

Harnessing Trends.

By

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Knowledge is power! Study trends to seize opportunity early.

The more you know about trends, the more you can prepare to seize the opportunities they offer. But, as you read what follows and study more on the subject, keep in mind that it is not necessarily a straight line from a trend to how you can leverage it. The process requires that you extrapolate what it might mean to your customer, client or audience. For example, when I created a client R&D Team recently to help me see my business through their eyes, they told me indirectly that they wanted information in bite size chunks available when they wanted it with follow-on resources they could purchase individually. They also told me they wanted more action steps to help them use the information I was giving them. I deduced what they really wanted by carefully examining their responses to my questions about hypothetical scenarios. The same process can be applied to any part of your business or career as you learn to pay attention to what trends are telling you.

Yesterday is tomorrow today

I have a client who is a futurist. Her job is to prognosticate about what she observes in technology and recommend ways her employer can use this information to change the way their business is done in the future. What she does is extremely cool and has enormous impact on how her company adapts its products to maximize emerging opportunities.

Perhaps America's best-known futurist is Faith Popcorn. Popcorn studies trends across platforms and hypothesizes about what those trends might mean for the rest of us. Have you ever noticed the dixie cup size portions of ice cream positioned as you approach the check-out line at your grocery store? Or, perhaps you've seen the small, single serving size portions of pastries in the freezer case? These items reflect trends Popcorn identified several years ago. Dubbed "small indulgences," she accurately predicted that we would want to reward ourselves with tiny treats. Manufacturers capitalized on her predictions based on her serious consumer research and astute observations.

Cinco de Mayo celebrations are another good example of the impact of trends. With the shift in population patterns in more than half of the country's major cities, savvy marketers have pounced on this traditional Mexican holiday and are building it into its own brand like St. Patrick's Day, Oktoberfest and Chinese New Year.

Cross-over advertising is another example. An interactive media strategist client in NYC told me two years ago that he believed that advertising and entertainment would soon merge. If you've watched TV recently, you may have noticed how "Men in Black II" and "Austin Powers III" have blurred the lines between advertising and entertainment with their amusing product tie-ins that drive business to their movies and to the products they promote. It's a brilliant concept and one you will surely see a lot more of.

So how can you do what the big guys do in time to seize opportunity? You already have everything you need to create your own predictions. Here are a few ideas.

- **Spot trends by paying attention.** Be a trend detective by noticing subtle changes in advertising and in products you see in the stores where you shop or on-line.
- **Build your knowledge base by studying what others say about what's coming.** Read what the experts say then play with the results as they apply to what you do.
- **Tap into your intuition.** What inklings do you have about changes in your industry, profession, or career?
- **Conduct your own research.** Find out what your clients, customers or audience want by asking them. Ask your colleagues or co-workers. Go to the library or search on-line. The virtual world is way ahead of the three-dimensional world. What's going on there is a good indicator of what's to come.
- **Ask big questions.** When you see something new in the grocery store, ask yourself what trend it is tapping into. What is the manufacturer predicting? What does this mean? What does this mean for you and the way you work or do business? Where is the opportunity?

Once again, knowledge is power! The more you know about trends the more you can prepare to seize the opportunities they offer.

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