

The trend for 2008: PowerJacking!

Bread price fixing. Telecoms price cartels. Negligent aircraft maintenance. Government succession battles. Power cuts. Rising interest rates, linked to irresponsible credit provision. Incidents of ministerial drunkenness whilst hospitalised... That was 2007. In their top trend predictions for 2008, Yellowwood Future Architects look at what all this means for 2008.

During the course of 2007, the average citizen has borne painful witness to the fallibility of “trusted” institutions – both corporate and social – and a certain amount of disillusionment is setting in. Already, we're seeing evidence of people attempting to wrest control of the reigns, from neighbourhood watch organisations to protest groups on Facebook.

These and related trends promise to keep on growing in 2008, as consumers start to question everything – and particularly, to question the values and behaviours dictated to them through commercial communication and popularist media. 2008 may well be the year that people realise they're permitted to consume less. Where ordering tap water ceases to be *infra dig* and Humma Humma campaigns are recognised as a shade irresponsible in light of global warming and the oil crisis.

What is a marketer to do? Quite possibly, learn to tell the truth. Here are our top South African consumer trends for 2008:

1. Cynical consumers, decreasing trust:

Social networks and consumer watchdog sites like Hellopeter have given a public voice to customers seeking retribution for poor treatment. In the SA context, this has been the case for years, without much luck. But things do look set to change, with the competition commission and consumer ombudsmen exposing and breaking up cartels in every category. Rumour has it financial services are next – and we can only hope that telecoms get a look in soon. As people become more informed, they will inevitably ask more questions – and authenticity will become increasingly critical.

2. Convergence and choice:

From financial services to connectivity devices, categories are converging to provide an increasing array of choice for consumers. Next year, as economic slowdown renders demand a little tighter, true choice and control will start to return to the consumer – what they buy, how they buy, how they pay – and when. Some confusion – even scepticism – is inevitable. The brands that win will be those that are transparent enough to help their customers make the right choice for their circumstances.

3. Value please!

Massclusivity (the idea that affordability need not mean ugliness or inferior quality) is an idea that has been around for some time. It will become critical in 2008, for three reasons: belt tightening necessitated by rising interest rates, SA

consumers' perennial refusal to cut back, ever and the increased availability of choice. People will not necessarily demand lower prices, but will expect more for their money. Be prepared to be imaginative, in going the extra mile. This may involve investment in service quality.

4. Permission to consume less, and a potential bling backlash:

The City of New York recently ran an advertisement encouraging citizens to choose tap water, as a perfectly safe alternative to the environmentally costly practice of bottled designer water. Trendwatching recently ran an article talking about materialist status as a “traditional” practice that is rapidly being replaced by non consumption based means of asserting one's achievements. People are learning that it is not necessarily he who dies with the most toys that wins. The category of luxury has become far more experience-based, rather than focused on the acquisition of objects. In 2008, bling and Humma Humma are likely to elicit substantial consumer irritation. Sell them an effective moisturiser – not an unrealistic pipe dream.

5. The new normality:

Our world has been one of extremes, veering from euphoric patriotism, a booming economy and riotous credit provision, to hellish despair over issues like crime, and increasing panic over rising interest rates and “what will happen next year”. We've agonised over global warming, rattled on about “eco chic”, but continued to buy luxury vehicles, failed to recycle and hopped onto aeroplanes at the slightest provocation. In health, we've seen a growing number of publications dealing with health and holistic living, a booming dietary supplement and functional food industry – and yet society also seems to be prepared to keep partying like it's 1985. Trend analysts attribute this kind of behaviour to a phenomenon known as the “desire gap” – essentially the difference between what people believe they ought to do, and what they can sustainably achieve in reality. They try to do it all, and when that fails, they do nothing. Think about yo-yo diets. But increasingly, thinking people are starting to talk about a middle ground, seeking practical ways to do better, rather than do it all. A middle ground somewhere between self righteous self denial and outright hedonism. Moderation will be hot next year, and it will make itself felt in every industry – from “better for you” fast food choices to golf estates with inclusionary housing.

6. The return of family values:

This is a trend that has been slowly sneaking up on us, through Generation Y, for several years now. This generation (formally defined as people born after 1978) appears to be choosing to get married young, and to have children. They also tend to express the complete absence of any desire to prove themselves by working for a corporate boss, and tend to want to move into something entrepreneurial, creative and somehow “worthwhile”. So the trend is being driven from the bottom. But in South Africa, where (as it's been mentioned) social and commercial providers are being proved fallible, we're seeing this trend being augmented in other spheres of society, such as home schooling.

7. Home-made:

According to trend watchers, handmade gifts will be hot this festive season – and not just because people are feeling that much discussed belt tightening. In fact, it has more to do with individualism and authenticity trends – a handmade gift shows the greatest investment of all: time. Expect this to continue from 2008 – from crafts and cottage industries to digital art and remix culture. Incidentally, Nokia predicts that by 2012, up to 25% of all entertainment content will be home-made.

8. Social networking becomes a business thing:

Facebook was unarguably one of the single biggest social events for 2007. Its social popularity is, however, starting to fade due to a combination of work pressure winning out – and some silly privacy-related moves on the part of the company. What Facebook – and a few similar – tools have successfully introduced, however, is the concept of self promotion through peer to peer networks. This will truly take off in 2008. Expect more content marketing platforms, business networks, at least one self promotion and publishing solution for aspirant musicians and filmmakers.

9. **Small is the new big:**

Business social networks are an easy connection to make, but we predict a parallel – and even more remarkable – phenomenon in the sphere of bricks and mortar. In Johannesburg, a privately run recycling service is taking over where the council has failed, while the residents of Melville are working together to eliminate crime and pedestrianise Seventh Avenue. Where else will individuals take the reins in 2008?

In short, 2008 will be the year of the individual and the community. Of personal causes and entrepreneurial ideas. Of practicality and do it yourself...

For marketers, this means that participative communication will become absolutely imperative. It's a brave new world out there.

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