

11 Trends for 2011

**Marian Salzman
Euro RSCG Worldwide PR**

**For more information please contact:
Alie Griffiths or Bella Hignett @ CK Publicity 020-8811-1495
alie@ckpublicity.com / bella@ckpublicity.com**

Sometimes people ask me, “When you started trendspotting, did you foresee that you would still be doing it almost 20 years later?” No, I didn’t. Nobody can foresee something that precise that far ahead. Just as I didn’t know that I would suffer and survive a brain tumor or that, as a marketing executive, I would now be heading a PR agency.

But I knew without a doubt in the early ’90s that trendspotting would become more popular and more essential, that I wanted to be part of it, and that I would continue sticking my neck out to make predictions about the future. Cultural monitoring is in my blood. Everything I’ve done in my life, my inquisitive personality, my background in sociology, my interest in social researching and digging deep to look for patterns—it all blends and blurs together to create a personal hot spot for seeing what’s around me and applying it to where the future is headed.

But at the end of every year, when I publish my trends report for the upcoming year, I also like to look back. I look back at the trends I’ve spotted in the past to guide my sense of what’s now that’s pointing to what’s next.

I had the good luck and good nose to take a spin on the information superhighway when it wasn’t so clear to most corporate people. Among my 1995 forecasts was this prediction that businesses would stake out places in cyberspace:

***My Name Is URL.** Expect to see every business from Fortune 100 companies to Big Al’s Dry Cleaners reserving their trademarks in cyberspace. An Internet address will become an essential symbol of business savvy.*

And with businesses moving online, I was sure money would follow. Even people who had embraced the Internet didn’t believe it would offer ways to make money. I begged to differ (again, in 1995):

***The Road to Riches.** The information superhighway will become the information supertollway. We’ll be seeing everything from new cars to dishwasher soap sold in cyberspace.*

Back then, Bill Clinton was at his lusty peak and his baby boomer cohorts were still full of vim for changing the world and making millions. But even then, the demographic writing was on the wall, and I didn’t need glasses to read it:

***Gray Areas.** The boomers are beginning to gray. They’re still concerned about equal rights and repressive regimes, but these take a backseat to issues that concern them directly: health care, Social Security, taxes and so on.*

At the turn of the millennium, my avocation attracted even more interest than usual. Among the trends on my radar exactly 10 years ago were:

***Good Stuff.** Values will increasingly influence business decisions.
E-Reading. Digital books will be downloaded to a small, flat tablet with a touchpad controlling page turning.*

Social Networking. *Computer-generated friendship circles will identify people around the world with whom you may share common interests. Cataloging these hyperlocal associations will allow marketers to target these groups.*

CSR, the iPad, Facebook—need I say more? Turn the page to see what I think is in store for 2011 (and beyond).

1. Mad as Hell—and Only Getting Madder

Temperatures are rising, and it's going to keep getting hotter—and this has nothing to do with climate change. Remember hyperpolarization? That was just a start. There's a successful (for now) coalition mindset in the U.K., and Australians are still confident despite debt-related problems, but in the U.S. expect 2011 to be even angrier, with men at home angry at their wives and the economy, women at work angry that they are the sole breadwinners, and everyone angry about taxes, reforms, individual freedoms and more. The tone of public debate in the United States is now on a one-way track to very passionate discourse, if not anger. Americans are mad, seething, outraged, *furious*.

There's plenty of fuel for anger, depending on personal preference. Headlines show banks are again making billions (and well-connected bankers aren't doing so poorly, either) while ordinary Americans are losing money, work, homes, health care and hope. Jobs are disappearing, and immigrants keep arriving, many of them apparently illegally. Frustrated middle-class Americans trying to do the right thing are facing poorer prospects and more uncertainty despite their best efforts. The mightiest nation on earth still fears terrorist attacks despite years of bankrolling anti-terrorist wars abroad and shipping home caskets and maimed heroes. Washington talks about solutions, but for many Americans government itself looks like the problem.

Yes, for anyone feeling frustrated, trapped and threatened, there's plenty to feel angry about.

There have always been plenty of reasons for people to be angry; what's different now is that the echo chambers of 24/7 news and the always-on blogosphere pick up the hottest angry news and amplify it, giving anger more fuel. The angriest people stand out most and encourage others to get angry. So many Americans are so angry that voters are rejecting ordinary politicians in favor of grassroots newcomers who share their anger and express it. As Seth Godin noted, right now, angry people grab attention because they're interesting, and grabbing attention means being able to drive agendas and get elected.¹

Anger is the color of the zeitgeist, and anyone who isn't tapping it risks appearing out of touch. Barack Obama's cool, calming rhetoric hit the spot for many Americans in panic-stricken 2008. In retrospect, his no-drama style appealed just long enough to get him voted in amid the turmoil of the financial meltdown and two wars, but now it's way out of style.

¹ http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2010/10/how-media-changes-politics.html

2. Talk to the Hands

In today's rebooting world, people are seriously re-evaluating what jobs and activities are worth—something deeper than the next bonus, the next promotion, the next gadget or the next status symbol. Which are more satisfying and create more value? Which feel more meaningful? This comes at a time when “educated elites” have become figures of scorn for middle-class Americans. The Tea Party isn't just about anger at elites, though. It's also about a sense of losing control, of being at the mercy of big abstract systems, and it's a yearning for an era when ordinary Americans were practical people who could look after themselves with their own hands.

Crumbling roads and bridges, creaky energy supplies, leaky oil wells, sagging porches and dripping faucets need people who can wield tools skillfully, people who can make things and fix things. Even people earning their living at a computer are turning to urban gardens and window boxes to grow food and feed both body and soul. Amid the despair of cities such as Detroit being hollowed out by unemployment and repossessions, urban farming is being embraced as a back-to-the-future response.

In many ways, education and technology have empowered ordinary people to be more independent, but there's a yang to that yin: Education and technology have also made ordinary people more dependent on things far beyond their control. What happens if the network or grid goes down? How many people can fix their car or any household appliance? How many people would be able to grow food and raise livestock if they needed to?

As Ph.D. philosopher turned motorbike repairman Matthew B. Crawford points out in *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work*, a lot of manual work can be intellectually challenging, practically satisfying, more meaningful.

“Meaningful” is a huge topic, worthy of millions of words, but it ultimately comes down to activities that feel valuable and satisfy, that connect to a higher and deeper sense of purpose. It can mean growing vegetables rather than buying them, cooking a meal from scratch rather than heating up a store-bought meal, volunteering for an hour rather than donating \$10, or creating music or images rather than downloading them.

Things that feel meaningful usually go against the classic sales pitch of “quick, easy, convenient.” Watch as more people share the revelation that putting in effort, time, attention and care—and getting dirty hands—are often the magic ingredients that bring a sense of satisfaction and meaning to life. Watch as more people allay their anxieties by acquiring hands-on skills that can help them reduce bills, improve their surroundings and prepare them for survival if any Hollywood-style disasters come to pass.

3. Net Gain

People around the world are losing faith. Many Americans, for example, have lost trust in their politicians, their institutions, their media and the direction of the nation. To compensate (because they haven't lost trust in self-reliance and faith in technology), they are looking to their networks, turbocharged by computers and the Internet. The Network Effect is making good on its promise.

Around the world, in fact, the Internet continues to meet more and more needs. Thanks to Google and other search engines, people are confident that the information they seek is out there and easily accessible. Thanks to eBay and Amazon and all the other online outlets, they can confidently expect to find whatever they want to buy, and at competitive prices. And increasingly, thanks to social media, global citizens are turning to the Internet to find the people they need in their life.

With almost 2 billion Internet users worldwide (including 239 million in the U.S., 51 million in the U.K., 45 million in France, 81 million in India and a whopping 420 million in China), there's a virtually unlimited supply of people out there who can meet anyone's networking needs—whether it's old friends, new buddies, lovers, advocates, employers, partners, suppliers, fellow enthusiasts, fellow sufferers, co-religionists or people to just hang out with. There's a new sense of unlimited possible partners for anything from recovery to marriage.

As world citizens continue to embrace social media—from Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to Orkut, QQ and Copains d'avant—they are realizing that keyboards and mobile devices can also facilitate real conversations and mediate real human connections. (Although, in a related aside, we've been witnessing an interesting decline in people's personas on social media—from an authentic expression of self to a measured, calculated projection of values—with attendant societal implications both online and off.) The more niche the passion, the more social the match experience. And as time goes by, the interactions will build into rich, detailed connections and an ongoing sense of ambient awareness—true connectedness to a wider network of people.

4. Public Mycasting System

They used to say everybody had a novel in them. Veteran journalist Studs Terkel recorded the life stories of working Americans and put them into books such as *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*. Now people are doing it for themselves.

This is the emerging world of mycasting, of individually curated interactive content, in which each individual expresses his or her world view through what they write, the images they upload, the “share this” links they create, the tweets they retweet. The potential points of view are infinitely varied: straight autobiographical, professional observation, fan information, philosophical musing, political ranting, advocacy. Over time and across platforms, through each posting, everyone is expressing different aspects of themselves and their story.

There’s no pitching a publisher. No sitting for hundreds of hours typing up thousands of words of polished prose. People can tell their life and times directly on the Internet in handy short installments or even bite-size tweets.

For most people, the potential constituencies for mycasting are far greater online than off. It’s the Long Tail principle in action.

Of course, just writing and posting doesn’t guarantee that anyone will read their story; there’s a lot of competition for eyeballs as millions of others do the same. As ever, attention goes to those who can tell their stories in ways that connect. In today’s saturated media environment, what connects is short, bold and sincere: Short, because most people don’t have the time or patience for long; bold, because most people don’t have the time or patience for subtle; and sincere, because people have gotten sick of spin and artifice.

For some people it’s enough to express themselves, whether or not they have readers. Others want to connect more widely through their posting, and some have the knack of sharing things in ways that do that. On the Internet, sharing doesn’t necessarily mean “telling”; it can equally well mean flagging links and snippets of interesting content.

5. Booting Up

Watch out for the return of skin-thickening boot camps to toughen up kids and employees for the rigors of the 21st century. Over the past decades, we've prepared kids for the future by educating them, stimulating them, teaching them to care and share, and protecting them from bad things. Most have never faced screaming drill sergeants or barrack room bullies, let alone armed enemies intent on killing them in real life instead of just onscreen.

We now have a generation of millennials who are smart and savvy but oversensitive. Raised in a coddled hothouse environment where “everyone is special,” they are emotionally ill-prepared for a tough world in which competition for jobs and resources will only get fiercer. As *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman famously said he wanted to tell his daughters (in a twist on how his parents used to get him to eat his dinner), “Finish your homework—people in China and India are starving for your job.”² The generally outstanding results of South Asian and Asian students in the United States owe little to parental indulgence and a lot to old-fashioned, hard-assed knuckling down.

American parents and educators aren't about to subject children to the conditions that prevail in emerging countries, let alone leave them out on a hillside to weed out the weaklings, as the ancient Spartans did. But like it or not, they will understand that protecting kids too much is bad preparation for the future. Kids in Australia rarely go anywhere on their own. And around the world, children today are independent but overprotected, a result of the media's amplification of scary incidents.

Imagine manners classes and empathy workshops being replaced by emotional-resilience-conditioning workouts. It will be fascinating to see how regulators and authorities deal with entrepreneurs who offer toughen-up classes for kids and employees. There are pots of gold waiting for organizations that manage to build character without straying into abuse and facing lawsuits.

6. Yes, We Can...Reinvent Ourselves

“Change” has faded as a political slogan, but it’s becoming a way of life for many. Some people are volunteering for a change of life, embracing it with gusto. Others are being forced into it by the many disruptions in recent years. Whether the changes are voluntary or mandatory, it’s time to tap into that legendary can-do spirit and remember that America is the land of second chances.

People in their 40s, 50s and even older are launching new businesses, starting new relationships and embracing new lifestyles. Everybody knows about Madonna; her lifestyle is permanent reinvention. But how about Chicago movie critic Roger Ebert, who emerged from a battle with cancer unable to talk or eat? His midlife reinvention includes writing a best-selling cookbook and becoming a Twitter stalwart.³ Bill Gates now hands out his billions to good causes as quickly as they hit his bank account.

Millions of Americans who aren’t celebrities or aren’t rich are figuring out what it takes to reinvent themselves and their lives: clearing out attics and garages, scaling back debts, shifting expectations from “more” to “enough.” It’s like being young again, but with more experience about what it takes to shape and phase activities, one step at a time (and with power naps to maintain energy levels).

Europe will follow the trend that already occurs in America; people realize they have to live the change and reinvent themselves. But Europeans like to hold on to their customs and the “comfortable” life they are used to, thus their change happens slower than in the U.S.

For midlifers everywhere starting over, “pulling an all-nighter” is no longer about the pleasure of partying till dawn, or even the macho buzz of marathon code-cutting sessions fueled by caffeine and pizza; it’s about getting a decent night’s sleep to be in good shape for the next day.

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/29/roger-eberts-cookbook-the_n_630082.html

7. Reinvention, Part II

As millions of Americans set about reinventing themselves and their lives, will they allow corporations and big-name individuals to do the same? Will they give brands and celebrities a second chance to reboot?

For God-fearing Americans, there are biblical precedents for welcoming back repentant sinners. The nation has always had a soft spot for those who have fallen low and manage to haul themselves up and redeem themselves. Compared with other countries, the United States is far more lenient toward bankruptcy, for instance; some Americans even regard it as a rite of passage. (The rest of the world is probably not as forgiving of people.)

On the other hand, Americans are a lot more resentful and angry than they have been for a very long time, maybe more than at any time since the Civil War. If multibillion-dollar fraudster Bernie Madoff made a really sincere apology, would enough Americans support his release from prison before the scheduled Nov. 14, 2139?⁴ It's unlikely, but who knows?

The fires of anger burn very intensely but then hop to the next tinder. With the right timing, the right words, the right attitudes and behavior, and enough money to pay for top-class professional advocacy, even the most egregious corporate and celebrity wrongdoers might get themselves a second chance.

We might want to think of it as smart recycling of experience, a variant on rehabilitation. After all, most Americans would find it in their hearts to give a second chance to an average overweight middle-aged prodigal with a history of infidelity, divorce, and debt and alcohol problems. Entire TV shows are built on doing just that every week.

Exactly how the likes of BP will rehabilitate its reputation in the era of anger and 24/7 media remains to be chronicled by business schools and commentators, but the smart money says it will. Having shelled out a fortune in compensation and having been on a long-term diet of humble pie, there's a fair chance that a rebooted BP will be a wiser and more responsible company.

8. Separated at Worth

Who can say what anything and anyone is worth now? News reports talk of millions, billions and now trillions every day, sometimes as profit, sometimes as loss. The steady lines on the graphs have gone haywire. Years of solid work and long hours can be rewarded with half an hour to clear the desk and a security escort out of the building. A couple of years in the right place and lunching with the right people can be rewarded with millions of dollars.

A property bought for \$500,000 in 2006 might now fetch \$300,000. Gold bought at around \$550 an ounce in 2006 traded at more than \$1,300 an ounce in October 2010.⁵ The most powerful man in the world (overseeing a country of more than 310 million people) earns \$400,000 per year plus use of the White House;⁶ the prime minister of Singapore (population: 4.7 million) earns U.S.\$2,856,930.⁷

Wal-Mart is facing a multibillion-dollar class-action lawsuit on allegations that it pays women less than men for the same jobs and that female employees receive fewer promotions and have to wait longer for them than their male equivalents.⁸ Meanwhile, a recent survey found that young women are overtaking their male peers in terms of salary to the tune of 8 percent across major metropolitan centers.⁹ So are women worth less or worth more?

There used to be a difference between pay and compensation—"pay" being the reward for work and "compensation" being money given to victims of inconvenience, injury or injustice. Today's muddled terminology is another example of our confusion about what is worth what.

As people hear about multimillion-dollar bonuses and frivolous lawsuits, and worry about neglecting their family, their health and their mental well-being, compensation and overcompensation will be hot topics. And with money in shorter supply, compensation will be far more about emotional currency.

In a world where pay and compensation have become confused, and big money has begun to smell rotten, emotional wealth—the love and respect of others—looks like a much better bet. The extreme-cash bling of furs, fancy cars and luxury objects will be overtaken by the extreme emo bling of adoring friends going the extra 10 miles.

⁵ <http://goldprice.org/live-gold-price.html>

⁶ http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode03/usc_sec_03_00000102----000-.html

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Hsien_Loong#Salary

⁸ <http://www.thegrio.com/news/wal-mart-faces-massive-gender-discrimination-lawsuit.php>

⁹ <http://womensissues.about.com/od/womenintheworkforce/a/GenderPayGapClosing.htm>

9. Gender Bender

The commanding heights of political, corporate and academic power are still largely occupied by men, but for how much longer? At most other levels in the developed world, women are moving up to take their place alongside men and even get ahead. Increasingly, men must accept that they can't expect their gender alone to give them a head start. They can't expect to call the tune; in fact, many may have to accept whatever tune is called.

Numerous statistics have shown how women are powering ahead in education in all information societies, often outnumbering and outperforming men. In the United States, women earn 57 percent of bachelor's degrees, 61 percent of master's degrees and 51 percent of doctorates.¹⁰ Women are the primary or co-breadwinner for two-thirds of American families. In the Global Gender Gap Index 2010—which is published by the World Economic Forum and quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracks their progress over time—Iceland, Norway and Finland lead the pack with the smallest gender gap in access to resources and opportunities. The U.K. ranks 15, the U.S. 19 and Australia 23.¹¹

These shifts are becoming more prevalent as they play out in personal life. More educated women expect to have proper jobs and expect their men to take on a fairer share of tasks around the home; they don't accept that "having it all" (career, family) must mean them doing it all. Some, okay; all, no way. (Although women are still spending at least twice as much time on housework and child care as men in developed nations, according to a U.N. report.¹²)

This is reflected in long-term birth rates. In countries where old-style male attitudes tend to prevail and men have been slow to do their fair share, fertility rates have fallen; the rate is now 1.21 children per woman in Japan¹³ and 1.31 in Italy¹⁴. In South Korea, women are highly educated but earn far less than men and are less employed by local companies; the fertility rate there is a world low of 1.15 per woman.¹⁵ In countries where more men accept playing a domestic role, birth rates have held up and stand at 1.66 in the U.K.¹⁶ and the Netherlands¹⁷, and 2.05 in the USA¹⁸.

The net-net is that women are growing into new roles and men are growing out of the traditional male roles that gave them their top-class swagger; no longer are they automatically the head of household, the sexual initiator, the protector and provider, and the decision-maker. Men will decreasingly be masters of all they survey. In fact, men will have to get used to more of the media treatment that women have endured: being portrayed as sex objects or long-suffering keepers of hearth and home.

¹⁰ http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_268.asp?referrer=report

¹¹ <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2010.pdf>

¹² <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/21nations.html>

¹³ http://www.indexmundi.com/japan/total_fertility_rate.html

¹⁴ http://www.indexmundi.com/italy/total_fertility_rate.html

¹⁵ http://www.economist.com/node/17311877?story_id=17311877

¹⁶ http://www.indexmundi.com/united_kingdom/demographics_profile.html

¹⁷ http://www.indexmundi.com/netherlands/total_fertility_rate.html

¹⁸ http://www.indexmundi.com/united_states/total_fertility_rate.html

10. Who's in Control?

Oh, for the days when life in America seemed under control, back in the '50s. Looking back from the tumultuous present, we have idealized the midcentury point as a time when jobs were stable, hair was neat, figures were slim, there were no drugs or financial scandals, and people behaved decently—give or take. It was an era of predictable stability, relatively speaking. Then rock 'n' roll rebelled and started decades of letting it all hang out. Control went out the window, and it seems that things have been going haywire ever since.

The past couple of years in particular have felt like a roller coaster of unpredictability and instability. The most obvious one is finance, at every level. Public finances are in dire straits; federal, state and local budget deficits have exploded out of control. Financial institutions got themselves into situations that were so complicated that they were beyond the understanding and out of the control of many senior executives and regulators such as the SEC in America. The finances of millions of consumers around the world have gotten hopelessly out of control, too.

For anybody concerned about keeping addictive and compulsive behaviors in check, there's plenty to worry about. Narcotics are easily available in virtually every community; the Internet puts pornography a click away for anyone with a connection; cheap high-calorie food is everywhere; powerful mobile connectivity is fueling screen addiction to the highest levels; and the heady pleasures of shopping have fueled an omniomania, or shopping addiction, that is estimated to affect 6 percent of Americans.¹⁹

According to economist Andrew Lilico, the English have an "internal fear of losing control of our deficits and having foreigners telling us what to do."²⁰

The demand for greater control is a trend that unites Americans of all political and ideological persuasions. What divides them—and what will raise passions in the near future—is what should be controlled, how it can be controlled and who should do the controlling. One of the fault lines is between those who demand more self-control versus those who demand more regulatory control. Then there's the issue of who controls public discussion of these issues; is it under the control of liberal media, as conservatives have long complained, or is it under the control of powerful lobbies driving the rise of media with a conservative agenda, as liberals are now complaining?

As more of life becomes unpredictable (and we haven't even touched on extreme weather!), more Americans will be looking for more control.

¹⁹ <http://addictions.about.com/od/lesserknownaddictions/a/shoppingadd.htm>

²⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/europe/21austerity.html>

11. Tapping Minitrends

Some trends start small and inevitably grow huge, driven by unstoppable long-term forces, as is the case for the rise of women in power and the rise of Asia. Some trends start small and could grow huge or not, depending on such factors as the availability and appeal of the right technology at the right time at the right price in the right places with the right people. The huge trends just happen with their own momentum. The others take nudges along the way to make them happen; those are the trends that spell opportunity for innovators.

The rise of **African consumers** is one candidate trend that has attracted investment from big marketing groups, including Euro RSCG's parent, Havas Worldwide. The continent has languished in so many ways (e.g., economic development, conflict, misrule) that it tends to be disregarded in thinking about what's next. But with a population now at 1 billion and growing fast, there's the potential for a "demographic dividend," tapping the energy and ambition of the young population profile.²¹

Another trend is **small-scale solar energy** devices to power simple consumer needs in developing parts of the world. In developed countries, power needs are huge, grid power is cheap and solar energy devices are relatively too expensive. In developing countries with little grid power, needs are very modest and a single solar panel can meet them at low cost. The power can provide light through the evening, enabling a family to study without the cost, pollution and fire risk of a kerosene lamp.²²

Mobile technology is providing a springboard for many potential trends. In the developing world, simple cell phones (call plus SMS) are providing poor people with their first connections to the wider world, driving innovation such as built-for-cellular **money-transfer services** where there are no banks.

Mobile health care is a trend being tipped by our colleagues at Havas Health. Already, physicians are making the most of apps for mobile devices to access in-the-moment health-care information. As more consumers get smart phones, they too will increasingly find ways to make mobile devices part of their health-care journey.

As mobile readability improves, mobile devices will become a **smarter way to read** books, magazines and newspapers on the move. With the right interface, such as the *New York Times* app, it's perfectly possible to read even long, complex articles on a small screen. Scale the screen up a little to the size of the iPad or Kindle, and there's no loss of readability and every gain in portability.

²¹ <http://www.overpopulation.org/Africa.html>

²² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/about/transcripts/episode100/>

Conclusion

In highlighting these 11 trends, we're aiming, as always, to help marketers in three key areas:

- **Seeing what's in the air right now.** Knowing this will frame culturally relevant communication.
- **Gauging the trajectory of what's now.** By doing so, we not only anticipate what's next but also help to trigger the innovations that will shape it. The more marketers understand the thoughts and desires driving today's trends, the better prepared they will be to create next-generation products and services.
- **Developing the trendspotting mindset.** Some, many and maybe all the 11 trends we highlight might turn into something big; we wouldn't be highlighting them if we didn't think so. Readers might instantly accept or dismiss them, but that would be missing the real value, which is to reflect in depth on each one.

We hope marketers will argue with them, pull them apart, interrogate them and look for what's missing. Whatever conclusion readers come to, we guarantee that the process will stimulate fruitful thinking about what's happening now and what that could mean for what happens next. The name of the game isn't to *predict* the future (although it's great when that happens); it's to be prepared for it, to anticipate it and to shape it.

Marian Salzman

President
Euro RSCG Worldwide PR, North America
200 Madison Avenue, 2nd floor
New York, NY 10016
<http://www.eurorscgpr.com>

Future Bytes

Doing SoMe Good. Social media is catalyzing offline sharing and caring and collaborative consumption—from newly marrieds giving donations in lieu of wedding favors to more folks setting up communal living centers and shared ownership of big items. Malcolm Gladwell recently proclaimed that social media’s influence leads to superficial activism—not the real thing. Note to Gladwell: Aren’t these changes, small as they are, something like the real thing?

Business Models Go to Pot. Legalized marijuana is a growth industry. Look at the evidence—a proliferation of growers and pot-harvesting business schools; the first SoMe site for medical marijuana users, WeedMaps, is set to go public and its creator plans to build an empire of pot-based sites, while a pot-related URL domain land-grab rages. Add to that billionaire George Soros’ recent donation to support the cause and the first pot-specialized PR firm setting up shop, and it’s clear: The legal pot trade is set to fly high.

100 Is the New 80. Living to 100 is becoming commonplace in industrialized regions; the number of centenarians in the U.S. has nearly tripled from 1990 to 2009, and China has just overtaken Japan for the No. 2 spot for sheer numbers of citizens passing the 100-year mark. Not too surprising, given the recent news that many of Japan’s supposed extreme elders are in fact unaccounted for, most likely dead and not reported, so that families can continue to receive their pensions.

Today’s Counterculture. It’s a movement begun by teens (aren’t most of them?): defriending social media platforms by either quitting or refusing to join in the first place. Some SoMe professionals are vowing to “take a break” from hyperconnectivity. There’s even a program, the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine, to assist those who want to follow Google CEO Eric Schmidt’s advice to expunge their SoMe history. Schmidt’s words were intended as a joke—but who’s laughing now?

Wind Power Is the New Solar. Countries around the globe, from giants U.S. and China to tiny Portugal, are majorly investing in turbine technology. Even with Google backing a wind farm in the Atlantic that could potentially power 1.9 million U.S. houses, the United States is just keeping up with the Joneses at this point. But as mining is met with greater resistance the world over, the winds of change might power our homes.

Answer Me This. We’ll be making real decisions based on recommendations from our virtual friends. We’ll ask questions and get real answers, from real people. Think of JustAnswer and Aardvark, newly acquired by Google, as a preview of what’s to come.

Words to the Wise. Ancient languages are dying off (though an unknown one was recently discovered in India), as modern tongues blend (Chinglish, Franglais...) and new words are created—especially for electronic communication. The techy jargon might get us closer to a universal language offline.

TMI. With labeling, terms and conditions, disclaimers, etc., growing ever longer, along with information overload creeping into numerous aspects of our lives, we'll tune it all out at even greater levels. Not reading all this will (help) keep us sane.

Label Laws. Growing food fears and germ paranoia mean labeling becomes even more detailed: This chicken was raised on that farm; this "healthy" fare contains these three ingredients that could lead to high blood pressure, heart disease; etc.

Science vs. Faith. It's Hyperpolarization 2.0: U.S. cultural fault lines that were further cracked by voluntary political and religious segregation this past year will open even wider as scientific rationalists become more militant.

I'm Grounded. Skyrocketing ticket prices, increasingly stringent rules, jet-fuel guilt and a return to what's local and real (read: nesting, cocooning)—not to mention bombs in cargo packages. More and more people (and accounting departments) will realize they don't need the hassle of flying, especially when they can video-chat at no cost.

Agent Ex. Travel agents have all but disappeared, real estate agents are on their way out, and now direct buying, selling and working together means commissions will seem usury.

Making (Brain) Waves. We will start to see more stringent legislation in the U.S. around brain damage suffered by football players (with players' heads encased in helmets, they tend to hit each other harder, mitigating the protective element of the headgear), and more people will walk into clinics for traumatic brain injury. We will teach brain health—left- and right-brain integration—as the primary-school equivalent of Kaplan or the Princeton Review.

Shop Till You Drop? A new awareness by consumers about what they're spending their hard(ly) earned money on will find people seeking brands that demonstrate how a product or service delivers long-term benefits for them. Even shopping will be about protecting me, myself and the people I love.

Day Care: Not Just for Babies. With more families forced by tough economic conditions into multiple-generation living situations, parents—who must work even harder to support all the generations under one roof—will struggle to find day care for their children *and* parents.

Inheritance Taxes. Millennials will organize against the handed-down burdens of previous generations, from the complex problems of health care and depleted pensions, to drained resources and general climate irregularities.

Gene Chic. As genetic sequencing becomes "affordable," truly individualized high-tech status symbols are sure to follow (e.g., My Genius Gene earrings).

Climate (Out of) Control. Think there's constant chatter now about today's climate? Just wait. Weather mania shows no signs of abating as we all focus increasingly on the seemingly more intense and more frequent tragic extremes in atmospheric conditions.

Appy Days. App technology is more than buzzy; it's the way retailers will be tapping into customers, with smart-phone sales exploding and all kinds of shoppers turning to these devices to make them better at grazing and buying. Watch for retailers who launch applications that help you manage your shopping list and that make frequent repurchasing easy.

Reunited, and It Feels So Good. Forget online dating and speed dating. They'll both be upstaged by reunion dating. Past loves find each other on Facebook, reconnect online and take it offline (i.e., the—gasp!—real world).

Pol-on-a-Dole. The new matchup in elections: yin vs. yang. Chalk it up to a converging series of events on the part of voters and candidates, from apathy to ego to stupidity, but we'll see more and more candidates go populist—then take government funds to wage their campaign.

Extreme Makeover. There is one area where we'll actually see middle ground: As a result of backlash against all forms of orthodoxy, Americans will move toward moderation, as yin-yang becomes closed communities.

Health Club. Everybody's talking about the many ways technology is adversely affecting our health, but U.S. doctors helping the sick in Haiti by Internet are one of many signs that personal online wellness buddies will soon be on the rise. Think diet and exercise companionship/cheerleaders over Skype.

Luxury Goes Culturally Relevant. Luxury brands recently started embracing social media; now they'll reach the masses even more—and shed any arrogance along the way. It'll be the Four Seasons learning from Zappos (whose 10 core values include “Do More with Less” and “Build Open and Honest Relationships with Communication”) about transparency and living values.

Risk/Reward. Humans are notoriously bad at evaluating real risks, and although you'd think a down economy would give them a laser-like focus on shoring up those areas, the opposite is often true. We'll see a rise in programs that will educate people about risk and help them get better at calculating it.