

3 LAYERED CAKE

Interview with Anne Lise Kjaer

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Conceptual trend forecasting:

What happens if you get it wrong? Can you get it wrong? How do you ensure you're right?

At kjaer global we are working to forecast trends 10 to 15 years ahead with leading world brands such as Toyota, IKEA, Nokia and SONY. The way we map out future consumer needs is to use our holistic approach, combining research into scientific, social, emotional and spiritual trends to see the whole picture. Of course, you have to take it that little bit further - inspiration is vital to all new product and concept developments.

It is always possible to get trends research wrong, but in my experience this invariably happens when companies are arrogant and act too fast or work too far ahead without a tried and trusted methodology. There are no shortcuts in my business. The way to get predictions right is to follow the recipe - research, research, research. This is why our 2 Global Influences books about the future consumer has become consumer icons – they simply work on many levels to truly explore the future consumer. WE speak about the Hunters and the Gatherers and their universe whether they are tend to be rational or more emotional.

Expectations:

Do trends function a little like exchange rates in that they are expectation driven? If we expect emotional consumption to be the next concept on which we should focus, will it become the next concept on which to focus? How much of trends are consumer driven and how much are corporation driven?

Yes we are in the business of setting trends, but the only way to do this successfully is to put the consumer in the centre and chart their future expectations. We ensure success by always focusing on the end users and ensuring we give them what they want.

For that reason I would say that trends don't work like exchange rates, which are notoriously volatile and hard to predict. With trends there is a close and symbiotic relationship between corporation/producer and end user. There are social trends and business trends but over-riding trends - the ones that register - rely on both corporation and consumer 'singing off the same hymn sheet'. Successful new products are inspired by consumer needs rather than boardroom edicts.

I think it's crucial to remind ourselves that people only remember the trends that did become the 'next big thing' - never the legions of products that failed because consumers simply didn't like, want or need them.

How does being a trend forecaster affect your life outside of the office? Over the years, have you noticed a change in the way you interact with people and everyday surroundings? A change in the way you react?

My job is not a job, it's a lifestyle. I am continually looking forward in my day-to-day business but you can't live your own personal life in the future. My solution is to take time to savour the present - and try to make every day feel like a holiday.

As far as interaction goes, I guess I'm much more aware of meaning, especially in a society so full of mad and meaningless over-consumption. One direct consequence of this awareness is that I have become a keen recycler and I always try to take the ethical route with my personal consumption. What I preach I like to practice - and I have been preaching that particular message over many years!

Emotional Consumption is foremost about people whose outlook on life is focused on meaning rather than materialism. This is an oxymoron, isn't it (Consumption is materialism)? In your Emotional Consumption brief you describe the attributes of the emotional brand, but what are the attributes of a product intended for the person who focuses more on meaning than materialism? Or does it even matter, as long as the brand fulfills the person's needs?

Think beyond shopping here. Consumption is more than materialism because our every action in living is in some way an act of consuming - even if we are just talking about the air we breathe. Consuming is a natural by-product of existence, but the manner in which we consume is a society-wide issue right now. Put simply, we don't have to take more than our fair share of the oxygen!

In outlining the attributes of the Emotional Brand I am describing products and services whose attributes focus more on meaning than materialism. These are things that empower, educate, illuminate - provide something more than the sum of their parts. Emotional Consumers want to feel that they are gaining something, but also that they are enabled to give something back.

For instance, Innocent smoothies or Camper shoes make a virtue out of transparency in manufacturing and ethics - and this is something that consumers are happy to buy into. So this becomes more than just a smoothie and a pair of shoes. This is a classic example of Emotional Branding.

We have also seen the rise of Yeppies (young, experimenting perfection seekers), who are a world away from the Yuppies of the 1980s. First described by the Social Issues Research Centre, their aim is to collect life experiences, rather than worldly goods.

Your core expertise is pan European consumer behavior. Can you say a bit about how pan European behavior differs from other large markets (American, Asian)? Does one usually lead another? How close are they on the same trend lines (temporally speaking)?

It's fair to say that Western Europe has a reputation for being exclusive and original - perhaps a bit more edgy. Asia is more interested in materialism at present and the USA is polarized - it's such a vast and diverse country. But these are generalizations...

The companies we work with deal on a global scale and my experience and research shows that in every society around the world there is a top segment that think very much alike in that they are ethical, careful consumers who look for high standards in every area of life.

Western Europe and Scandinavia - and parts of the USA - have a higher proportion of this style of consumer right now than Eastern Europe or Asia, where consumerism is still a relatively new and exciting prospect. But things are moving so fast - particularly in China - that we will see massive changes and perhaps fewer disparities a few years down the line.

Also remember that trends can and do come from all areas of the world - often from surprising quarters. For instance the USA has a reputation for being a gas-guzzling nation, yet go to Portland, Oregon and you will find one of the most forward thinking public transit systems in the world.

Time Capsule: Which three things (food, design, color, industry, anything you work with) would you put in a time capsule today that say the most about you and the times we live in?

- **Food:** A skinny decaff fairtrade caffe latte non GM soya milk - so now!
- **Design:** Anything 'less is more' - I believe passionately in intelligent reduction.
- **Color:** White because it's a blank canvas that allows for a fresh and stress free start every day.
- **Industry:** The Fair trade Industry

What motivates you?

People with good energy who believe that their glass is half full and rather than half empty.

Which food/dessert or design icon best describes your approach to trend forecasting?

Hard to say - and I don't think it's possible to sum up in one single object!

First thing you notice in a restaurant?

The space and its energy.

Eating what food brings back the best memories?

Strawberries (preferably with cream and sugar). They remind me of my childhood in Denmark.

Last piece of art you fell in love with?

A white painting by Koushna Navabi - I'm still paying it off.

Favorite flea market find (or best deal on an interior accessory). Where is it now?

A 1950s pastel coloured globe which I love because I find the concept of mapping out things so fascinating and mind blowing – it makes me dream. It's in my bedroom.

No home is complete without?

Loads of leather pouffes - great for creative thinking and good for healthy relaxation.

Information source you can't live without.

None – most of my inspiration comes from inside when I am outside walking in nature.

You'll always pick up a magazine if _____ is on the cover?

The words: 'future' is somehow in the title...

When you travel, you always bring _____ along with you.

My son - he's got all the good energies and curiosity you could want from a travel companion.