INSTANT TREND EXPERT

Everything you need to persuade colleagues and clients of the power of consumer trends.
Trends are no longer trendy.

They (like pretty much all types of content :) are now everywhere. But despite their ubiquity – indeed, because of the very forces driving it – trends are more valuable than ever.

INTRODUCTION

Yes, information overload, hyper-accelerated change and the innovation frenzy (which you may well be helping to drive) mean endless overwhelm; but endless opportunity, too, if you can harness them.

That, in short, is what consumer trends are for. They provide a handle on the information onslaught and a framework by which to understand rapid change. They allow you to process, and focus.

Trends help you find the right insight or opportunity, generate the right ideas, and then execute them in the right way.

The result? Delighted consumers.
We know, you’re smart.

You probably know all this already. But that will mean you get asked these questions almost as often as we do. Especially if you’re trying to build a trend-spotting (and opportunity-seizing) innovation culture in your organization. Here are our answers. Hopefully they help you convince skeptical colleagues or clients too.
Because no one wants to be these guys:

INSTEAD OF RISKING ANYTHING NEW, LET'S PLAY IT SAFE BY CONTINUING OUR SLOW DECLINE INTO OBsolescence.

Thanks to the always awesome Tom Fishburne.
BECOME AN INSTANT TREND EXPERT

Via these 10 critical trend questions and their answers.
QUESTION # 1

Spell it out already: what is a consumer trend?
A new behavior. A new attitude or opinion. A new expectation. Any of these can form the basis of a consumer trend.

Underneath our definition lies a model that juxtaposes external change – technological, social, economic and more – against human nature, which, at its most fundamental, doesn’t change. That model will let you understand how new consumer trends emerge, and how to know a trend when you see one.

Interested? Then scroll down.

A consumer trend is a new manifestation among consumers – in behavior, attitude, or expectation – of a fundamental human need, want or desire.

• We’re obsessed with consumer trends. Not industry trends (smartphone screen sizes, car interior colors, airline seat legroom, etc). Not macro trends (think aging populations, climate change, increasing economic inequality, etc). Unless of course they affect consumer behavior, attitudes or expectations. Then we’re interested.
QUESTION # 2

So Tinder* is a trend, right? Or is that just a fad?

*Insert hot new mobile/social app of your choice here.
The difference between a trend and a fad? **Trends emerge when external change unlocks new ways to serve age-old human needs and desires.**

So: Tinder. The internet unlocked new ways to serve the age-old human desire for human connection. Now, there’s the expectation that the instant connection and social gratification available online will be a part of offline social lives, too. *That’s* a trend. Tinder is just one, hugely successful example of that trend.

Is the service a fad, or will young urbanites still be swiping furiously in 2035? We don’t have a crystal ball. It’s not important anyway: trends aren’t about the success or failure of individual innovations (see Q5).

But will consumer desire for instant connection and social gratification continue? Yes. And will there be new opportunities to serve that desire? Absolutely.
QUESTION # 3

So trends are market research? Then where are the stats?!
Traditional market research is a powerful tool when it comes to many questions: market size, brand perception, audience share, and more.

But traditional market research is inherently backward-looking, because it is based on data about what consumers were doing and saying yesterday. And it is typically bounded by what consumers themselves are able to articulate about their wants, needs and behavior (and we all know what innovators from Henry Ford to Steve Jobs thought about relying on that).

Of course, data can support trend analysis. But trend watchers understand that if they rely only on conventional market research – that is, data on yesterday’s consumer choices and statements – they’ll risk missing powerful future opportunities.
Okay, okay: human nature, external change. But what's the point of the examples that come with every trend you publish?
Examples are central to how we spot new trends and keep track of the ways that existing trends are evolving. Here’s how we do it (of course, it’s not the only way):

Our network of spotters sends us hundreds of local innovation examples every month. They allow us a unique window on global consumerism as it evolves in real time.

New products, services and campaigns are ‘bets on the future’ – taken on aggregate, they allow us to access the wisdom of the business crowd, and draw powerful insights on new directions of travel in the consumer arena. These insights can help us spot new trends, or help us update existing trends. To see that in action, read TRENDS REFRESHED.

There’s an added benefit, too. Examples bring a trend to life by showing how the trend is being applied. Perfect for helping inspire you to apply a trend in your context (and for persuading colleagues that it can be done).
QUESTION # 5

But some of your featured innovations fail! Doesn't that invalidate the trend?
When taken on aggregate new products, services and campaigns can help signal future directions for consumerism. But trying to draw broad conclusions based on the success or failure of individual innovations just won’t work.

A single example is simply one attempt to adapt a trend for a specific context: that is, the target market and consumer. **There are simply too many variables (logistics, financing, execution, etc.) at work to draw conclusions about entire trends from one or even a handful of examples.**

Plenty of peer-to-peer startups failed in recent years. But try telling the founders (and users) of Airbnb that this invalidates the ongoing trend for peer-to-peer consumerism.

Clusters of examples help suggest future directions for consumerism. Individual success or failure doesn’t tell us much.
We obviously offer much more than monthly Trend Briefings...

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QUESTION # 6

Trend content is EVERYWHERE now. What competitive advantage is left to be gained?
Countless online and offline publications in every conceivable niche are creating a GLOBAL BRAIN of trend content that’s accessible to all.

But here’s what countless magazines won’t tell you: trends are not the point. **Trends are just a means to an end: successful (and profitable) innovation. It’s all about applying trends: that’s where you win your competitive edge.**

Which trends to run with? That depends on you! Know your brand, capabilities and (potential) customers, and adapt the trend accordingly. Let deep human needs and wants be your anchor.

When to run with a trend? You can jump into almost any trend at any time, if you’re aware of how it is evolving (tip – start with the latest examples).

Want to start applying trends? Just see the bonus question (Q 11) at the bottom of this Briefing ;)

**In the end, trends aren't the point. The opportunities they highlight are. So get going!**

QUESTION # 7

But surely only some trends apply in my region or market?
Baseline answer: trends are informed by fundamental human needs and wants that we all share, and that means any trend can (with relevant adaption) be applied in any region.

What’s more, we’re amid a convergence that sees consumers from Boston to Beijing lust after the same smartphones, wear the same fast fashion, and drink (dare-we-say-almost-the-same ;) craft beer.

Just look at the wave of global on-trend examples (from Portugal to the Philippines) featured in our recent INNOVATION CELEBRATION publication. How many of them couldn’t be adapted for your local market?

Of course, regional differences do still exist. How to adapt?
Ask: is the external change driving this trend different here?
How will the underlying consumer expectations combine with local culture and values?
Shouldn't I focus on trends in my own industry?
Focusing on trends and innovation inside your industry alone is a sure way to lose. Why? Because you’re not competing only against other players in your industry; you’re competing against everyone.

Today, information and excitement about new products or experiences travels near-instantly. Consumer expectation – on what is possible, and who is doing it best – is set and reset at light speed. So who are your competitors now? Your industry colleagues? Or the brands in other industries that are finding new ways to surprise, delight, and raise expectations?

There’s huge power in looking across industries. See how other brands are using trends to innovate. Learn the underlying lessons. Then adapt the trend to apply in your context.

Consumers don’t live inside industry silos. Neither should you.
QUESTION # 9

How do I know if a trend applies to my target demographic?
We know lots of marketers are still obsessed with traditional demographic segments: baby boomers, millennials, luxury consumers, and more.

First, with aspiration becoming increasingly globalized and age-agnostic, demographic segments are becoming less meaningful predictors of consumption patterns. If anything, four broad segments remain: tech vs. non-tech. Rural vs. urban.

More important, applying trends is all about adaption. When targeting specific consumer groups, ask yourself: how is the external change driving the trend manifested for this consumer (their income level, age etc.)? How does this shape their expression or experience the deep needs in play?

One good example: look at the way the INTERNET OF CARING THINGS trend is being applied to multiple tribes, from exercise junkies, to parents, to motorbike riders, to seniors.

ANSWER

Forget traditional demographics (they mean less and less). Instead, think adaptation.
QUESTION # 10

I have no budget/ I am not in charge of innovation – what use are trends to me?
You don’t need a budget to use trends. Nor do you need to be in charge of innovation.

It only needed one waiter and a piece of chalk to launch the SYMPATHETIC PRICING innovation that saw French cafe La Petite Syrah offer discounts to polite patrons. **If you have any contact with consumers, you can use trends.**

If you really have no opportunity to apply trends in your current role, then there’s never been a better time to launch a side project that has impact and can reach a limitless potential audience. Crowdfund, and you don’t even need to leave your job until you know it’s a success. Still looking for excuses? ;)
PHEW! CAN I GET A SUMMARY OF ALL THAT?

We’re glad you asked! Here’s a recap, as TEN TREND TRUTHS.
TEN TREND TRUTHS

The first five...

**Truth #1.** A consumer trend is a new manifestation among consumers – in behavior, attitude, or expectation – of a deep human need or want.

**Truth #2.** Fads come and go. Trends emerge and evolve.

**Truth #3.** Traditional market research is inherently backward-looking. Trends are all about right now (and, yes, tomorrow).

**Truth #4.** Spotting and analyzing new B2C innovations is at the heart of trend methodology.

**Truth #5.** Clusters of innovations can signal future directions for consumerism. Individual success or failure doesn’t mean much.
Truth #6. In the end, trends aren’t the point. The opportunities they highlight are. So get going!

Truth #7. Local context is important. But (now more than ever), people are people.

Truth #8. Consumers don’t live inside industry silos. Neither should you.

Truth #9. Forget traditional demographics (they mean less and less). Instead, think adaptation.

Truth #10. If you have any contact with consumers, trends can be your (not so secret) weapon.
BONUS QUESTION!

Okay, I understand trends. How do I apply them to come up with innovations of my own?
That's the spirit!

To get started applying trends today, use our free CONSUMER TREND CANVAS: a tool to help you unpack a trend, contextualize, and ideate.
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