

# "VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY"



## INTRODUCTION

Let's face it, the art of trend watching often isn't particularly academic. A mix of curiosity and open-mindedness, and a fascination with manifestations of the (seemingly) new will get you a long way.

And subsequently applying your findings and spottings and turning them into new goods, services and experiences for, or even better, with your customers is more about creativity and guts than about endless studies and number crunching. Sure, numbers are important, but more as evidence than as a starting point.

No wonder, then, that 'observing' and 'inspiration' are at the core of what trend watchers do, and that many of their activities could be described as a 'diet' (or in Europe: 'light') version of anthropology. To refresh your memory, anthropology consists of the study of mankind with a strong emphasis on fieldwork. Or, when it comes to business: the study of how consumers live and work.



To quote Saatchi & Saatchi honcho Kevin Roberts: "If you want to understand how a lion hunts, don't go to the zoo. Go to the jungle."

No wonder that corporations are eager to get anthropologists on board these days: saturated, demanding and often blasé consumers can only be catered to in profitable ways if one truly immerses oneself into their lives. Immersion hopefully then leads to discovering latent needs, which in turn should inspire businesses to come up with new goods, services and experiences that truly excite consumers.

The challenge? There are many lions, and many jungles. As a trend watcher/anthropologist in the offline world, you can either only do one project a time, or you need an uber-expensive team of thousands of field observers to be everywhere, all the time.

This is where **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** comes to the rescue.

**As consumers around the world pro-actively post, stream if not lead parts of their lives online, you (or your trend team) can now vicariously 'live' amongst them, at home, at work, out on the streets. From reading minute-by-minute online diaries or watching live webcam feeds, to diving into tens of millions of tagged pictures uploaded by Flickr-fueled members of GENERATION C in Mexico, Mauritius, Malaysia and dozens of other countries.**



Why now? Look no further than many of the consumer trends we've been discussing for the last two years, with at the core a massive shift from consumers being members of the audience to active participants. Consumer generated content and rampant collaboration have created a web of insanely valuable content and context. There is now the web of organizations, and the web of people. It's a turbulent concoction of [GENERATION C](#), [LIFE CACHING](#), [NOUVEAU NICHE](#), [GRAVANITY](#), [ONLINE OXYGEN](#), [MINIPRENEURS](#) and more (please re-read these trends to refresh your memory), will provide you with more **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** context.

For the first time in the history of our still evolving consumer societies, tens of millions of consumers are pro-actively telling and showing each other, and you, what they're feeling and doing in the

broadest sense of the word, all in a centralized online arena, in real time (it has never been easier to upload your [LIFE CACHE](#)), whether it's on (mo)blogs or on picture and video sites. They want to connect, to share, to create, to show off. Add to that a slew of new search engines helping you navigate through Web 2.0 (there, we said it), and the ability to link postings to personal profiles ([TWINSUMERS](#)) to put things in perspective, and what you end up with is a completely new way of observing, of keeping a finger on the global pulse, of inspiring yourself. Regardless of whether you're a CEO, a researcher, a planner, an entrepreneur, a designer, an MBA or MFA student, or a fellow member of GENERATION C.



### Don't be EVIL!

A word of warning: **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** in a business setting is about finding out what consumers (may) need, what may delight them, what you *could* or *should* do next to better serve them. It's about inspiration and curiosity. It's NOT about spying on consumers, or worse, trying to sell directly to individuals whose postings, musings, pics, vids etc you've come across.

Sure, all of this content is public, and people *do* offer a snapshot of their lives because they want to share, or even want to be seen by many, but they're obviously NOT putting all of this stuff online just for you, the corporate virtual anthropologist. Don't be mistaken: the ongoing power shift towards consumers means that if you sin, your punishment can be unpleasant and instant.

**VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** is also NOT a one-way affair. Taking without giving -- something most corporations unfortunately excel in -- is completely out of tune with everything we've discussed in previous newsletters. The least you can do as a virtual anthropologist is to share some of your findings with the rest of the online population. This is as much about better serving consumers as it is about returning the favor, adding to the collaborative efforts instead of just benefiting from them.

Now, before this gets too theoretical and wordy, let's look at how you can start (or expand) your collection of **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** windows, sources and tools, at virtually no cost, adding a valuable 24/7 stream of insights to your trend unit. Here are some random 'immersion' examples:

## 1. Live the lives of your customers

What are consumers doing? What are they feeling? What are they saying, reading, watching, listening to? How do they use your products, or your competitor's products?



Are you in the gaming business, and do you want to see in what setting people are playing games around the world? Go to [games.textamerica.com](http://games.textamerica.com).



Ju Jia (Shanghaiese, Office Clerk)

I used to like the expensive mode of living and always bought famous-brand products. After having lived abroad for a period of time, I prefer a simple but comfortable life. I don't have pains and I'm happy about my life.

Cai Yiming (Shanghaiese, Freelance)

Life is satisfactory at present. I like a free and quiet life and don't want to be bound to anything or anyone. I have no wishes or dreams and believe that life will arrange everything for me as what I need to do is to make the best of the things. I don't suffer about my life.

Do you manufacture furniture or do you sell anything that ends up in living rooms, and would you therefore like to take a peek inside, let's say, Shanghai living rooms? Check out the [ShangartGallery](#).



Are you a manufacturer of refrigerators or a fast moving consumer goods giant (the stuff that goes *into* fridges) and do want to see how people use or abuse their fridges? Look no further than [fotovanjeoelkast.web-log.nl](http://fotovanjeoelkast.web-log.nl), or the [whatsinyourfridge](#) pool on Flickr. Some of the Flickr pics even include notes of what individual items are: [flickr.com/photos/voodoozebra/33771533/](http://flickr.com/photos/voodoozebra/33771533/)



And talking about [Flickr](#): the photo sharing site now displays close to 70 million tagged pictures, uploaded by individuals from around the world. (Tags are descriptive words that users assign to objects, making it easy to find what you're looking for.) Approximately 10 million pics are added every month. For virtual anthropologists, this is currently as good as it gets!

Check out:

What's in your bag (shown above):

[flickr.com/photos/tags/whatsinyourbag](#)



What's in your closet:

[flickr.com/photos/tags/closet/clusters/clothes-hangers-shirts](#)



What's on your desk:

[flickr.com/photos/tags/office/clusters/work-desk-computer](#)



People moving:

[flickr.com/photos/tags/apartment/clusters/moving-boxes](#)



And all things H&M:

[flickr.com/photos/tags/hm](#)

Looking for a fun exercise to hone your **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** skills? Explore Flickr.com (and [Buzznet.com](#)) for anything related to your products, how your customers use them, what they do with them. If you're a car manufacturer, search for people personalizing their car interiors, or [tuning](#) their rides. Oh well, you get the (tagged) picture!



What about video? For thousands upon thousands of often tagged home-made videos about anything and everything, dive into sites like [blip.tv](#), [youtube.com](#), [Google Video](#), [Dailymotion.com](#), [Revver.com](#), [Vidilife.com](#), [Vsocial.com](#), [Castpost.com](#), or [Vimeo.com](#). For now, most content is geared towards entertainment, but keep an eye out of the inevitable rise in detailed 'this is how I live or work' vids.



Need consumer diaries? Look no further than the tens of millions of blogs. The best way to find the blogs you need? [Google Blog Search](#), [Technorati](#), [Bloglines](#), [Feedster](#), [Blogdigger](#), [Blogpulse](#), [IceRocket](#), and [BlogSearchEngine](#).



Or get an even deeper look into dark, and often funny, corners of your subjects' minds by viewing postcard secrets as sent to [postsecret.blogspot.com](#). The personal and creative nature of these shared secrets have made PostSecret one of the web's hottest destinations.

And let's not forget webcams: on webcam directories like [webcamplaza.net](#) and [onlineCamera](#), they're categorized by location and subject matter. For example, live feeds from living rooms and bedrooms are here: [webcamplaza.net/cams/home](#).

## 2. Roam the world's most inspiring places

This is where **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** meets travel meets inspiration. After all, nothing beats the buzz found in the world's great cities, from street culture to window shopping to arts and architecture. And while real-world exploring will always be superior to the virtual alternative, the **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** mindset will let you roam the core and the periphery not just once a year on your 'inspiration' trip, but once a day, or even once an hour.

Be on the ground in the new super states of China, India, Russia, and Brazil, connect to the vibrant emerging economies of Turkey, South Africa and the Gulf states, immerse yourself in the established yet bustling centers of art, retail, fashion, and finance like New York, Tokyo, and London: it's all at your fingertips if you further develop your **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** web.

Some more examples:

[www.trendwatching.com](#)



To get minute-by-minute reports on what's happening in Shanghai, check out [Shanghaiist](#), part of the excellent Gothamist city blog group (New York, London, Paris, Toronto and more). Other good blog-like, user-generated 'pulse' sites are [Gridskipper](#) and [superfuture](#). For New York, check out [Curbed](#) and the now famous [Gawker](#). And then there are the thousands of neighborhood and even street blogs that a quick search on [Technorati](#) will instantly reveal.

Zoom in to street level using [Google Maps](#).



Once you've zoomed into Seoul, for example, browse [Seoul Style](#) to see what's doing.



Or, if you prefer Tokyo, check out [Japanese Streets](#) for up to date street pics of what people are wearing. Same goes for [Tokyo Street Style](#).



Nordic influences can be soaked up at [Hel Looks](#), which not only includes great pictures of street fashion in Helsinki and info on what people are wearing, but also their own descriptions of their personal style.

Want to see more than still shots? For streaming video from all of these cities, check out [worldlive.cz/en/webcams#location](#).

Window shopping from your computer: Amazon's [A9 Maps](#) show street views and storefronts in more than 10 U.S. cities using over 26 million photographs. And for window shopping, too, Flickr rules. Check out the clustering functionality for different tags, like: [street](#), [fashion](#), [retail](#) and [shops](#).



To see London shop fronts, go to [Street Sensation](#). And if you want to zoom in on mannequins, go to [mannequindisplay.com](#).



And here's a simple but often overlooked source: **retailers' online stores**. No need to fly to Sao Paulo to roam [Etna](#), Brazil's answer to IKEA, as their website will show you what their designers have come up with. Same for [Target](#) in the US.



Peruse the aisles at a [Makro](#) supermarket in Malaysia, or the menu on offer at a [McDonald's India](#) restaurant (check out the McAlloo Tikki!). Or get live shopping feeds from [webcams](#) in shopping malls around the globe.

Dive even deeper into consumers' commercial lives by watching what *they're* watching: want to see what's showing on TV around the world, from talk shows (always revealing) to commercials (even more revealing)? More than 1,000 live TV stations can be watched on [wwtv.com/portal](#), while you can tune in to more than 11,000 radio websites and 3,500 television websites (including 400 online) at [comfm.com/live/tv](#). You can also track more than 3,000 webcams. [Shoutcast](#) also offers thousands of free radio stations from around the world.

For TV commercials, check out [Visit4Info](#). For ads (offline and online), explore [Reklamfeber](#) and [Adverblog](#).



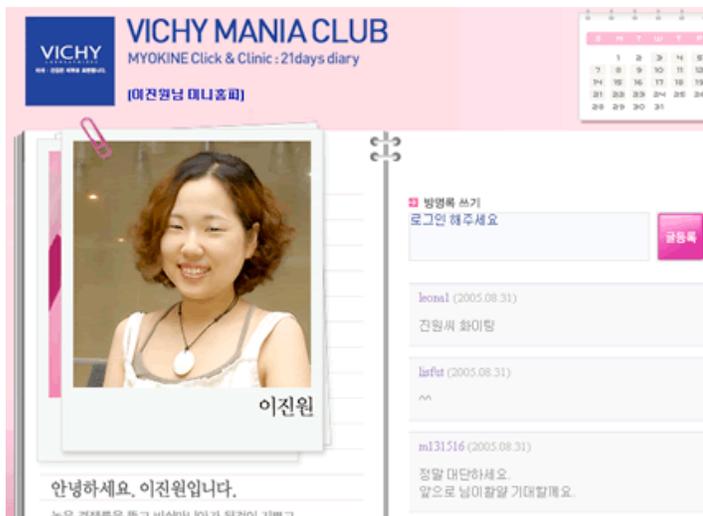
For actual front pages of newspapers from around the world, go to [Newseum](#).

## Opportunities

There are millions of **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** sources. So the above is really just a quick reminder of how much there is to be gained from building your own **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** shortlist. Yes, it will take time to find the sources that fit your point of view, your interests, your business or industry, and to add them to your [RSS feeds](#), and yes, it also takes time to track them, and keep an eye out for even better or newer sources. And to return the favor. But the information available is global, exciting, fresh and FREE.

### Next

Is the above too passive for you? Rest assured that nothing is stopping you from inviting consumers to start blogging and [LIFE CACHING](#) about any aspect of their daily lives you may find interesting. They won't do it for free, though: time to pay up!



Take a cue from **Vichy Korea** (skin care): since end of last year, they've been inviting customers to [blog](#) about their experience with the Myokine anti-wrinkle product line. Consumers shared and tracked results day by day, adding updates in real time. Vichy not only 'learned', but also gave back by having skin experts answer individual questions. 9,000 people signed up for the program. Vichy France also asked its customers to pitch in on [Journal de ma Peau](#), a blog about their 'Peel Micro Abrasion' product.



In the Netherlands, retail chain **Kijkshop** is recruiting webcam-testers to film their week-long use of electrical shavers, hand blenders, mobile phones and other devices. Every month, 15 to 20

webcams will be installed in kitchens, bathrooms, and living rooms across The Netherlands. Kijkshop is now putting the first [3-5 minute long movies](#) (and reviews) online for all to see. More than 5,000 people have already expressed interest in taking part.

And yes, the next step in **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** is to link the concept to your [CUSTOMER-MADE](#) strategy. More on that in a future edition. For now, learn, share and give, and get ready for yet another turbulent year!

## P.S. TREND CURATORS

Now for something completely different (well, kind of): if **VIRTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY** is all about actively living amongst consumers to get some insights, and, who knows, spot some new trends, how about the people doing the actual trend spotting for you?

You already read our newsletter (thank you!!), but do check out the following trend sources if you haven't done so already. What better way to prepare for 2006 than to update your list of trend curators? And just like [TRENDWATCHING.COM](#), they're free of charge.

**Agenda Inc:** a 24/7, curated feed of articles from the frontiers of pop-culture.

**PSFK:** a not to be missed daily selection of trend articles and insightful comments from around the world.

**Influx Insights:** a brand/trend agency with a spot-on blog, offering a mix of interesting articles and proprietary spottings/trends.

**Reveries Extra Texture:** an eclectic collection of marketing-relevant news headlines and trends, updated throughout the day.

**Springwise New Business Ideas:** [TRENDWATCHING.COM](#)'s sister publication, offering a monthly dose of new business ideas (and the trends that make them tick).

**TrendCentral:** daily new products and service spottings, ranging from the frilly to the cutting edge. Heavy teen/youth focus.

Last but not least, to [learn](#) from what major business publications have said about our trends, including many new insights and examples, please visit our ever-growing overview of trend articles at <http://www.trendwatching.com/press/trendarticles.html>.