

Forecasting the Future

With product lead times so long, reacting to current trends isn't enough. Stacey Sheppard talks to the 'professional trend forecasters' and finds out how designers can look ahead to future developments in order to maximise the success and profitability of their products



At the first mention of 'trend forecasting', it is inevitable that many of us will immediately think of fashion and what the next big trend to hit the catwalk will be.

However trend forecasting is a far more complex undertaking than merely discerning whether we should be dressing like 80s rejects straight off the set of Dynasty, toting outlandish feathered headdresses or indulging in the latest trend for 'homeless chic' - and no this is not just some bizarre fashion trend I've just made up, there really is an (oxy) moronic trend for looking like a dapper tramp.

Trends are of course not limited to fashion - they affect all sectors of business and society. Contrary to the general perception, trend forecasting is also not something that can be done by merely gazing into a crystal ball, rather it takes in depth research, observation and application and when done correctly it can prove invaluable to business success. Numerous companies have made it their business to predict the consumer trends of the future and filter this information back to those that produce consumer goods.

Kjaer Global is one such company and its passionate and enthusiastic CEO is Anne Lise Kjaer, a leading global futurist and trend forecaster. For Kjaer, trend tracking is an integral business tool that can help give companies that all important insight into the demands and needs of their consumers. "Tracking trends is a crucial way to be informed

PERSONAL FULFILLMENT Rejuvenated Woman, Inner Peace	UNIVERSAL ANXIETY Karma Capitalism, Art/Science Convergence		
HEALTH & WELLNESS Personal Pampering, Foodie Culture, BOTOX, Porno Youth	PURCHASE DRIVERS Cultural Consumption, Lifestyle Centers, Authenticity Rejuvenated, Intelligent Reduction, Deep Luxury	GLOBAL SUSTAINERS Deep Planet Living, Philanthropy	
LEARNING COMPASSION Empowerment Brands, Consumer Controlling	NETWORKING SOCIETY Diva Power, Facebook Fanbase, Creative Class, Female Empowerment, First Star Youth	WORKLIFE BALANCE Customer Convenience, Redefining Work/Life	COMMUNICATION NATION Convergence Technology, Web 2.0
GLOBAL POLITICS Climate Change, Transparency, Globalization	ECONOMIC DRIVERS Credit Challenges, Emerging Markets	PREMIUM ECONOMIES Rapid Cycling, Living the Brand, Creative Capital	EMERGENT TECHNOLOGIES Clean Tech, Smart Everything

about society and understand people, their behaviour, needs and mindset, and how that could impact the future," Kjaer explains.

"There are Macro trends (long term drivers 5-10 years) and Micro trends (short term drivers 1-3 years). These trends ideally should inspire and inform companies' future vision from the board, brand and marketing to innovation strategies for developing products, services and experiences that will fulfil and meet the needs of tomorrow's people."

And she should know. Having been in the trend forecasting business for over

20 years, Kjaer has built up an impressive portfolio of clients who come to her for advice and guidance. From BMW, Nike and Disney to Sony, Herman Miller and Ikea, the list of big name brands investing in her trend forecasting services is pretty extensive. And it's easy to see why they seek external help - predicting the future isn't exactly an easy task.

As we are now living in the knowledge age, Kjaer believes that we are often overwhelmed by the amount of information we have available to us and she sees the biggest challenge for businesses today in understanding how

Above: People bond with brands that engage and empower them by providing inspiration, interaction and informed knowledge

"EVERY COMPANY SHOULD HAVE ITS OWN TREND GROUP, EVEN IF THAT 'GROUP' IS JUST ONE PERSON"

to take advantage of all this information and distil it into a meaningful future strategy.

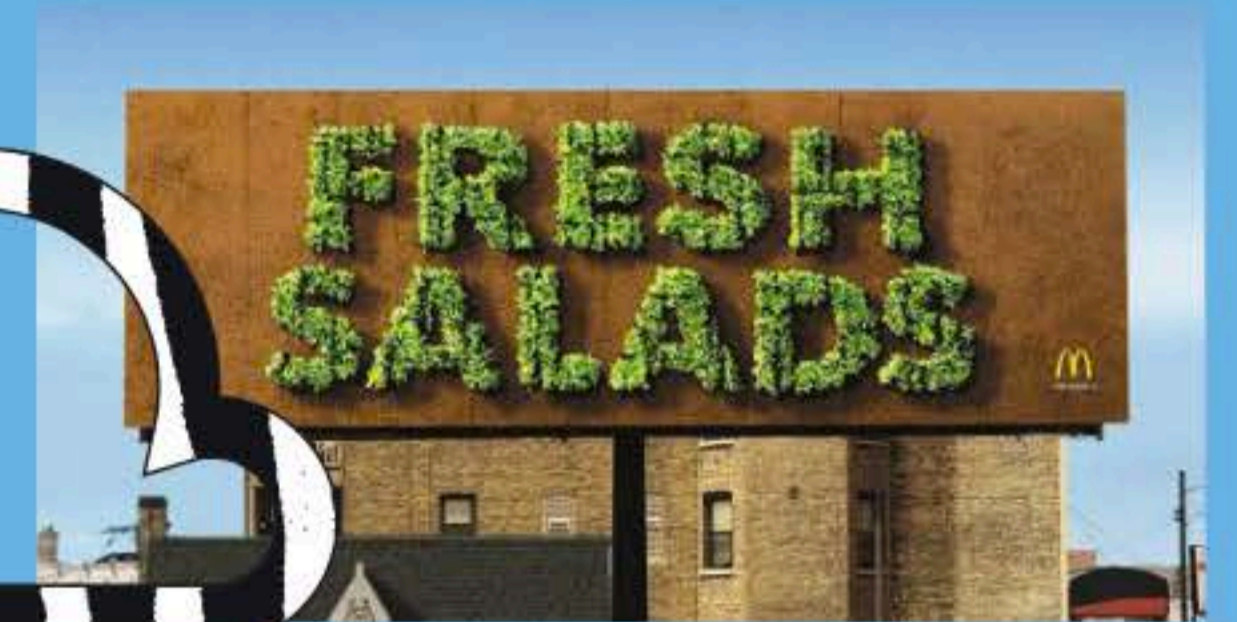
"I don't know many executives who can deliver a 'to the point' answer about where the future is going," she says. "Even less who are capable of explaining the main ten, five, or even three key drivers shaping not only their industry but the entire business arena. And how many CEOs can comfortably create a 'kick-ass strategy' based on their understanding of today's society? Therefore investing in trend intelligence and ultimately taking time out to actively think about the future makes sound business sense."

However, trend forecasting is not the sole domain of specialised companies such as Kjaer Global. In recent years, trend forecasting has become somewhat of a trend in itself as we have seen the proliferation of so-called 'cool hunters' and 'trend hunters' emerging onto the scene. Whilst most successful companies do tend to collaborate with international trend agencies, the sheer amount of information that can sometimes be involved means that some companies have now opted to set up their own internal trend forecasting teams.

This is something that Reinier Evers, founder of trendwatching.com, believes is crucial to the success of a company. "Every company should have its own trend group, even if that 'group' is just one person," he says. "The trend group is not some multi-million dollar/euro/pound affair. It doesn't have to employ a dozen staff - though of course that would be nice. It's more a state of mind. It can be low-cost, unauthorised and grass roots if need be."

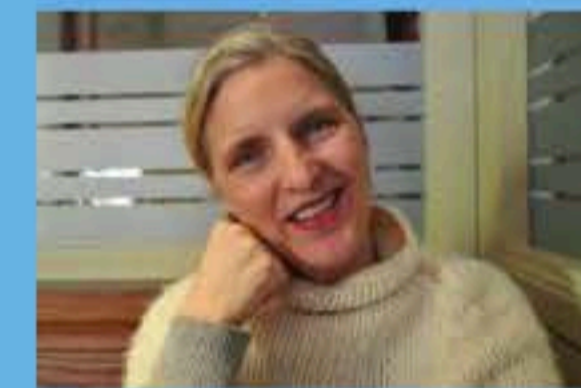
Evers feels so strongly about this that he believes you shouldn't even wait for permission to make the trend group a fait accompli within your business, but that you should just do it and then tackle the support issue. "Without backing from at least one senior member of the management team, the trend group may steadily grow, but results - innovations, that is - won't make it off the drawing board," he explains.

James Woudhuysen, Professor of Innovation and Forecasting at →



Above: On the go consumption and the new health conscious fast-food choice

Anne Lise Kjaer's TOP 5 TREND PREDICTIONS for 2010



Staying@Home: Be it work, leisure, entertainment or even going to the movies - staying at home is the new going out. Whether it is our own private dinner club, the home-office, self-pampering or technology, we invest in our home to make it our ultimate destination. The average person in the UK spent £2K+ on technology in 2008.

Doing-my-bit: The influential and informed individual practises sustainability by 'doing' and this is already starting to filter through every level of society. Take a lead as an ethical organisation and become the worthwhile choice, but never overplay your ethical credentials.

EmpowermentBranding: People bond with brands that engage and empower them by providing inspiration, interaction and informed knowledge. This leads to a feeling of personal ownership. Unconventional thinking emotionally engages people and cements lasting relationships.

MyTribe: Sharing lifestyles and value sets across conventional borders we want to learn about ourselves and find greater meaning in life. Companies must create inspiring, informed, interactive and meaningful propositions for the purpose of empowering people and influencing their lives in a positive manner.

Time-saving: In a fast society time-saving is a magic word. Fast, easy and empowering solutions that make us feel in control appeal to us all. Absolutely fab apps for iPhones are a huge success. There are now more than 65,000+ apps available, inspiring people by offering intelligent navigation and smart choices.

