

1) What is your prognosis for retail trade in 10 years? How will the market look?

This is a very bold question and there aren't just one answer but more answers. The best way to summarise the future of Europe is to look at this model 'The Evolution of Society' (See Attached illustration). It demonstrates the evolutionary relationship between the individual and corporate worlds since 1900 and also plot my forecast on where we were going in the future.

We are clearly entering a new era where value sets are shifting. Our basic needs have been met, and since we already know that money alone can't buy happiness, we are looking elsewhere for meaning. Not only has Sustainability become our new religion - it's also the strongest driver transforming our society and how we do business. We went from the Industrial Age to the Technology Age and we have already entered the Sustainable Age. Of course, the stage each society is at depends on geography, local economy and market demands, but we're all heading in the same direction in Europe. All companies and societies have to adjust to a more ethical and resilient model to create real and sustainable growth.

2) What will be the future and the connection between the retail trade and internet?

People Empowerment is the biggest driver between retail and the internet. In a network society we can connect across conventional borders and it empowers people to co-create new products & environments - we want influence and clear value definition. We can now control our lives and environments in ways previously undreamed of. People are already saying: Don't tell us, consult us!

3) Which chains will remain on the market and which ones will diminish or leave the country?

Looking at the key society drivers we are clearly facing great changes: The million dollar question is: What is the best future strategy for anticipating and managing change? Do I sit back and wait it out – pretending that this will not affect me? Or Do I ride the wave turning obstacles into opportunities? There is a Chinese proverb that sums this up perfectly: 'When the wind of change rises, some people build walls. Others build windmills.' So it's your choice: Are you and windmill builder or are you just going to wait it out?

4) What is the future of the so called "discount" retail chains?

In a multidimensional world where contrast and diversity rule organisations are faced with a tough set of challenges. Society today is both: responsible and indulgent. People demand transparency & ethics but still want discount & more choice. As the gap between rich and poor is widening two driving forces run in tangent: efficiency to gain material wealth and the quest for happiness and the need for meaning. There will always be a discount culture wherever you are in the world. The rich love it the poor needs it.

5) What is happening to European retail chains amidst the global crisis?

Firstly, it has been evident for a number of years that the unsustainable economic growth in the west was going to come to an abrupt end. Now the bubble has burst and it's time to welcome a new and more sustainable era. 'Business as usual' has been more about greed than true need over the past decade. The mad consumption pattern was exhausting and relentless and many of us will already be asking ourselves – how much do I actually need to be happy? We are witnessing an adjustment and there are winners and losers whenever this happens.

6) How is the Bulgarian market important in the development plans of retail companies?

Think global act local! One of the biggest challenges is responding to change by spotting opportunities. IN SHORT: Build relationships through emphatic leadership and communicate a meaningful message. The most salient trends that will shape the future of retail, FMCG brands and marketing are:

Empowerment – Be an empowerment brand: inspire, inform and educate

Interaction – Foster exchange of ideas and enable personal interaction

Ethics – Practise Sustainability, be transparent and appeal to people's ethics

Meaning – Create emotional experiences to enrich people's lives

These trends should serve as inspiration and must be adapted to people's mindset and local culture. The most successful brands and companies of the future will be those that "think from the outside in"

7) What will happen on the Bulgarian market - can we expect new players or a withdrawal of some of the already established chains?

I think this is already answered in number 3)

8) What are the still undeveloped niches on the Bulgarian market?

Despite current economic challenges, we need to invest our way of the crisis. Creating successful products, services and experiences in the future will mean changing the way we think about people and innovation. Concepts simply must become people-centric, demonstrating empathy for the cultures they serve and respect for the context in which they exist.

I would say that the future is far brighter than we know right now, because it will change our whole outlook and shape our values in positive ways. If I had to distil the 21st Century's driving trends into one key phrase, it would be:

Be people-centric – connect by inspiring and empowering them – only then can you create successful future for your brand.

Anne Lise Kjaer

Futurist & Visionary Thinker