inspire you to come up with goods, services and experiences that will satisfy your increasingly READY-TO-KNOW customers.

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READY-TO-KNOW and music

Consumers who hear an unknown song while hanging out in the pub, listening to the radio or sitting in a restaurant, only need press 2580, point their phone to the music source, hit send, and London-based **Shazam** will then send a text message (SMS) reply with the name of the artist and the track. Besides the technology enabling recognition of the songs, Shazam has built a database with 2.2 million tracks (adding 5,000 songs per week) to surprise even the most hard to please READY-TO-KNOW customers. Revenues come from partnerships and from the actual calls. Other services include sending song clips to friends, accessing your 'tags' on a personalized web page, and buying the CD straight away on Amazon.

Shazam is currently active/available in 12 countries around the world. Besides the UK, its home market, Shazam works with MusicFinder in Germany and Austria, and with a host of other partners in Poland, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia

and Australia. Shazam's mobile user base in the UK counts nearly 600,000 people (the company serves 1 million customers world-wide), who are charged 9p per call and 50p (USD 0.95 / EUR 0.75) per successful tag.

In the US, a similar technology has been developed by **Gra-cenote**, in conjunction with Philips Research. The service is called Mobile MusicID, and comes with an impressive database of over 7 million 'waveform fingerprints', growing by 25,000+ each week. The MusicID technology is used by MusicPhone in the US (avail-able on AT&T Wireless, now Cingular). KTF, Korea's largest mo-bile carrier, launched Gracenote's MusicID in September 2004. Gracenote also has partnerships in Spain, Portugal and The Netherlands, with Japan and Mexico going 'live' soon. Now, if they could only get pixel recognition to work so cameraphones could be used to identify movies or any object for that matter?

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READY-TO-KNOW and real estate

Yet another cool 'text-and-know' service, this one from the world of real estate: Dutch **www.SMSeenHuis.nl** ("text a house") works with real estate agents to enrich 'for sale' or 'for rent' signs with a unique text code, allowing passers-by interested in a certain prop-erty to text, instantly receive and store detailed information on their cell phone. Details include asking price, address, number of rooms, square footage, seller, etc. Participating real estate agents pay a EUR 20 fee (USD 27 / GBP 15.50) subscription fee, EUR 50 per unique property code, and EUR 0.50 per text message

(capped at EUR 50 per month). No word yet on an MMS (picture message) version, which would go down well with **READY-TO-KNOW** consumers, since few things evoke a craving for more visual info quite like spotting one's potential dream loft or castle!
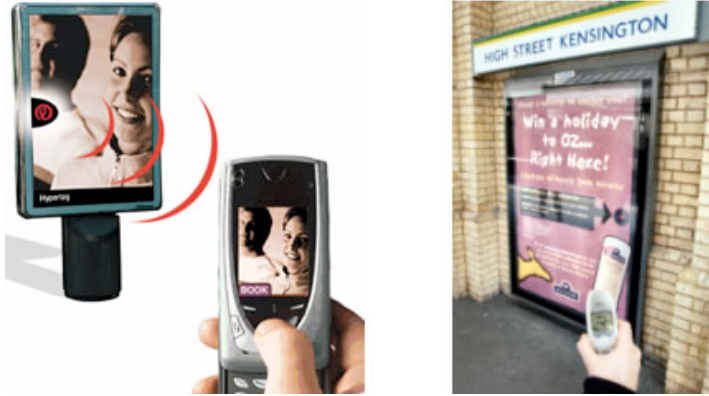
READY-TO-KNOW and retail

Amazon.com Japan's new 'Scan Search' enables consumers in any real-world store to point their cell phones at a product's bar-code and then be instantly directed to **Amazon.co.jp** on their phone screen, where they can view the -- no doubt lower priced -- item, and have it sent to them straight away. The future? **Nokia** is already working on a phone that can 'read' RFID tags, the latter being the new bar codes. (A supermarket-ready RFID tag is shown above.) Stay tuned, this is definitely **READY-TO-KNOW**'s next frontier.

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READY-TO-KNOW and advertising

British **Hypertag** specializes in poster advertising campaigns that talk directly to your consumers' mobile phones, without the need for connecting to a wireless network. **READY-TO-KNOW** enthusiasts enable the infra-red port on their mobile phone or PDA and point it at a Hypertag enabled billboard. Within seconds, a piece of content is downloaded to their phones. Think words and numbers, a prompt to remind them of an important event, a picture, a ringtone or a game. Hypertag currently focuses on two applications: the visitor attraction market and the outdoor advertising market, and has plans to develop more applications in the future. Advertising clients include O2, HP, Procter & Gamble, UIP, Nintendo, and London Underground. The current network consists of about a 100 billboards in the UK. The first commercial advertising roll out was in 20 London cinemas for O2, with billboards telling moviegoers where to download music, trailers or stills from the movie, where to find the nearest cinema or how to call up the online box office. A sensible **READY-TO-KNOW** application: advertising that is available on request, not shoved down consumer's throats, and offers useful solutions, too.

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READY-TO-KNOW and story-telling

Chicago based Orange restaurant is going the extra mile to please its curious **READY-TO-KNOW** guests: its menu is an actual 21 page full-color glossy, with the actual menu on the first pages; the rest of the 'menuzine' consists of editorials (written by the staff) and local ads. Credits list the entire staff, from management to bussers, and the editorials include recipes, interviews with the chefs, where to find exotic ingredients in Chicago, where to go out in the hood, etc. Not only is the Orange menuzine a great conversation piece, it adds to the story of the restaurant, and gives **READY-TO-KNOW** customers all the possible info and story elements they'll ever need. So much for information overload: the restaurant frequently finds its 'zines out of stock. ;-) (Spotted by Lynde Gillis, Springspotters.com)

OPPORTUNITIES
Is there more to this trend than the above? Of course. We could go on and on about **READY-TO-KNOW**, from how it fuels PLANNED SPONTANEITY (big picture stuff) and the looming revolution in local search to how it may shape the actual content stored on RFID tags (we're rooting for extensive product information and stories, not pushy advertising!). But we'll save that for the inevitable update. In the meantime, chances are you're not anticipating your customers' **READY-TO-KNOW** state of mind. Are you providing them with all the price/product/comparison/story elements and info you can, at THEIR terms, not yours? Are you making this information available to them wherever they need it most, accessible through whatever channel or device or exchange they prefer? Are you partnering with leaders in **READY-TO-KNOW**? Mind you, this is NOT about corporate IM systems or content management systems, or, even worse, about *sending* out more information: this is about consumers adopting a Google attitude even when they're not behind a desk, and all you can do is obey and provide ;-) >> Email this trend to a friend.