The year of the snake

By Oresti Patricios

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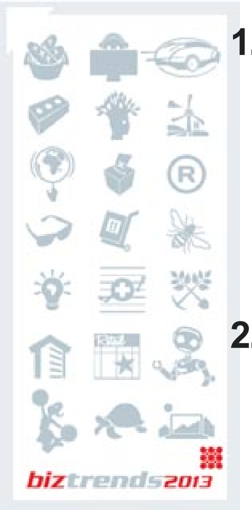
Context is king, but knowing what's around the next corner takes a little more than 20/20 vision. To find out what trends, innovations or environmental changes could affect your brand's future in 2013, here's some foresight.



1. Your consumers are not who or what you think they are

As digital and social networks continue to converge with traditional channels, consumer identity will become increasingly fraught. Old-school methods of categorising people into markets will becoming more flawed as 'netizens' and mobile users organise themselves into tribes and clusters online. This will require more fluid and flexible strategies for understanding people and demographics.

2. Society will become more divided

As the recession continues to bite and our government struggles to deal with poverty, unemployment and income disparity, politics will become more polarised. This will make marketing national identity increasingly risky, but ultimately more rewarding. Those brands that understand culture will be able to create stronger local identities, and people will gravitate to brands that give them a sense of identity during these uncertain times.

3. Clutter and information-overload drives the need for quality and curation

People will gravitate to well-crafted content, while people who are able to sort out the wheat from the chaff will become influential. For marketers, this will translate into the need to invest in good content generation in the form of clever PR, smart web and blog management, and the creation of content for channels such as YouTube, SoundCloud, Facebook, Twitter and other social cities.

4. Coders become the kings of the game

In the old days, marketers didn't have to know about technology but, as branding, social networks, apps and technology collide, understanding what's 'under the hood' will give marketers the edge. Those brand-builders who get technology will have a distinct advantage over the rest.

5. The marketing and sales departments get wed

The rise and rise of social networks and direct marketing (through mobile, internet, tablets et al) means that marketing has become embedded in sales channels. This means that sales functions which rely on social and mobile networks will become wedded to the marketing function and vice versa. Watch for a marriage between these two functions, and for marketing that will become accountable for sales.

6. Design is everything

From social apps to kitchen utilities, the world remains reliant on design and, in time-pressured environments, people will appreciate good design that enhances their experience of life, saves them time and/or saves them money. Design will continue to grow in importance in the value of branding, and in the everyday expression of people's lives.

7. Television goes broadband

Television will remain a medium for mass influence, but discerning markets and net-heads will look elsewhere for visual entertainment. Here the discernment will be everything and quality will be what distinguishes this market. This will realise a rise in bit-torrenting and the consumption of online visual channels, as well as the rise of niche cinema offerings and home theatre.

8. Trust is the new brand currency

Social and mobile networks have made the opaque visible. Consumers can now peer right through distribution channels, and there is full exposure on a brand's value chain. The rise of ethical consumerism will make trust the most valuable brand currency.

9. A picture will paint a thousand words

The visualisation of social networks will see copy become more considered and a stronger emphasis will be brought to the visual. Complexities will be rendered simple through visualisations, and infographics will be used to make intricate purchase decision- making (such as mobile packages or medical aid offerings) become quick and easier to access or understand.

10. Crowdsourcing will become king

2013 will be the year of the crowd, and Facebook, Twitter and other social engines will be used to give those people with purchasing power a bigger say into how brands are produced, changed, merchandised or marketed, and to offer greater product choices and variance.

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- Ornico & TREND.Lives: 2013 TREND. Annual

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