

EARLY PRAISE FOR *NON-OBVIOUS*

“*Non-Obvious* is a sharp, articulate, and immediately useful book about one of my favorite topics: the future. Filled with actionable advice and entertaining stories, Rohit offers an essential guidebook to using the power of curation to understand and prepare for the future of business.”

—DANIEL H. PINK

Author of *To Sell Is Human* and *Drive*

“Shatter your magic crystal ball, and toss out the tea leaves. In this book, Rohit shows us how and where to find the future trends that will shape your business, your brand, and even your own decision-making.”

—SALLY HOGSHEAD

NY Times bestselling author of *How The World Sees You*

“There are very few books that I read hoping that no one else around me will. They’re the books that are so insightful, so thought provoking and so illuminating that they provide powerful competitive advantage. *Non-Obvious* is one of those. Pass on it at your own peril.”

—SHIV SINGH

SVP Global Head of Digital & Marketing Transformation at VISA
and author of *Social Media Marketing For Dummies*

“*Non-Obvious* should be called *oblivious* since that’s how you’ll be if this book isn’t on your shelf. I actually wish some of Rohit’s predictions won’t come true (‘Selfie Confidence’!? Nooo!) ... but usually they do. He’s the best at this, and this book shows you why.”

—SCOTT STRATTEN

Four time Best-Selling Author, including 2014 Sales Book of the Year: *UnSelling*

“This is one of those rare books that delivers insights that are both useful and help illuminate where business is going. It’s a great read.”

—CHARLES DUHIGG

Author of the bestseller *The Power Of Habit*

“For the last four years, Rohit has helped make the non-obvious obvious by spotlighting trends to help anyone prepare their business for the future. It gets better every year so if you haven’t been reading, it’s time to start.”

—RYAN HOLIDAY

Author of *Trust Me I’m Lying* and *Growth Hacker Marketing*

“The aim of many business books is to give a man a fish. Rohit generously goes one better—not by simply telling us what’s working, but by showing us how to apply his thinking for ourselves.”

—BERNADETTE JIWA

Bestselling author, award-winning blogger & keynote speaker

“Rohit Bhargava’s “Likeonomics” is the gold standard on understanding the social economy. His new book had me at “predict the future” but there’s much more than that in here. It’s about seeing the world in a new way — plus a powerful argument for how curation can change your organization.”

—SREE SREENIVASAN

Chief Digital Officer, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Host,
“@Sree Show” podcast on CBS @Playit network

“Rohit provides a goldmine of ideas and trends that will shape the future of marketing and product development. Read this book to get in front of the herd.”

—GUY KAWASAKI

Chief Evangelist of Canva
Author of *The Art of the Start, 2.0*

“Seeing things that others don’t is perhaps the highest form of creativity that exists. Unlock the Non-Obvious approach and you can write your ticket to success in any field.”

—JOHN JANTSCH

Author of *Duct Tape Marketing* and *Duct Tape Selling*

Rohit Bhargava collects ideas the way frequent fliers collect miles. His infectious enthusiasm for trends and strategy is a recipe for success for your enterprise. In *Non Obvious*, he provides the solution to a problem

business owners, entrepreneurs, heads of marketing, and CEOs have struggled with for years –how do you identify where the market is headed and be there first, ready to take advantage of it. Artfully lacing stories together to pull out simple, yet powerful trends, Rohit offers a blueprint for making trend identification a key component of your business strategy. The format of his book makes it easy for the novice to adopt these principles, and for the expert to glean pearls of wisdom. While the title is *Non Obvious*, your next step should be obvious –read this book today!

—JOEY COLEMAN

Chief Experience Composer at Design Symphony

“Lots of books tell you to “think different” but *Non-Obvious* is one of the few books that actually teaches you how to do it. Whether you are trying to persuade clients, motivate a team, or just impress a demanding boss –*Non-Obvious* can help you succeed. I’ve already purchased copies for my entire team.”

—JOHN GERZEMA

New York Times best-selling author and social strategist

“Very few people understand the world of digital business better than Rohit and I have introduced my clients to his ideas for years. His new book is a must-read resource for learning to see patterns, anticipate global trends, and think like a futurist every day!”

—GERD LEONHARD

Author and Keynote Speaker Basel / Switzerland

“It doesn’t take a crystal ball to predict that digital is the future. Rather than tell you what you already know, Rohit sets his sights on something much more important: helping you adopt a more curious and observant mindset to understand the world around you. If you believe in a lifetime of learning, read this book!”

—JONATHAN BECHER

Chief Marketing Officer, SAP

“In *Non-Obvious* Rohit shares valuable tips, tricks, methodologies and insightful curated trends to help readers navigate the future. Recommended!”

—ROSS DAWSON

Chairman, Future Exploration Network

“*Non-Obvious* is a powerhouse ‘must read’ for corporate executives, marketers and product and service developers. Rohit Bhargava provides valuable, entertaining and easily understood sideways insights into critical trends shaping the near future. He lifts the lid on the myths surrounding the dark arts of trend prediction and offers very practical guidance on how to spot, curate and capitalize on Non Obvious trends.”

—ROHIT TALWAR

Global Futurist and CEO Fast Future Research

“The best books approach their topic with a spirit of generosity. Rohit’s new book offers insight into the business and cultural trends that matter. And why they do. And what actions they might inspire. But more than that, it also generously teaches you how to develop your own process, for evaluating the trends that matter and those that don’t. Also, it’s well-written. Which makes it a joy (and not a chore!) to read!”

—ANN HANDLEY

Chief Content Officer, MarketingProfs

“A lot of books promise to help you see things differently but Rohit’s book actually delivers. His insightful blend of visual thinking and business strategy shows you how to find meaningful patterns that others miss. A real mind-opener.”

—SUNNI BROWN

Author, *Gamestorming* and *The Doodle Revolution*



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*No animals were harmed in the writing, printing or distribution of this book.
The trees, unfortunately, were not so lucky.*

CONTENTS



PART I THE ART OF CURATING TRENDS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 The Norwegian Billionaire: Why Most Trend Predications Are Completely Useless	5
CHAPTER 2 The Curator’s Mindset: Learning the 5 Essential Personalities of Trend Curators	16
CHAPTER 3 The Haystack Method: How to Curate Trends for Fun and Profit	34

PART II THE 2015 NON-OBVIOUS TREND REPORT

CULTURE & CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TRENDS

CHAPTER 4 Everyday Stardom	61
CHAPTER 5 Selfie Confidence	67
CHAPTER 6 Mass Mindfulness.	74

MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

CHAPTER 7 Branded Benevolence	80
CHAPTER 8 Reverse Retail	86
CHAPTER 9 The Reluctant Marketer	92

MEDIA & EDUCATION TRENDS

CHAPTER 10 Glanceable Content	98
CHAPTER 11 Mood Matching	103
CHAPTER 12 Experimedia	109

TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN TRENDS

CHAPTER 13 Unperfection	114
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER 14 Predictive Protection 120

CHAPTER 15 Engineered Addiction 126

ECONOMICS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRENDS

CHAPTER 16 Small Data 131

CHAPTER 17 Disruptive Distribution 137

CHAPTER 18 Microconsumption 143

**PART III
THE TREND ACTION GUIDE**

CHAPTER 19 Intersection Thinking: How to Use
Workshops to Apply Trend Insights to
Your Career, Customer or Brand Story 151

CHAPTER 20 How to Use a Customer Journey
Mapping Trend Workshop 160

CHAPTER 21 How to Use a Brand Storytelling Trend Workshop... 169

CHAPTER 22 How to Use a Business Strategy
Trend Workshop 177

CHAPTER 23 How to Use a Corporate Culture
Trend Workshop 185

CHAPTER 24 The 7 Best Trend Resources You Need
to Bookmark 193

CHAPTER 25 Anti-Trends: The Flip Side of Trends 196

Afterword 199

Acknowledgements 201

Notes, References, and Credits 203

**APPENDICES: THE PAST YEARS' NON-OBVIOUS
TREND REPORTS**

Appendix A – 2011 Trends 220

Appendix B – 2012 Trends 228

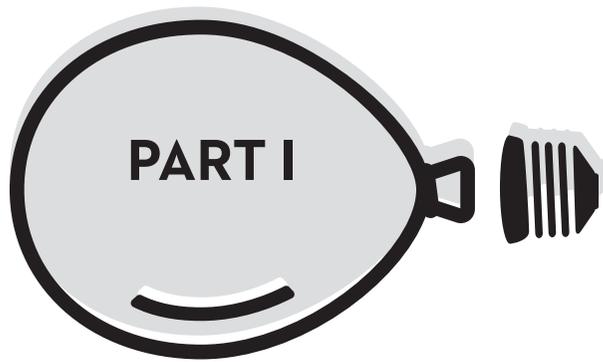
Appendix C – 2013 Trends 236

Appendix D – 2014 Trends 244

Index 249

*The farther backward you can look,
the farther forward you can see.*

—Winston Churchill



THE ART OF TREND CURATION

INTRODUCTION



“I AM NOT A SPEED READER, I AM A SPEED UNDERSTANDER.”

—ISAAC ASIMOV, Author, Historian and Biochemist

Isaac Asimov was not just a science fiction writer.

In his prolific lifetime, he wrote nearly 500 books on topics ranging from his beloved science fiction series to a two-volume work explaining the collected literature of William Shakespeare. He even wrote a reader’s guidebook to the Bible.

Even though he was celebrated for his science fiction work, Asimov never defined himself in one category. When asked which his favorite book was, he often joked, “the last one I’ve written.” He wasn’t a scientist or a theologian or a literary critic. He was simply a writer with an incredible curiosity for ideas.

Unlike other experts, he knew that the power of his thinking came from his ability to bring disparate bodies of knowledge together and add his own insight. In fact, he used to describe himself as a “speed understander,” a skill he clearly relied on to help him maintain a grueling schedule of publishing more than 15 books a year at his peak.

What if each of us could become a “speed understander” like Asimov?

I believe we can.

The simple aim of this book is to teach you how to see the things that others miss. I call that “non-obvious” thinking, and learning how to do it can change your business and your career.

The context within which I'll talk about this type of thinking is business trends. For better or worse, most of us are fascinated by trends and those who predict them. We see these annual predictions as a glimpse into the future and they capture our imagination.

There's only one problem—most of them are based on guesswork or lazy thinking. They are *obvious* instead of *non-obvious*.

This book was inspired by the landslide of obvious ideas we see published today.

In a world where anyone is one button away from being a self-declared expert, learning to think differently is more important than ever. I believe that observing and curating ideas can lead to a unique understanding of why people choose to buy, sell or believe anything.

This book aims to teach you the skills to avoid the obvious and predict trends for yourself.

A great trend is a unique curated observation about the accelerating present.

Great trends are never predictions about the world 20 years from now. Those are most often guesses or wishful thinking. How many trend forecasters do you think predicted the rise of something like Twitter back in 1997? Exactly zero.

Yet this doesn't mean trends are useless. The most powerful trends offer predictions for the *short-term future* based on observing the present. And knowing the short-term future is more valuable than you may think.

Why Does Trend Curation Matter?

Most of our life decisions happen in the short term, though we may describe them differently. You choose to start a business in the short term. You choose whom to marry in the short term. You change careers from one role to the next, all in the short term.

Long-term decisions start in the short term, so understanding how the world is changing in real time is far more valuable immediately than trying to guess what will happen in the world 20 years from now.

When I speak on stage, I often describe myself first as a “trend curator.” The reason I use that term is because it describes my passion for collecting ideas and taking the time to see the patterns in them to describe the world in new and interesting ways.

For the past four years, I have published a curated look at the 15 biggest trends that will shape the business world in the year to come. Each year it is called the *Non-Obvious Trend Report* and each edition is based on a year of research, conversation, thinking and writing.

Across that time, I have advised some of the largest brands in the world on business strategy, taught marketing courses at Georgetown University and spoken at events in 27 countries around the world.

All of this gives me the valuable chance to work in dozens of different industries and study media, culture, marketing, technology, design and economics with an unfiltered eye. Each year, I also read or review dozens of books, and buy magazines on everything from cloud computing to Amish farming methods.

I collect these ideas the way frequent fliers collect miles—as momentary rewards to use for later redemption.

Why I Wrote This Book

Unlike many other trend forecasters, simply sharing my annual report is not enough. If I really believe in the value of curating trends, and that anyone can learn to do it, then it was important for me to share my process for how to do it.

So this book is divided into three simple sections.

Part I is dedicated to my methods of trend curation, which I have previously only shared in depth through private workshops or with my students in class. You will learn the greatest myths of trend prediction, five essential habits of trend curators and my own step-by-step approach to curating trends, which I call the Haystack Method.

Part II is the 2015 edition of the *Non-Obvious Trend Report*, featuring 15 new ideas that will shape business in the year to come. Each trend features supporting stories and research, as well as ideas for how to apply the trend to your own business or career.

Part III is filled with tips on making trends actionable, including step-by-step guides to four different types of workshops I use often. In this part, I also discuss the importance of anti-trends (Chapter 15) and how to use “intersection thinking” to see the patterns between industries and stories.

As a bonus, I have also included an extensive collection of appendices which include summaries from every one of my curated trends from four previous editions of the report (more than 60 total), along with candid, honest “longevity ratings” of how accurate those trends still are in 2015.

You can choose to read this book in the order it was published or you can skip back and forth between trends and techniques. Whether you choose to focus on my predictions for 2015 and how to apply them, or learning the techniques of trend curation and non-obvious thinking for yourself, this book is written to be read in short bursts.

Like Asimov, you don't need to be a speed *reader*.

Being a speed *understander*, however, is a worthy aspiration. It is my hope that this book will help you get there.



THE NORWEGIAN BILLIONAIRE: Why Most Trend Predictions Are Spectacularly Useless



In 1996 Christian Ringnes was a billionaire with the ultimate first-world problem.

One of the richest men in Norway, Ringnes is well known as a flamboyant businessman and art collector whose family started the country's largest brewery more than a hundred years ago. In his hometown of Oslo, Ringnes owns restaurants and museums, and recently donated more than \$70 million for the creation of a large sculpture and cultural park, which opened in 2013.

In his heart, Ringnes is a collector. Over decades he has built one of the largest private collections of art in the world. Yet his real legacy may come from something far more unique: his lifelong obsession with collecting mini liquor bottles.

This fixation on mini liquor bottles began for Ringnes at the age of seven when he received an unusual gift from his father: a half-empty miniature liquor bottle. It was this afterthought of a gift that led him on a path towards amassing what is recognized today as the largest independent mini-bottle collection in the world with over 52,000 miniature liquor bottles.

Unfortunately, his decades-long obsession eventually ran into an insurmountable opponent—his wife, Denise.

As the now legendary story goes, Denise wasn't too happy with the disorganization of having all these bottles around the house. After years of frustration, she offered him an ultimatum: either find something to do with all those bottles or start selling them.

Like any avid collector, Ringnes couldn't bear the thought of selling them, so he created a perfectly obvious solution based on his wealth and personality.

He commissioned a museum.

“To Collect Is Human”

Today the Mini Bottle Gallery in downtown Oslo is one of the world's top quirky museum destinations, routinely featured in irreverent travel guides and global lists of must-see Scandinavian tourist attractions. Beyond providing a place for Ringnes to put all of his mini bottles, the gallery is also a popular event venue with an in-house restaurant.

It was this event space and restaurant that offered me my first personal introduction to Ringnes and his story. I was in Oslo for an event and the conference team had organized a tour and dinner at the Mini Bottle Gallery.

It lived up to its quirky reputation.

The entrance to the museum was a bottle shaped hallway leading into an open lobby with a champagne waterfall. As you moved from room to room, each featured its own composed

I have 52,500 different miniature bottles in a museum in Oslo. They're completely useless. But men, we like collecting. We like having things. That's human. Once you get fascinated by something, you want it and then you start collecting.

—Christian Ringnes
(From interview in Arterritory.com magazine)

soundtrack, customized lighting and unique smells.

Only steps into the tour, it was clear the gallery was more than just stacks of bottles lined along the walls of a display case in random fashion. Like all great museum experiences, the rooms of the Mini Bottle Gallery had been carefully *curated*.

The mini bottles were grouped into intriguing themes ranging from a

brothel themed Room of Sin with mini-bottles from the Dutch Red Light District, to a Horror Room featuring liquor bottles with trapped objects floating inside like mice and worms.

There was a Jungle Room, a Room of Famous Persons, and rooms themed around sports, fruits, birds, circus performers and the occult. And of course, an entire room featured the iconic porcelain series of the Delft Blue KLM houses, a series of tiny Dutch rowhouse-shaped liquor bottles given away to passengers by KLM Airlines for more than five decades.

Across all these rooms, the gallery typically has more than 12,000 bottles on display at any one time. The rest are stored in a bottle vault below the museum and available for display when needed.

Adding Meaning to Noise

If you consider the amount of media any of us is exposed to on an average day, the quest to find meaning amongst the noise is a familiar challenge. Navigating information overload requires a single important skill: curation.

Curation is the ultimate method of transforming noise into meaning.

The Mini Bottle Gallery only displays about 20% of Ringnes' full collection at any time, and carefully keeps the rest in storage. This thoughtful curation makes the experience of seeing them valuable.

Without curation, the meaning would be lost and the experience, meaningless.

An Accidental Trend Curator

It was only on my flight home from Oslo that I realized how important curation had become for my own work.

Just a few months earlier I had published the first edition of my *Non-Obvious Trend Report*, inspired by an idea to publish a blog post from the many ideas I had collected over the past year but never written about.

What I was already doing without realizing it was collecting intriguing ideas and saving them in perhaps the most disorganized way possible—by

writing them down, printing them out or ripping them out of magazines and keeping them in a folder on my desk.

In producing that first report, my ambition became to describe patterns in the stories I had collected that went beyond the typical obvious observations I was always reading online. My goal was to find and develop insights that others either hadn't yet noticed or that were not getting the attention they warranted.

To get a different output, sometimes you need a different input.

On that flight home from Norway, I realized that my accidental method for getting different input—collecting ideas for a year and waiting months before analyzing them—could actually be the very thing that would set my insights apart and make them truly non-obvious.

The *Non-Obvious Trend Report* was born from my desire to curate trends on a timeline and scale that others weren't.

Science's Dirty Little Secret

Now, if you happen to be an analytical person, this explanation will hardly seem rigorous enough to be believable. How can collecting ideas and waiting possibly be a recipe for developing genuine insights? What about proper research? What about trend panels and using a global army of spotters? What about the *science*?

Well, it turns out science isn't always done the way we think it is—and that may be a good thing.

In early 2013, a PhD candidate named Beckie Port gathered and published 75 examples of scientists using the hilariously viral hashtag #overlyhonestmethods to share some brutally honest truths about the realities of scientific research.

Among the compilation of tweets Port shared online were these entertaining sound bites:

- “Samples were prepared by our collaborators at MIT. We assumed no contamination because, well... they're MIT #overlyhonestmethods” (@paulcoxon)

- “Our representative device is representative of the ones which didn’t immediately explode. #overlyhonestmethods” (@ajdecon)
- “Barbados was selected as a case study because the authors had a naive hope that it might justify some fieldwork there. #overlyhonestmethods” (@mlkubik)
- “We used jargon instead of plain English to prove that a decade of grad school and postdoc made us smart. #overly-honestmethods” (@eperlste)

When you think about the discipline that goes into scientific research and the many years of study that lead to a PhD, it is easy to see research as a task only performed by robot-like perfectionists. The truth of scientific research, just like the truth behind many equally complex areas of study, is that the people behind them are far more human than we tend to admit.

Trends, like science, are not always perfectly observed phenomena that fit neatly into a spreadsheet to be described. This doesn’t mean they don’t have immense value.

Great science always involves great observation. Scientists learn to observe the results of their experiments and then work to describe them with hypothesis and proof as best they can. Sometimes they do it and sometimes they don’t.

For all the similarities between trends and science, this is only half the story. Discovering real trends takes a willingness to combine curiosity with observation and add insight to create valuable ideas that you can then test to ensure they work.

This is vastly different from the method we often mistakenly believe is behind most work with trends, “trend spotting.” This phrase is a symbol of some of the many myths we tend to believe about those who predict or describe trends.

Let’s explore the five most common of these myths.

The 5 Myths of Trend Spotting

As a writer and speaker, I spend a lot of time seeking stories. When it comes to trends and predicting the future, the people who do this are often called “trend spotters.”

Despite what you may have heard, there is no such thing as a trend spotter.

Unfortunately, this trend-spotter bias has created an unreliable picture of the type of person who can predict the future. Consider this lazy definition from WiseGeek.com for what it takes to become a trend spotter:

To become a trend spotter, someone usually receives extensive education and training in the industry he or she is interested in working for. After receiving a thorough grounding in the mechanics and history of the industry, the trend spotter could start working in company departments which predicted trends, slowly working to the rank of an official trend spotter.

The assumption that you need to be working in “company departments which predicted trends” is just plain idiotic.

I believe that anyone can learn the right habits to train themselves on becoming better at curating trends and predicting the future for themselves.

The rest of this first part of the book is dedicated to teaching you to how to curate and uncover trends for yourself, but before we start, it is important to tackle some of the biggest myths surrounding trends so you know what to avoid reading (or trusting!) in case you happen to encounter it in the future.

MYTH #1: TRENDS ARE SPOTTED.

The idea of trend spotting suggests that there are trends simply sitting out there in plain sight ready to be observed and cataloged like avian species for bird watchers. The reality of trends is far different. Trend spotters typically find individual examples or stories. Calling the multitude of things they spot the same thing as trends is like calling eggs, flour and sugar sitting on a shelf the same thing as a cake. You can “spot” ingredients, but trends must be curated from these ingredients in order to have meaning.

MYTH #2: TRENDS ARE PREDICTED BY INDUSTRY GURUS/EXPERTS.

It is tempting to see expertise as a prerequisite to being good at curating trends, but there is also a predictable drawback: blind spots. Quite simply, the more you know about a particular topic, the more difficult it becomes to think outside your expertise and broaden your view. There is no single expertise required to curate trends, but those with a greater curiosity about the world beyond any industry will more easily avoid any danger of industry-based tunnel vision.

MYTH #3: TRENDS ARE BASED ON HARD DATA.

When it comes to any type of research, some people rely on numbers inserted into a spreadsheet as proof, and they conveniently forget that there are two methods to gathering research: the quantitative method *and* the qualitative method. Qualitative research involves using observation and experience to gather mainly verbal data instead of results from experiments. If you are uncovering the perfect pH balance for shampoo, you definitely want to use quantitative research. For curating trends, you need a mixture of both and the ability to remember that hard data can often be less important than really good observation.

MYTH #4: TRENDS ONLY REFLECT CURRENT POPULARITY.

The line between trends and fads can be tricky. Although some trends seem to spotlight a currently popular story, good ones need to describe something that happens over a span of time. Fads, in comparison, describe an idea that is popular in the short term. Great trends do reflect a moment in time, but they also need to describe something that is broader than a fleeting moment.

MYTH #5: TRENDS ARE HOPELESSLY BROAD PREDICTIONS.

Perhaps no other myth about trends is as fueled by reality as this one. The fact is, we encounter hopelessly broad trend predictions in the media all the time. The problem comes in treating those as indications that trends *should* be broad and all encompassing. Good trends tend to

be the exact opposite. They define something that is concrete and distinct. Something that doesn't apply to everyone, but rather offers a point of view that you can easily grasp and describe in a unique way.

Now that I have shared five of the most common myths about trend predictions, we need to spend a brief moment talking about a sad but true fact about many trend predictions you might end up reading.

In our one-button world of publishing opinions online, many of trend predictions you might read are little more than self-indulgent guesswork or lazy thinking. At this point, you could be forgiven for wondering why I am so negative on so many other trend predictions out there. Why exactly do I dismiss them as useless?

In order to illustrate, let me tell you a little story.

Why (Most) Trend Predictions Are Useless

A few weeks ago I picked up the final 2014 edition of *Entrepreneur* magazine which promised to illuminate trends to watch in 2015. Earlier that same week, a special double issue of *BusinessWeek* magazine arrived in the mail making a similar promise.

It was December and the trend season was in full swing.

Just like New Year's resolutions to lose weight, trend forecasting is what everyone starts talking about at the end of the year. Unfortunately, the side effect of this annual media ritual is an abundance of lazy predictions and vague declarations.

For entertainment over the years, I have started to collect them as standing memorials to the volume of pitiful predictions each of us have become used to confronting at the end of every year.

To illustrate my point, here are a few of the worst offending most obvious "trends" shared near the end of 2014. For the sake of kindness, I removed reference to which particular publication or writer a trend came from before listing them below:

- "It's all about the content."
- "Integration"
- "The Year Of Mobile has arrived. Really?"
- "Public Relations will continue to be the place to be."

- “Google Plus”
- “3D Printing”
- “Change will be led by wearable technology and augmented reality.”

Integration? Really?

Not to ruin the suspense, but I don’t believe any of these are actually trends. Some are just random buzzwords or the names of platforms. Others are hopelessly broad, useless and, yes, obvious.

None is a unique idea describing the accelerating present.

Meanwhile, all of us as media consumers watch all of it unfold with varying levels of skepticism. Trend predictions have a believability problem, but I think it can be solved. In order to do that, a perfect place to start is by understanding the four reasons why most trend predictions fail so spectacularly.

REASON 1: NO OBJECTIVITY

If you sell hammers, declaring 2015 the “Year of Hammers” is clearly self-serving. Of course, most bias isn’t this easy to spot and objectivity is notoriously difficult for any of us. Our biases are based on our expertise and the world we know. This is particularly true in business where we sometimes *need* to believe in industry or brand in order to succeed. The problem is, losing objectivity usually leads to wishful thinking. Just because we want something to be a trend doesn’t make it one.

EXAMPLE: Near the end of 2014, I received what seemed like dozens of emails about white papers and blog posts each forecasting that wearable technology or the “Internet of things” would be the hottest trend of the coming year. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of them had some type of product or strategy to cash in on this hot trend—and were mostly dismissed by the media they were aiming to reach.

REASON 2: NO CREATIVITY

Trends need to do more than repeat common knowledge. For example, saying that “more people will buy tablets in 2015” is obvious—and useless because it lacks creativity. The biggest reason that most trend predictions share these types of hopelessly obvious ideas is because it is

easier to do so. Lazy thinking is always easier than creative and informed thinking. Great trends are never obvious declarations of fact that most people already know. They share new ideas in insightful ways while also describing the accelerating present.

EXAMPLE: The phrase “digital natives” was first coined nearly 15 years ago to describe a generation who would grow up never having known a world before the Internet. Despite its long history and relative ubiquity, several trend articles I reviewed at the end of 2014 shared the “emergence” of this group as if it were a brand new insight. That’s just plain lazy.

REASON 3: NO PROOF

Sharing a trend without specific examples is like declaring yourself a musician by simply buying a guitar and learning to play one song. Unfortunately, many trend predictions coast on the power of a single story or example. Great examples and stories are powerful parts of illustrating why a trend matters. They are necessary elements of proving a trend. Only finding one (or none) and declaring something a trend without them is usually a sign that a so-called trend is based on little more than guesswork.

EXAMPLE: When publishing website Medium.com first became publicly available and increasing numbers of journalists and writers began using it to freely share extremely high-quality stories and articles, several early trend reports in 2014 predicted the rise of a sort of anti-Twitter trend where people would begin flocking to longer-form content. Unfortunately, one popular website isn’t enough to describe a trend, and most of these forecasts were predictable failures.

REASON 4: NO APPLICATION

Perhaps the most common place where many trend predictions fall short is in the discussion of how to apply them. It is not enough to think about trends in the context of describing them. Aside from that being one of the myths behind finding trends, it also provides little value because it

isn't clear what someone might do differently as a result of understanding a particular trend. The best trend predictions go further than just describing something that is happening. They also share insights on what it means and what you can do to use the trend in your own situation. In other words, their trends are actionable.

EXAMPLE: In a beautiful piece of ironic content, a collaboration of top PR agencies published a sponsored editorial in Advertising Age magazine last year aimed at sharing predictions for the upcoming year to underscore the value of PR for big clients. Unfortunately, most of the top ten predictions featured plentiful buzzword babble, like "Big data is important, but big insights are critical" and was dramatically short on any real insights on how to apply the thinking or what to do about it. Not the PR industry's best work.

How to Think Different about Trends

Now that you've reached the end of this chapter, you are probably wondering what actually makes a great trend when there are so many myths and reasons for failure.

What actually makes a trend, and what makes it non-obvious?

A non-obvious trend is an idea that describes the accelerating present in a new, unique way.

The next two chapters will share a step-by-step approach to help you think differently about trends and escape the trap of lazy thinking and flawed insights. The biggest challenge is learning to abandon the obvious ideas and push yourself to work harder.

When you do, I guarantee that not only will your ideas improve, but your outlook on your business and your career will as well.

So, let's get started.



THE CURATOR'S MINDSET: Learning the 5 Essential Habits of Trend Curators



“YOU NEVER LEARN ANYTHING
BY LISTENING TO YOURSELF SPEAK.”

—SIR RICHARD BRANSON, Entrepreneur and Founder of the Virgin Group

In 2006, renowned Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck wrote a book about an idea so simple it hardly seemed worth mentioning—much less devoting an entire book to exploring.

Across decades of research into motivation, achievement and success, Dweck had come upon a beautifully elegant idea to describe why some people succeeded while others failed: it all came down to *mindsets*.

After conducting experiments with grade school students, interviewing professional athletes and studying business leaders, Dweck proposed that most people had one of two types of mindsets: a fixed mindset or a growth mindset.

People with *fixed mindsets*, argued Dweck, believe that their skills and abilities are set. They see themselves as either being either good at something or not good at something, and therefore tend to focus their efforts on tasks and in careers where they feel they have a natural ability.

People with *growth mindsets* believe that success and achievement are the result of hard work and determination. They see their own (and

others’) true potential as something to be defined through effort. As a result, they thrive on challenges and often have a passion for learning.

It likely won’t surprise you to learn that I believe in the power of the growth mindset and aspire to always maintain one for myself. When it comes to learning to predict the future, though, it is important to adopt that same mindset for yourself.

The beautiful thing about mindsets is that we all have the ability to change ours—we just need to make the choice to do it.

Seeing trends, like playing the guitar or being more observant, are skills within your grasp to learn and practice. Does this mean you can transform yourself into a professional flamenco guitarist or a full-time trend forecaster with enough practice? Not necessarily. Aptitude and natural talent do play an important part in succeeding at anything on a professional level.

Still, my work with hundreds of executives and students at all levels of their careers has proved to me that the skills required for trend curation can be learned and practiced. When you learn them, they can inform your own view of the world and power your own future success.

Beyond adopting the growth mindset and having a willingness to learn, there are five core habits that will help you develop your trend-curation abilities. Let’s explore them by starting with a story of the most famous art collector most people have never heard of—until he passed away.

As soon as children become able to evaluate themselves, some of them become afraid of challenges. They become afraid of not being smart. I have studied thousands of people ... and it’s breathtaking how many reject an opportunity to learn.

—Carol Dweck (from *Mindset*)

The Unlikely Curator

By 2012, at the ripe old age of 89 years, a retired postal worker had quietly amassed one of the greatest collections of modern art in the world.

Herbert Vogel and his wife, Dorothy, were already legends in the world of art when Herbert passed away. News stories the day after his death told the story of five large moving vans showing up at the Vogel's rent-controlled, one-bedroom New York apartment to pick up more than 5000 pieces of art. This Vogel Collection, built over decades, would have a permanent home as part of the archives and collection at the National Gallery of Art.

The Vogels always said the only things they did were buy and collect art they loved.

This passion often led them to find new young artists to support before the rest of the world discovered them. The Vogels ultimately became more than collectors. They were tastemakers and their “fabled collection,” as one critic later described it, which included art from hundreds of artists including pop artist Roy Lichtenstein and post-minimalist Richard Tuttle, was the envy of museums around the world.

The same qualities that drive art patrons like the Vogels to follow their instincts and collect beautiful things are the ones that make great curators of any kind.

The Rise Of “Curationism”

Museum curators organize collections into themes that tell stories. Whether they're quirky like those told in the Mini Bottle Gallery, or an expansive exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the goal of curation is always taking individual items and examples and weaving them together into a narrative.

Curators add meaning to isolated beautiful things.

I am inspired by curators—and I am clearly not alone. The business world has turned toward the longtime practice of curation with such growing frequency that even the world of artists and art critics has begun to notice.

In 2014, art critic and writer David Balzer published a book with the brilliant title *Curationism* (a play on creationism) to explore how “curating

took over the art world and everything else.” His book explores the evolution of the curator as the “imparters of value.”

The one caution he shares in his book is that this rise in curationism can sometimes inspire a “constant cycle of grasping and display” where we never take the time to understand what all the pieces mean. In business or art, curation is only valuable if you follow the act of collecting information with enough moments of “quiet contemplation” to truly understand what you are seeing and collecting.

This combination of collection and contemplation is central to being able to effectively curate ideas and learn to predict the future. To do it, there are five specific habits that I believe can help you find the right amount of time for this sort of thinking in a world that seldom seems to offer you the time for such a luxury.

Let’s explore these five habits further.

The 5 Habits Of Trend Curators

Curators come from all types of backgrounds.

Some focus on art and design while others may look at history or anthropology. Some have professional training and degrees and others are driven by passion like Herbert and Dorothy Vogel. No matter their background, every one of them exhibits the same types of habits that help them to become masters at adding meaning to collected items.

Curation doesn’t require you to be an expert or a researcher or an academic. Learning these five habits will help you put the power of curation to work to help you discover better ideas and use them to develop smarter observations about the rapidly accelerating present.

THE 5 HABITS OF TREND CURATORS

1. **BEING CURIOUS** - always wanting to know why and always seeking to learn more about the world and improve your knowledge by investigating and asking questions.
2. **BEING OBSERVANT** - learning to see the small details in stories and activities that others may ignore or fail to recognize as significant.

3. **BEING FICKLE** - moving from one idea to the next without becoming fixated, developing deep biases or overanalyzing each idea in the moment.
4. **BEING THOUGHTFUL** - taking enough time to develop a meaningful point of view and patiently considering alternative viewpoints before finalizing an idea.
5. **BEING ELEGANT** - seeking beautiful ways to describe ideas that bring together disparate concepts in a simple and understandable way.

For the past five years I have been sharing and teaching these habits through workshops and classes to business professionals, entrepreneurs and university students. I have learned one simple thing from that experience: we all have the aptitude to learn these skills. The challenge always comes from teaching yourself to apply them.

To help, let's take a deeper look at each skill and some actionable ways to learn how to use them.

How to Be Curious

Bjarni Herjulfsson could have been one of the most famous explorers of his time.

Instead, his life has become a cautionary tale about the perils of lacking curiosity. In the year 986, he set off on a voyage from Norway with a crew to find Greenland. Blown off course by a storm, his ship became the first European vessel in recorded history to see North America.

Despite his crew pleading to stop and explore, Herjulfsson refused and guided his ship back on course to eventually find Greenland. Years later, he told this tale to a friend of his named Leif Eriksson who became inspired, purchased Herjulfsson's ship and took the journey for himself.

As many of us learned in grade school, Erikson is now widely remembered as the first European to land in North America—nearly 500 years before Christopher Columbus. Herjulfsson's story illustrates one of the most compelling facts about curiosity (or a lack of it): curiosity is a prerequisite to discovery.

Being more curious means asking questions about why things work the way they do and embracing unfamiliar situations or topics with a sense of wonder.

We as people are naturally curious. The challenge is to continually find ways to allow yourself to explore your curiosity without it feeling like an ongoing distraction.

When noted chef and food pioneer Ferran Adrià was once asked what he likes to have for breakfast, his reply was simple: “I like to eat a different fruit every day of the month.”

Imagine if you were able to do that with ideas.

Part of being curious is wanting to consume different things all the time to earn greater knowledge of the world, even if that knowledge doesn't seem immediately useful. Here are some ways to do it:

REAL LIFE ADVICE (3 WAYS TO BE MORE CURIOUS TODAY)

- ✓ **Consume “Brainful Media”** – Sadly we are surrounded with what I like to call “brainless media,” including reality shows featuring unlikeable people doing unlikeable things (sometimes on islands, sometimes in our backyards). While sometimes entertaining, brainless media also encourages vegetation instead of curiosity. Curiosity is far better developed by consuming “brainful media,” such as a short documentary film or inspirational 17-minute talk from TED.com.
- ✓ **Empathize with Magazines** – Curiosity comes from seeing the world through someone else's eyes, even if it's uncomfortable. I often use niche magazines to learn about unfamiliar things. Simply walking into the magazine section of a bookstore or visiting www.magazines.com offers plenty of options. For example, *The Progressive Farmer*, *Model Railroader* and *House Beautiful* are three vastly different magazines. Flipping through the stories, advertisements and imagery in each will do more to take you outside of your own world than almost any other quick and easy activity.

- ✓ **Ask Bigger Questions** – Several months ago, I was invited to deliver a talk at an event for the paint industry. It is an industry I know very little about and so it would have been easy to show up, deliver my talk and then leave. Instead, I stayed and walked around the exhibit hall asking questions. In less than 30 minutes I learned about how paint is mixed and what additives are typically used. I heard about the industry debate between all-plastic cans versus steel and the rise of computerized color matching systems. The only reason I learned about any of these things was because I chose to stay and ask more questions instead of taking the easy path and leaving early.

WHAT TO READ

- ✓ **Historical Fiction** – Every great piece of historical fiction was inspired by a writer who found a story in history that was worth retelling and sharing with the world. This curiosity makes books like Erik Larsen's *The Devil In The White City* (about murder at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair) or Simon Winchester's *The Professor And the Madman* (about the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*) wonderful tools to get you thinking about the world in new and unexpected ways.
- ✓ **Curated Compilations** – There are many books that bring together real life stories or essays to help you think about new and interesting topics. A collection of shorter topics and stories is sometimes far easier to use for engaging your curiosity than a longer book. For example, the *This Will Make You Smarter* series edited by John Brockman or any book by *You Are Not So Smart* founder and psychology nerd David McRaney are perfect, bite-sized ways to inspire your curiosity without requiring a huge time investment.

How to Be Observant

Last year I was invited to a formal dinner at an event in New York. The venue was a beautiful restaurant and after our meal the waiter came

around to take our dessert orders from one of two set menu options. Less than 10 minutes later, a team of six people *not* including our waiter came and delivered all the desserts to our large table of 30 people, getting each order perfectly right without saying a word to anyone.

As they delivered the desserts, I started to wonder how had that one waiter who took our orders managed to relay all those choices perfectly to a team of six within 10 minutes?

By observing, I quickly figured out the simple trick our head waiter had used. If you had picked dessert option one, he placed a dessert spoon *above* your plate. And if you picked option two, he placed the spoon to the *right* of your plate.

So when that team of food runners came to the table, all they needed was the “code” to decipher the spoon positioning and they would be able to deliver the desserts perfectly. That little story of food delivery is a perfect example of why observation matters.

Being more observant means training yourself to see the details that most others often miss.

Perhaps you already knew that little spoon trick, but imagine you didn't. Simply observing it could teach you something fascinating about the little processes that we rarely pay attention to that keep the world moving along. Now imagine that moment multiplied by a hundred or a thousand.

Learning to be more observant isn't about seeing the big things. Instead, it is about training yourself to pay more attention to the little things.

By simply choosing to observe, what can you see about a situation that no one else notices?

What can that teach you about people, processes and companies that you didn't know before?

This is the power of making observation a habit, so let's explore three ways to help you do it.

REAL LIFE ADVICE (3 WAYS TO BE MORE OBSERVANT TODAY)

- ✓ **Explain the World to Children** – If you are lucky enough to have children in your life, one of the best ways to train

yourself to use observation more frequently is to get better about explaining the world around you to children. When my kids asked me recently why construction vehicles and traffic signs are orange but cars aren't, it forced me to think about things I would otherwise have easily ignored, even if I didn't have the perfect answer to the question.

- ✓ **Watch Processes in Action** – Every situation is filled with processes, from how school buses drop off children at their stops to how coffee shops take and make orders every morning. When you look at these interactions, you'll notice that nothing is by accident. Pay attention and ask yourself what does a typical interaction look like? How does it differ when it involves a “regular” versus a “newbie”? Seeing these patterns in regular everyday life can help you train yourself to use this observational skill in other situations as well.
- ✓ **Don't Be Observationally Lazy** – It is easy to go through the mundane moments of life glued to your smartphone. Aside from being really good at capturing our attention (see Chapter 15 on *Engineered Addiction*), they also keep us from seeing the world around us. Rather than switching to auto-pilot to navigate daily tasks like commuting or buying groceries, train yourself to put your phone down and choose to be observant instead.

WHAT TO READ

- ✓ ***What Every Body Is Saying* by Joe Navarro** – If you need to learn the art of interpreting body language or detecting lies, a former FBI agent like Joe Navarro is probably the ideal teacher. In this best-selling book from 2008, Navarro shares some of his best lessons on how to spot tells in body language and use them to interpret human behavior. His work on situational awareness and teaching people *how* to be more observant to assess people and situations for danger and comfort is a brilliant book that should be on your reading list no

matter what you do. It also happens to be a perfect supporting book to teach you how to be more observant in general.

How to Be Fickle

Being fickle may seem like a bad thing, but that isn't always true.

When we hear the word, we tend to think of all the negative situations where we act in inconstantly or abandon people or ideas too quickly, but there is an upside to learning how to be purposefully fickle.

Being fickle means capturing ideas without needing to fully understand or analyze them in that same moment.

On the surface, this may seem counterintuitive. After all, when you find a great idea why wouldn't you take the time to analyze it and develop a point of view? There are certainly many situations when you will want to do that, and chances are you do it already.

But you probably *never* do the opposite. A part of becoming an idea curator is saving ideas for later digestion. This doesn't always mean you don't think about them when you find them, but you don't always *need* to.

For example, here are three interesting stories which I recently saw and saved:

- Coca-Cola decided to disconnect voicemail for all employees at its corporate headquarters in Atlanta.
- Richard Branson allows Virgin staff to take as much holiday as they want.
- A Trader Joe's employee gave a gift of flowers to a flustered mom of adopted kids who was leaving the store after an embarrassing toddler meltdown because the employee herself had been adopted and she just wanted to say thanks.

When I saved each of the stories above, I didn't make the broader connection to tie them together. Only when I reviewed them at the end of the year while researching trends did I realize that each of these stories says something unique about the state of employee relationships with their employers and empowerment.

There was a theme, but it was only by setting those stories aside and choosing to analyze them later that I had enough perspective to see that connection. Being fickle isn't about avoiding thought—it is about freeing yourself from the time constraints you might feel around collecting ideas by making it easier to save an idea without necessarily analyzing it deeply in the moment.

To help you learn to do the same thing, here are some tips.

REAL LIFE ADVICE (3 WAYS TO BE MORE FICKLE TODAY)

- ✓ **Save Ideas Offline** – Thanks to wonderful productivity apps like Evernote and plenty of browser plugins, there are many ways to save information online, but they can sometimes be lost in collections you never return to and the connections between them are hard to visualize. Instead, I routinely print articles, rip stories out of magazines and save them into a *single* trend folder which sits on my desk. Saving ideas offline allows me to spread them out later to analyze more easily, but it also helps me avoid overanalyzing them in that moment when I find them.
- ✓ **Use a Timer** – If given the chance, most of us will naturally take the time to analyze something that we see or find in a moment. Being fickle is partially about intentionally delaying that process and using a timer can help. The other benefit of literally using a timer when you are consuming some type of new media is that it forces you to evaluate things more quickly and then leave them behind as you move to something else.
- ✓ **Take Notes with Sharpies** – Many of the articles and stories I find throughout the year are marked with just a few words about the theme of the article and story. I use the Sharpie because the thicker lettering stands out and encourages me subtly to write less because it takes up much more space. This same trick can help you to make only the most useful observations in the moment and save any other ones for later.

WHAT TO READ

- ✓ *The Laws Of Simplicity* by John Maeda – Maeda is a master of design and technology and his advice has guided many companies and entrepreneurs toward building more amazing products. In this exactly 100-page book, he shares some essential advice for learning to see the world like a designer and reduce the noise to see and think more clearly. “More appears like less by simply moving it far, far away,” he writes when talking about the power of software as a service or the value of Google. I believe the same principle applies to information and ideas; sometimes you just need distance and time in order to fully appreciate them.

How to Be Thoughtful

In 2014 after 10 years of writing my personal blog, I decided to stop allowing comments. This seemed counter to the fundamental principle of blogging, which is to create a dialogue (as many of my readers emailed to tell me). Was it because I thought I was too important to answer comments, or was there something else at work?

The reason I stopped was simple. I had noticed a steady decline in the quality of comments over the 10 years that I had been blogging. What was once a robust discussion that involved thoughtfully worded responses had devolved into a combination of thumbs-up style comments and spam.

Thanks to anonymous commenting and the ease of sharing knee-jerk responses, comments had become *thoughtless* instead of *thoughtful*—and many people online were starting to notice.

Unfortunately, the Internet is filled with this type of “conversation.”

Being thoughtful means taking the time to reflect on a point of view and share it in a considered way.

Despite this general shift in online commenting, there is one platform that hopes to single-handedly change this landscape. In 2012 LinkedIn

launched a pilot program called *LinkedIn Influencers* to feature insights from top business minds like Tom Peters and Bill Gates, who answered compelling questions like what advice they might offer to their 20-year-old selves.

These posts inspired amazingly detailed and well-thought-out comments from LinkedIn users. Every comment was linked to a professional profile, and the stature of the contributors led to better comments. After all, who would post an ill-informed stupid comment if they thought Bill Gates might actually read it?

Online commenting might seem like a relatively frivolous way to illustrate the value of being thoughtful, but it is just a symbol of how important taking the time to consider an argument has become.

To help you be more thoughtful as you think about curating trends and understanding the media that you save and consume every day, here are some tips:

REAL LIFE ADVICE

(3 WAYS TO BE MORE THOUGHTFUL TODAY)

- ✓ **Wait a Moment** – The beauty and challenge of the Internet is that it occurs in real time. We have an idea, and we can share it immediately. It's easy to think that if you can't be the first person to comment on something, that your thoughts are too late. That is rarely true. Real time should not mean sharing a comment from the top of your head within seconds. Instead, you need to redefine it so your comment is still relevant beyond the particular moment you write it. This means you might choose to take 15 minutes (or longer!) to think about *how* you want to share it.
- ✓ **Write and then Rewrite** – Anyone who has ever had to write consistently will tell you that the ultimate way to get better at writing is to just force yourself to do it even if whatever comes out isn't very usable. When it comes to being thoughtful with writing, even the most talented writers take the time to rewrite instead of simply sharing the first thing that they write down.

- ✓ **Embrace the Pauses** – One of the things speakers try to learn as soon as they spend any time standing in front of an audience is how to become comfortable with silence. It's not an easy thing to do. Yet when you can use pauses effectively, you can emphasize the things you really want people to hear or remember. This same principle works whether you are on stage or just engaged in a conversation. The trick is to use those pauses as times to find the right words so you *can* be more thoughtful when you eventually do share your point of view.

WHAT TO READ

- ✓ ***Brain Pickings* by Maria Popova** - Popova describes herself as an “interestingness hunter-gatherer” and she writes *Brain Pickings*, one of the most popular independently run blogs in the world. On the site she publishes articles combining lessons from literature, art and history on wide ranging topics like creative leadership and the gift of friendship. Every year she pores thousands of hours into publishing thoughtful pieces and her readers reward her by donating to support the continued ad-free operation of the site. The way she presents her thoughts is a perfect intellectual example of how to publish something thoughtful week after week.

How to Be Elegant

Jeff Karp is a scientist inspired by elegance ... and jellyfish.

As an associate professor at Harvard Medical School, Karp's research focuses on using bio-inspiration—inspiration from nature—to develop new solutions for all types of medical challenges. His self-named Karp Lab has developed innovations such as a device inspired by jellyfish tentacles to capture circulating tumor cells in cancer patients, and better surgical staples inspired by porcupine quills.

Nature is filled with elegant solutions, from the way that forest fires spread the seeds of certain plants to the way termites build porous structures with natural heating and cooling built in.

Ian Glynn, author of the book *Elegance In Science*, argues that elegant proofs or theories have most or all of the following features: they are simple, ingenious, concise and persuasive; they often have an unexpected quality, and they are very satisfying.

I believe it is this idea of simplicity that is fundamental to developing elegant ideas. As Einstein famously said, “make things as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Being elegant means developing your ability to describe a concept in a beautiful and simple way for easy understanding.

A good example of things described beautifully is in what great poets do. If you are out of school, chances are you don't spend much time with poetry. Great poetry has simplicity, and emotion, and beauty *because* words are taken away. Poets are masters of elegance, obsessive over language, and always understand that sometimes less can mean more.

You don't need to become a poet overnight, but some of these principles can help you get better at creating more elegant descriptions of your ideas.

For example, think back to the last time you encountered something that was poetically written. It may have been something you once read in school, or perhaps a Dr. Seuss book that you read to a child at bedtime.

Dr. Seuss in particular had a beautiful talent for sharing big ideas with a simplicity and elegance:

- “Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is youer than you.”
- “A person's a person, no matter how small.”
- “Everything stinks till it's finished.”

We love to read or see elegant solutions and we delight in their ability to help us get the big picture with ease, but they may not seem quite so simple to develop or write. If you have ever sat down with paper or in front of a computer screen and tried to tell a simple story you know that it can be harder than it seems.

But we all have the power to simplify our ideas and share them in more elegant ways. We just need a better way to do it. Here are a few ideas to help.

REAL LIFE ADVICE

(3 WAYS TO THINK MORE ELEGANTLY TODAY)

- ✓ **Start with the Obvious** – One of my favorite trends from my *2012 Non-Obvious Trend Report* was something I called “ChangeSourcing” to describe the idea that more and more people were turning to crowdfunding campaigns to inspire more movements for social change. At the time, crowdfunding was one of the hottest topics in the media. The idea of ChangeSourcing took something that people already knew in an unexpected new direction and used a simple and elegant title to do it. As a result, it was one of the most talked-about trends from the report that year.
- ✓ **Keep It Short** – One thing you will notice if you look back on any of my previous trend reports is that no trend is more than two words. Elegance often goes hand in hand with simplicity and this usually translates into using as few words as possible. When it comes to defining and curating trends, it is perfectly fine to start by describing the trend with as many words as you need. When you get to the point of trying to add more elegance to your description, though, a necessary component will usually be reducing the words you use to name *and* describe it.
- ✓ **Use Poetic Principles** – There are some basic principles that poets use when writing that can also be helpful for anyone who is curating trends. One of them is to try and use metaphors and imagery instead of obvious ways of sharing something. Another is to rhyme words or use alliteration to add symmetry to an idea. If you flip to the second part of this book, you will see many places where I used these types of principles to develop trends like “Branded Benevolence” or “Unperfection”—which may be my favorite trend name from

this year's report because of its slight twist from "imperfection" makes it meaningful yet still unique.

WHAT TO READ

- ✓ ***Einstein's Dreams* by Alan Lightman** – Lightman was the first professor at MIT to receive a joint appointment in the sciences and the humanities and is a trained physicist and a poet. His book *Einstein's Dreams* has been one of my favorites for years because of how it imagines what Einstein's dreams must have been like and explores them in a beautiful way through short chapters with interesting assumptions about time and space. This is not a book of poetry, but it will not only introduce you to the power of poetic writing but also lead you toward the most elegant description of how time might actually work that you'll ever read.

Why *These 5 Habits*?

Looking back, the fact that I only chose 5 habits to help you learn the art of curating ideas may seem a bit random. What makes these five habits stand out? The fact is, the process of how I came to these five in particular was an interesting exercise of curation in itself.

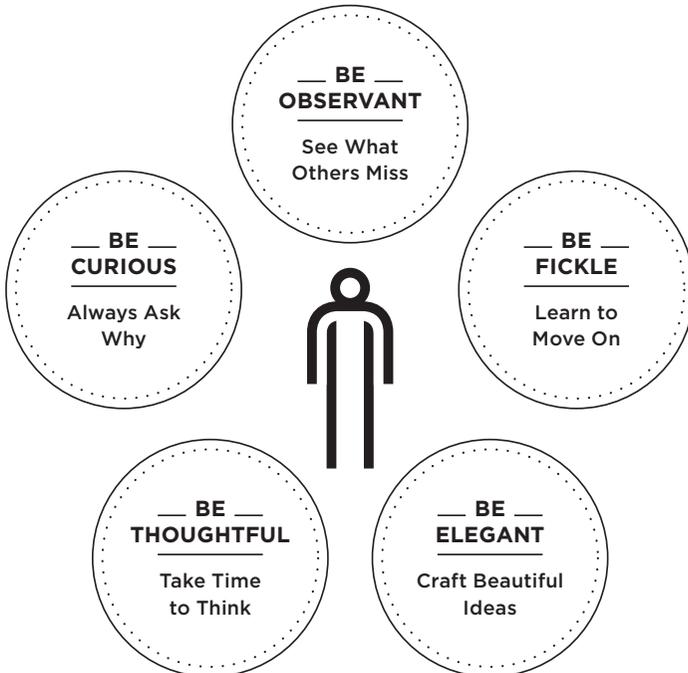
Over the past year, I read interviews with professional art curators and how they learned their craft. I bought more than a dozen books written by trend forecasters, futurists and innovators. I carefully studied my own behavior, and (as I mentioned earlier in the chapter) I tested the effectiveness of these habits by teaching them to my students in classes and business professionals in workshops.

Ultimately, I selected the five habits presented in this chapter because they were the most helpful, descriptive, easy to learn and effective once you learn to put them into action.

So as a final recap before we get started with a step-by-step approach to curating trends, let's do a quick review of the five habits here:

1. **Being *curious*** means asking questions about why things work the way they do, and embracing unfamiliar situations or topics with a sense of wonder.
2. **Being *observant*** means training yourself to see the details that most others often miss.
3. **Being *fickle*** means capturing ideas without feeling the need to fully understand or analyze them in that moment.
4. **Being *thoughtful*** means taking the time to reflect on a point of view and share it in a considered way.
5. **Being *elegant*** means developing your ability to describe a concept in a beautiful and simple way for easy understanding.

5 HABITS OF TREND CURATORS





THE 2015 NON-OBVIOUS TREND REPORT

2015 NON-OBVIOUS TRENDS OVERVIEW – SUMMARY

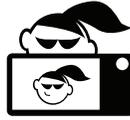
WHAT IS A TREND?

A trend is a unique curated observation about the accelerating present

CULTURE & CONSUMER BEHAVIOR - Trends in how we see ourselves and patterns in popular culture



Everyday Stardom



Selfie Confidence



Mainstream Mindfulness

MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA - Trends in how brands are trying to influence and engage consumers



Branded Benevolence



Reverse Retail



The Reluctant Marketer

MEDIA & EDUCATION - Trends in content and information impacting how we learn or are entertained



Glanceable Content



Mood Matching



Experimedia

TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN - Trends in technology innovation and product design impacting our behavior



Unperfection

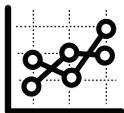


Predictive Protection

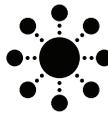


Engineered Addiction

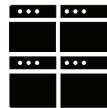
ECONOMICS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP - Trends in business models, startups and careers affecting the future of work or money



Small Data



Disruptive Distribution



Microconsumption

Chapter 4



EVERYDAY STARDOM



What's the Trend?

The growth of personalization leads more consumers to expect everyday interactions to be transformed into celebrity experiences with them as the stars of the show.

On the morning of November 15, 2013, most of San Francisco woke up with no idea that their city was about to be saved by a superhero.

The fact that this particular superhero happened to be less than four feet tall and was only five years old were details most of the city would only learn after his heroics would go viral for millions of people to watch unfold online in real time.

Months earlier as a kid being treated for leukemia, Miles Scott told the Bay Area chapter of the Make-A-Wish Foundation the one thing he wanted—to be Batkid.

To make it happen, a team from the nonprofit started preparation on a plan to get about 200–300 people to show up at City Hall to support a staged event where Miles could wear a costume as Batkid and defeat an actor dressed as one of Batman's longtime enemies.

It quickly became clear that they had far more interest than they expected.

A longtime video game designer signed on to help design the experience. A social media agency volunteered to help promote the event. And countless people started following the plan on Twitter and vowing to show up in person.

When November 15 finally came, an estimated crowd of 20,000 people showed up at City Hall to cheer on Batkid.

As watchers shared the day on social media with the hashtag #SFBatkid, a worldwide audience started paying attention. All told, the event generated more than half a million tweets, real time conversations in 117 countries and more than 16,000 photos shared on Instagram.

The day even prompted San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee to declare November 15 as Batkid Day and inspired a feature-length documentary about Miles' story called *Batkid Begins* which was released in January 2015.

Most importantly the day transformed a little boy's life and offered a moment that, as one spectator put it "restored your faith in humanity."

In a time when these types of promises are used as click bait in overly sensationalized media headlines, Batkid day stood out for being, as the documentary film promos put it, "the day the Internet was nice."

It turns out at around the same time Miles was having the best day of his young life, one of the largest entertainment companies in the world was rolling out a technology system designed to create a magical experience to give millions of kids (and the adults that came with them) the feeling of being superstars just like Miles every day.

Disney's Master Plan

The ambitious MagicBand and MyMagic+ initiative from Disney to transform the experience at their flagship theme resort in Orlando, Florida, was estimated to cost over a billion dollars. Affecting everything from how visitors book rides in advance to how resort rooms were accessed, the effort is one of the most ambitious to integrate wearable technology in the travel and hospitality sector.

A MagicBand is a waterproof wristband that can act as a room key, theme park ticket, mobile payment device and more. It also lets Disney

collect a vast amount of data as visitors move around the parks, which helps the company manage crowds. Depending on how guests choose to set up their Disney accounts, the MagicBand also allows characters to recognize and address them by name (if they choose), and for Disney to create photo packages where families can build memories through automated albums of the many pictures taken of them throughout Walt Disney World.

Clearly Disney wants to offer a personalized experience to every guest, and they are not alone. This ambition to completely personalize a customer experience is one that many other brands—from established fashion labels like Burberry to startup custom bike seller Villy Bikes—are trying to integrate into their experiences.

The goal they all are working towards is at the heart of this trend of *Everyday Stardom*—to allow customers to feel like superstars with every branded interaction.

Bollywood Brides

While the idea of stardom may seem like a stretch at a theme park or when ordering a customized bike, it's far more understandable on the one day when most people might *expect* to feel like stars: their wedding day.

In India, weddings have taken such a central role in the culture that many of the best loved films from the country's vast film industry, known as Bollywood, feature weddings in almost every story.

The Bollywood industry collectively releases more than 1000 films every year (about double the output of Hollywood) and a favorite scene in many of them is the over-the-top musical wedding featuring colorful outfits, flash mob-style dances and melodramatic courting rituals filmed in scenic locales ranging from Swiss mountaintops to Brazilian beaches.

The prominence of this fantasized wedding tradition has recently led to a surge in the “matrimonial matinee,” as the *Times of India* called it, where soon-to-be married couples hire a film crew to help them recreate these scenes from films as part of their wedding videos to share with guests.

Of course, part of the appeal of having a beautifully filmed and choreographed wedding video (whether it features a Bollywood dance theme or not!) is the chance to share it with friends and family. Aside from our human desire to be the star of the show, a big motivation for wanting to create these types of stardom experiences is the chance to share it through social media with the people we care about.

Weddings don't happen every day, and for most of us they (hopefully!) only happen once. On your wedding day, you *expect* to be the star of the show. Now, you might come to expect it when you pay for a scripted experience like going to Florida to experience the attractions and magic of Disney.

What about every other day?

Me: The Museum Experience

In 2011 Intel launched one of the year's most successful social media campaigns, focused on a simple idea: to allow people to create and share a museum of their own lives. Luckily, the ideal foundation to build this already existed—on Facebook.

Attending events, sharing photos, posting interesting quotes or observations about daily life are all the types of content most people were already posting to Facebook. The concept of the Museum of Me was to create a tool you could apply to your Facebook profile to search your past posts and photos and arrange them into an interactive experience.

You could literally watch your life unfold over the time that you had been active on Facebook and share that story with your friends and family.

If you think about it, the concept of taking social data and using it to create a celebrity-like experience is one that we see almost every day on social media. Instagram users recreate celebrity poses in their own attempts to take memorable selfies. Twitter users share pithy observations to entice retweets, or simply find stars to follow and share their thoughts directly.

Social media and the rise of the personal brand enables consumers to put themselves at the center of their own life narratives, creating personalized moments and memories as a result.

Why It Matters

The beautiful human story of fulfilling a sick five-year-old boy's wish, the efforts of Disney to personalize your visit to their theme parks, Bollywood wedding videos and the rise of personal branding through social media all share a single underlying theme: the human desire for recognition.

Everyone wants to be noticed, recognized and celebrated.

Dale Carnegie once wrote “a person's name is to that person the sweetest most important sound in any language.” His point, made through years of observation, was that people are hardwired to seek out moments of recognition where they feel singled out, understood and appreciated.

In a world where individualism is rising, the human desire for recognition can become paramount. When people want to feel like stars every day and have the tools and platforms to expect it—the leaders who connect and the brands that inspire loyalty will be the ones who offer personalized treatment, celebrate their consumers, and manage to treat them like the stars they long to be.

Who Should Use This Trend?

The most powerful element of this trend is how it crosses between leadership and business. Retailers and those who offer a physical experience will find this trend particularly valuable, however anyone in a leadership position should also consider the implications when it comes to leading a team and inspiring them to believe in a mission. This trend is equally applicable whether you happen to be trying to integrate more personalization to improve a customer experience, or trying to inspire more loyalty from a group of people you are trying to lead or influence.

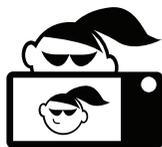
How to Use This Trend

- ✓ **Ask personal questions** – Most of us have been taught that it is impolite to ask questions that are too personal. The

problem with censoring ourselves against getting personal is that you may lack the information you need in order to really treat someone else like a star. Disney's MagicBand asks for an extraordinary amount of personal data, but they reflect it back to their customers in an obvious way that makes it useful. When you ask customers to share more, it can lead you to a valuable insight to help personalize an experience in a way they may remember for a lifetime.

- ✓ **Use data you already have** – One of the biggest ironies of many organizations is the store of data that has been collected but never used. Do you have your customers' physical addresses? If so, do you ever send them something proactively that isn't a marketing offer? The point is not to collect data simply to fill a hole in a spreadsheet. If you ask for a piece of information, be sure you're going to use it—or don't ask in the first place.
- ✓ **Focus on memories people can share** – One of the most frequently shared pieces of advice in business today is about creating experiences instead of selling products. It is good advice, most of the time. To effectively use the trend of *Everyday Stardom*, though, may require more effort not only on creating a memorable experience, but also on helping people to actually remember it by helping them share it as it happens.

Chapter 5



SELFIE CONFIDENCE



What's the Trend?

The growing ability to share a carefully created online persona allows more people to use social content such as selfies as a way to build their own self confidence.

What would you do if your most embarrassing picture went viral?

Caitlin Seida unfortunately found out, when her most embarrassing photo, of her at a Halloween party dressed as Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*, went viral.

For weeks before she saw it, the photo had been making the rounds online—and commenters had been posting snarky comments about her choice to wear the costume despite being overweight. The cruel caption “Fridge Raider” had inspired hundreds of anonymously mean comments in response.

When she first found it, she was devastated.

It was the perfect example not only of the culture of nastiness that Internet commenting has become known for, but also of a technology-induced problem that has been accelerating so fast we have had to create a name for it: cyberbullying.

According to recent statistics from the i-SAFE Foundation, *more than half* of all adolescents and teens have been bullied online and about the same number have engaged in cyberbullying themselves. In response,

there are a growing number of educational programs designed to help adolescents and teens deal with cyberbullying and even how to fight back.

When it comes to that fight, Seida's story has a positive outcome. Not wanting to hide from the past, and realizing that removing the image from the web was next to impossible, Caitlin Seida did that only thing she could think of; she embraced the embarrassment and told her side of the story.

On October 2, 2013, she wrote an article on Salon.com sharing her embarrassment at discovering the photo and also the fact that she had been having fun that evening and didn't regret dressing up as her favorite video game character.

She told her personal story of her medical struggles with polycystic ovarian syndrome and a failing thyroid gland, both of which caused her weight to spike. And she shared her story of confronting many of these commenters with a short message:

You're being an asshole. Why don't you just do the right thing and delete the post and stop sharing it?

It takes self-confidence to stand up and confront a bully.

Thanks to the world of low privacy filters and an online culture of meanness and sarcasm—the ability to find new ways of discovering your own self confidence has become a daily necessity. The problem is, not everyone can find the type of courage Caitlin Seida did and channel it toward building (or rebuilding) their own confidence.

After the whole embarrassment faded, Seida did her own photo shoot with a retro pinup photographer and described the experience with these words: “that particular shoot felt great. Just to be seen a little bit more as I wanted to be.”

That same sentiment underlies the rapid growth of the world's most unlikely tool for building self-confidence: selfies.

The Upside of Selfies

A “selfie” (as you have likely seen in the media many times) is essentially a photograph someone takes of him- or herself, usually with a mobile phone camera.

Earlier this year, while profiling a laughably popular product called the “selfie stick” (designed to allow you to extend a phone camera away from you to better compose your selfie), *Time* magazine noted that “if 2013 was the year in which *selfie* became a buzzword, then 2014 was the year selfies became a cultural phenomenon.”

While that may be true, selfies certainly don’t enjoy the greatest reputation as a *positive* cultural phenomenon.

Many people rate it the exact opposite, citing low attention spans, a rise in narcissistic behavior, and a temptation to use all those duck face poses and auto-filtered images to portray an unrealistic self-portrait.

In many ways, this usage of the selfie share a controlled version of ourselves is in response to the way the Internet has become a haven for the snap judgment “hot or not” types of rating and comments that can be so damaging to anyone’s self-esteem.

Microsoft Principal Researcher danah boyd is well known for her aversion to the “self-righteousness” of capital letters (thus the use of lowercase to present her name throughout this chapter), and her years of work into understanding how young people use social media as a part of their everyday practices.

In her latest book *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (2014), she explores what the book terms as an online “culture of meanness and cruelty.”

In her research, she explains this meanness as a natural outcome of the social world that teens must navigate, where attention has become a commodity. The ease of online commenting along with a media culture frequently critical of celebrities and personalities can even make this type of meanness seem normal.

In a world filled with anonymous meanness the real question is how teens (and many adults) can build enough self-confidence to be happy.

A selfie may be a greater part of the answer to that challenge than most of us realize.

Do Selfies Promote Selfishness?

The selfie has become the ultimate way to control how people see you online. Selfies can be posed, taken multiple times until they are perfect,

and even filtered and corrected by retouching apps inspired by fashion magazine tactics to manufacture the ideal of beauty through their covers.

Just a few years ago, these artificially manipulated images of impossibly skinny models were generating a huge social backlash. Companies like Dove built viral campaigns designed to expose the reality of beauty and challenge each of us to question what it really means to *be* beautiful. In the process, “Photoshopped” became a dirty word as it began to describe the lie many consumers felt they were being sold by the fashion industry.

Now we can sell those same lies to one another and it doesn’t seem quite so serious.

Instagram can instantly filter a sky to make that picture of a storm from your hotel window seem like an impending monsoon instead of a gentle afternoon shower.

An interesting question this led me to was whether this culture of online shallowness might also be part of the solution? Part of my answer came from what some might describe as the shallowest app ever created.

Facetune Yourself

The well-named Facetune app lets you take any image and immediately fix everything from whitening teeth to widening smiles and transforming cheekbones.

The site supporting the app features an entire tutorial on how to remove eye bags, acne and any other unsightly elements from your face before posting a photo to social media. The site has inspired plenty of other apps offering similar functionality as well.

The app offers understandable ammunition for those who joke that people who share too many selfies may be becoming “#selfieabsorbed.” Selfies can easily seem like yet another example of the “me first” culture, focused on self promotion and little else.

Yet all of this attention on creating and sharing the perfectly sculpted selfies is having an unexpected side effect.

Selfies are becoming instrumental in raising self-confidence in those who need it most.

Chapter 9



THE RELUCTANT MARKETER



What's the Trend?

As marketing becomes broader than just promotion, leaders and organizations abandon traditional silos, embrace content marketing and invest in the customer experience.

The death of marketing is greatly exaggerated on a regular basis.

On the list of the many shifts that have been projected to kill it in recent years are social media, consumer empowerment, ad-skipping technology and the list goes on. Yet for every doomsday prediction about its demise, marketing always survives.

It doesn't, however, have the luxury of surviving unchanged.

Near the end of 2013, the annual meeting of the Association of National Advertisers brought together top marketing executives from all types of brands. At the event, ConAgra Foods chief marketing officer (CMO) Joan Chow publicly wondered "if in five to 10 years whether we should be called chief marketing offices anymore. Consumers don't like to be marketed to. We should be thinking of ourselves as chief value officers."

Other executives shared a similar vision of the changing role of marketing as well. Beth Comstock, CMO at GE suggested that her job was much more similar to a chief growth officer and Walmart CMO Stephen Quinn offered the view that CMOs really need to be chief innovation officers.

Why were all these CMOs actively looking to leave their titles behind? A big reason is the broadening role of marketing itself.

Rather than being responsible for only the messaging and promotion of products and services, marketing is increasingly crossing the line into informing product development and research. Customer care and service is blending with marketing through social media engagement. Even the role of IT is shifting, as leading Gartner analyst Laura McLellan recently predicted that by 2017 CMOs will spend more on technology than CIOs.

On the surface, this may seem to create an inevitable contradiction. If the role of marketing is increasing, and marketing spending is growing, why are so many CMOs trying to rethink their titles instead of embracing the role of being the chief marketer?

The answer lies at the heart of the *Reluctant Marketer* trend, and it has everything to do with what we consider to be great marketing today.

Marketing is about getting consumers to learn about and fall in love with what you do. Increasingly it is being done through stories, word of mouth, conversations and the customer experience itself. As a result, promotion is less dependent on outbound communication and more on rapid word of mouth through connected consumers ready to share their brand experiences instantly.

In a world where experience is the marketing—what you say matters less than what you do and how you do it.

The First Brand to Kill Marketing

On July 1, the world's biggest advertiser officially killed marketing.

As part of a big reorganization at Proctor & Gamble (P&G), the marketing organization was officially renamed “brand management” and hundreds of marketing directors shifted titles to become brand directors instead. The change was deliberate, meant to describe the broader vision brand directors are meant to have over managing an entire customer experience instead of just promoting a product.

At P&G now, brand management breaks down into four categories:

Marketing is the future. All of us, as customers and consumers, are more empowered than ever before, so companies must embrace marketing.

—Rishad Tobaccowala,
Chief Strategist at Publicis Groupe

brand management (formerly called marketing), consumer and marketing knowledge (covering research and insights), communications (mainly external and internal relations) and design.

The last big shift at P&G in the marketing world was back in the 90s when the brand killed the restrictive “advertising manager” title in favor of a broader market-

ing title. The fact that they are doing it again now puts the brand on the front lines of a broader industry shift toward redefining the role of marketing itself.

If the past of marketing was about spending money in order to try and build value and (sometimes) sell a product or service, the future is about nurturing an entire experience that connects with consumers so deeply they can't help but talk about it.

Luckily, this shift has found a perfect voice in what is currently one of the hottest growth areas in business itself: content marketing.

The Ultimate Reluctant Marketing Tool

Content marketing is based on the principle that if brands can make their marketing more useful and focused on solving problems or answering questions, then consumers will embrace it rather than block it.

Content marketing is the ultimate tactic for reluctant marketers.

Over-the-top “buy one get one free” promotional offers are replaced by “how to” style content helping someone learn to do something better. Insightful experts previously working behind the scenes at organizations can now take center stage as employee spokespeople adding value and answering questions.

All these shifts are leading to marketing that is more human, believable and trusted.

To meet this growing demand for high-quality content, simply shifting the focus of marketing teams isn't enough—the team itself needs to change. In 2015 brands will continue the shift that has already started

happening, and they will increasingly hire former editors and journalists to produce high-quality media.

Dawn of Brand Journalism

This influx of brand journalists also contributes to the trend of reluctant marketers. As more professionals trained in the balanced and objective ethics of journalism enter into communications roles, there are two predictable effects.

The first, which gets plenty of attention, is that those professionals may be enticed to compromise some of the principles they learned and embraced in journalism school. Indeed this fear has led to many hand-wringing articles by traditional journalists speaking out against colleagues who choose to work with brands. The second effect of this shift is equally significant but gets far less attention.

When you bring more talented, ethical, well-trained content creators into the world of marketing, they will be able to produce better, less-biased content.

Journalists always aim to tell a great story, but they are also reluctant marketers by their very nature. The *story* is far more important than inserting a branded message artificially or making sure the logo appears in just the right place.

Great content can make marketing more meaningful.

Why It Matters

As the definition and practice of marketing broadens beyond promotion, marketers are increasingly encouraged to think bigger than traditional marketing efforts to bring value to their organizations. For example, today's CMO and marketing leader is increasingly managing the customer experience, simplifying and explaining the brand promise, generating growth and sales, investing in technology, inspiring innovation and attracting top talent.

The marketer of the future is not constrained by marketing, and

increasingly takes on that marketing-centric title with reluctance. Instead, these well-rounded leaders are imagining more open, less promotional and more useful brand experiences that cross over from marketing into business operations and ultimately reinvent how customers experience products and services on every level.

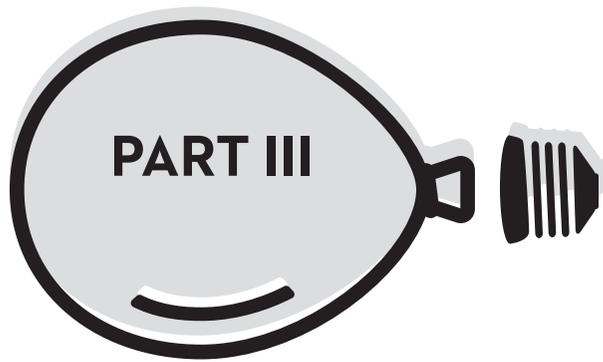
Who Should Use This Trend?

This trend most readily affects anyone who is currently working in a marketing position or navigating their path as CMO of an organization. The world of marketing has always changed rapidly, but 2015 will be a defining year for the CMO within an organization and a moment in time for leaders to carve their own path for how they will evolve the role of CMO to suit their own skills and the companies they work in. A secondary audience for this trend is anyone who creates various forms of media and may never have considered the role in the context of marketing, but who may now increasingly be working with organizations to put their skills to work building compelling stories on behalf of companies.

How to Use This Trend

- ✓ **Focus on experiences instead of promotion** – For anyone who has been trained in marketing, other customer experience elements like delivery to service to sales may seem as though they belong outside of marketing. That is increasingly no longer true. Are you building content to help your customers use your products *after* they have already purchased them? The key is using these moments to focus on improving experiences which generate more positive marketing and word of mouth, instead of just trying to upsell more stuff. ✓
- ✓ **Support broader team integration** – Many reluctant marketers will have a background in other disciplines, from operations to finance to documentary storytelling. These

outside skill sets can add big value, so a key priority of marketing leaders is to create a workplace where these sorts of intersections and integrations become commonplace and allow an entire team to escape the traditional confines of their own roles and broaden their collective vision.



THE TREND ACTION GUIDE



INTERSECTION THINKING: How to Apply Trends to Your Business



“DISCOVERY CONSISTS OF SEEING WHAT EVERYBODY HAS
SEEN AND THINKING WHAT NOBODY HAS THOUGHT”

—ALBERT SZENT-GYÖRGYI, Nobel Prize-winning physician

In 2009 Tom Maas, a former marketing executive for distiller Jim Beam, finally created his perfect drink. For years he had been working on developing and promoting a new cream liquor based on the popular traditional milky cinnamon and almond drink from Latin America known as *horchata*.

This new drink, RumChata (a mashup of its primary liquor and the drink that inspired its flavors), was a mixture of light rum, dairy cream and spices like cinnamon and vanilla.

RumChata was not an instant hit.

The drink took some inventive selling, but when bartenders started comparing its taste to the milk at the bottom of a bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal, it started to take off.

Bartenders started using the liquor to create more inspired blends, which quickly led to more liquor distributors and retailers carrying the brand. Meanwhile the brand ran inventive promotions like “cereal shooter bowls” designed for bars to serve RumChata based drinks and to further build the brand.

All the creativity finally started working.

A recent *BusinessWeek* article noted that the drink has taken one-fifth of the market share in the \$1 billion U.S. market for cream-based liquors, and even started outselling Diageo's Baileys Irish Cream (the longstanding leader) in certain regions.

More importantly, experts described the drink as a game changer, due to its popularity as a mixer and its popularity as an ingredient for food and baking recipes.

How to Create a Game-Changing Product

RumChata is a perfect example of the type of result that can ultimately come from putting the power of observation together with an understanding for the intersection of consumer behavior and the open space in a market.

While Maas may not have used this same trend curation approach in order to come up with his product idea, we can still reverse engineer its success in order to find some lessons in the example.

When you do that, it becomes easy to spot a few of the big trends over the past several years that clearly support the concept of RumChata and perhaps explain some of its success:

- A growing consumer desire for authentic products with interesting backstories
- The rising prevalence of food entertainment programming on television inspiring more creativity in home cooking
- The increased interest across the United States in Hispanic culture and heritage

In retrospect, these observations clearly seem to support the arrival of a product like RumChata. Of course, putting the dots together looking backwards is easy.

The real question is: how can you do it predictably in a way that can help you to create your own success in the near future?

An Introduction to Intersection Thinking

Trends are typically big ideas describing the accelerating world around us. Unfortunately, the value of big ideas are not always easily understood when it comes to applying them to real life situations.

Trend forecaster Chris Sanderson from *The Future Laboratory* describes trends as “profits waiting to happen.” As tempting as that sounds, realizing those profits takes more than skill at uncovering, curating and describing a trend.

Trends only have value if you can learn to apply them.

Is a trend telling you to abandon an existing product line? Or to pivot the focus of your business? Or to stay the course in a direction that hasn't yet paid off? These are the sorts of big questions that each of us is likely to contend with in our own business and career, and they are not easy to answer.

The good news is that we can usually find the answers if we apply the right model of thinking. The rest of this section is dedicated to giving you the tools, processes and knowledge to be able to apply trends in your own business and career.

Over the past several years of helping organizations and students learn to apply trends, my approach always starts with the single simple concept of intersection.

Intersection thinking is a method for creating overlap between seemingly disconnected ideas in order to generate new ideas, directions and strategies for powering your own success.

Most of the time, I have used a workshop model to help teams and brands apply intersection thinking to their own challenges in order to create new approaches based on trends in the marketplace. The chapters following this one offer a step-by-step approach to take you through four of the most popular workshop models I typically use. Before engaging in these workshops, it is useful to share three basic principles behind applying intersection thinking in real life.

PRINCIPLE #1: SEE THE SIMILARITIES INSTEAD OF THE DIFFERENCES.

Paolo Nagari is an intercultural intelligence expert who teaches executives the skills they need to succeed while living overseas. Unlike many

other experts, however, his model doesn't rely on teaching the "dos and don'ts" of a particular culture. Succeeding in a culture other than your own takes more than book knowledge.

Nagari's first rule for executives is all about learning to focus on the many similarities in cultures instead of the differences. It is a valuable lesson when considering how to apply unfamiliar trends as well.

Though the stories or industry behind a certain trend may seem disconnected from your own, there are always more similarities than you think. When former Coca-Cola executive Jeff Dunn became president of Bolthouse Farms in 2008, for example, he walked into a billion-dollar agricultural company that had literally reinvented the carrot industry by creating "baby carrots."

By the time Dunn took over, sales of carrots (and baby carrots) were experiencing a slump and he needed a solution, so he turned to advertising agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky (CP+B).

It wasn't the usual challenge for the agency, but they offered a unique idea for a solution based on a single insight: people love snacking on junk food and hate being told to eat healthier.

As CP+B creative director Omid Farhang later told *Fast Company* "the truth about baby carrots is they possess many of the defining characteristics of our favorite junk food. They're neon orange, they're crunchy, they're dippable, they're kind of addictive."

Using this insight, CP+B built a new campaign that enticed consumers to "Eat 'Em Like Junk Food," inspired by the marketing tactics of other consumer packaged goods companies (like Coca-Cola). In campaign test markets, sales were up between 10% and 12%, all thanks to a campaign built from seeing the similarities between the wildly divergent products of junk food and vegetables.

PRINCIPLE #2: PURPOSELY LOOK AWAY FROM YOUR GOAL.

Frans Johansson is a keen observer of people and companies. His first book, *The Medici Effect*, talked beautifully about the power of intersections between diverse industries and people as a way of generating game-changing ideas, products and organizations.

In his second book, *The Click Moment*, he focuses on the related idea of serendipity in our lives and what any of us might do in order to increase the chances of having our own serendipitous meetings or interactions with others.

In this second book he also retells the well-known origin story of the inspiration behind Starbucks, found on a trip Howard Schultz took to Milan, where he saw the dominance of the Italian espresso coffee shops on every street corner and imagined that a similar type of establishment might work in America as well.

His insight led to a pivot for Starbucks from a supplier of high-end home brewing equipment to a retail coffee establishment. The original purpose of his trip to Milan was only to attend a trade show.

It was only on a chance walk from his hotel to the convention center that he noticed and became inspired by these espresso bars. His story illustrates that sometimes it is better to explore ideas outside your main goal so you can see even bigger ideas waiting to be discovered.

PRINCIPLE 3: WANDER INTO THE UNFAMILIAR.

If you happen to be walking the streets of Bangkok around 6pm on any particular day, you will see people stop in their tracks for seemingly inexplicable reasons. Ask anyone afterwards and you will quickly learn that there are two times every day when the Thai national anthem is played (8am and 6pm) and all citizens stop what they are doing and observe a moment of silence out of respect.

Once you see this cultural choice in practice, it is impossible to forget.

Travel experiences are like this—whether they happen across the world from your home, or simply during a visit to an unfamiliar place. Wandering is a form of exploration that we often think to embrace only when traveling, but it has great value on a more daily basis.

In a world where we have a map in our pocket, ready to assist us with turn-by-turn directions to anywhere, wandering must be a choice. It is the perfect metaphor for why intersection thinking matters, and why it can be difficult as well.

Now that I have shared three principles for using intersection thinking, let's talk about how to apply trends to your own situation with the tool I use most frequently—*workshops*.

Why Workshops Work

A workshop is a defined moment in time where an individual or a group of people can focus on discussing a particular concept and generating powerful ideas on how to use that it effectively.

While it may seem like a complicated endeavor (particularly if you are looking to apply trends more individually for yourself and your own career), there are several reasons to consider taking a workshop-driven approach to applying trends.

1. **Focus your attention.** We are busy and usually don't have the time to be sitting around thinking about trends all day. To ensure you can have the right focused attention, I always recommend blocking out a set period of time for a workshop, even if it happens to be minimal. Just the act of making sure this time is scheduled and separate from your usual daily activities will help ensure that it feels and actually becomes significant.
2. **Follow a defined process.** There are many ways to engineer the structure of what you do in a workshop. I will share several of them in later chapters to help you get started. Whichever you choose, the important thing is that, like any good meeting, your workshop has the right structure so participants know what you aim to accomplish and can commit to the same shared goals.
3. **Establish accountability.** Another critical reason that workshops can be so effective is that they help bring the right people together in a single moment so they can make commitments about action steps and what to do next. Accountability, of course, is equally important if you happen to be working alone to decide how to apply these trends.

Almost every one of the dozens of workshops I have given on marketing and business trends and the future starts the same way, with a

presentation of the trends. Yet it is important to remember that most of the time, *the ultimate goal is not to uncover new trends.*

A workshop is most useful after you have *already* used the process in the first part of the book to curate your own trends, or selected trends produced by others (such as those featured in Part II of this book). The goal of any trend workshop is to take those trends and discuss how to put them into action to solve your business challenges.

5 Keys to Running a Great Trend Workshop

When considering using a workshop, there are a few basic ground rules to keep in mind to help you get the best result:

1. **Always have an unbiased facilitator** – It is easy to assume that the person closest to the issue will be the right person to lead a workshop, but this is often not true. Instead, the best workshop leaders are individuals who can lead a discussion, keep a conversation on track and ask bold questions without being biased or intentionally leading a group toward a particular answer or point of view.
2. **Encourage sharing, not critiquing** – We have all heard the common cliché that there are “no bad ideas in a brainstorm.” That’s not technically true. There *are* bad ideas, off-strategy ideas, impossible ideas and useless ideas. Unfortunately, they are rarely easy to distinguish in the real time environment of a workshop. For that reason, the best mentality to encourage for all participants is one where everyone commits to sharing new ideas that can be captured rather than wasting time and energy trying to critique an idea.
3. **Adopt a “yes and” mindset** – Stand up comedians always talk about the importance of following a scene and adding to the narrative by always saying “yes and” instead of “yes but” (its far more negative cousin). This additive approach allows you to build upon what others have shared instead of breaking it down, and it is one of the consistent hallmarks of great and effective workshops.

4. **Prepare like a pro** – If you have ever heard the phrase “garbage in, garbage out”—you should know this applies tenfold to workshops. If you have not prepared the right materials, insights and questions before a workshop, you will rarely be able to generate great value. This doesn’t mean spending months on research, but you should have the right background to make sure all the participants are informed enough to offer value back during the workshop.
5. **Recap and summarize** – One of the worst things to do after committing the time and expense to running a workshop is to let everyone in the room leave without summarizing what took place over the time you shared together. It is the role of the facilitator to summarize the conversation, recap any action items and ensure that everyone who spent their precious time participating understands what they collectively achieved and what will need to happen next in order to keep the momentum going.

The Four Models of Trend Workshops

While the formats and methods you might use in this type of workshop setting are almost endless, the next several chapters in this section will take you through four specific models for how to apply trends strategically based on differing goals.

Here are the four formats we will cover in the following chapters.

- **Customer Journey Mapping Trend Workshop** – Building a step-by-step understanding of how your customers interact with you so you can apply trends to each step of the process.
- **Brand Storytelling Trend Workshop** – Developing a powerful brand story or message designed to resonate with customers based on understanding and using current trends.
- **Business Strategy Trend Workshop** – Creating a new go-to-market or product-launch strategy or making changes to a business model or revenue model informed by current trends.

- **Company Culture Trend Workshop** – Planning your career or optimizing an internal company culture and team based on current trends.

For Small Teams

A final consideration I will share before digging into each of these workshops is how to apply them if you happen to be a sole proprietor or owner of a very small company without a large team of people to participate in something like a workshop.

Although the following chapters are specifically written from the point of view of having multiple participants in each type of workshop, many of the lessons in these chapters can be easily applied to small businesses individually as well.

It may be tempting to dismiss the value of workshops or even intersection thinking if you happen to be on your own, but I encourage you to give these approaches a chance. Just because you don't have an army of team members doesn't mean you can't use the benefits of intersection thinking and workshops to power your business as well.



THE 7 BEST TREND RESOURCES YOU NEED TO BOOKMARK



Despite the skepticism with which I often approach trend reports from so-called gurus, there are actually quite a few amazingly valuable sources for trend forecasting and techniques that I have drawn upon heavily over the years. Some have already been cited elsewhere in this book, however in the interests of simplicity, I am including a full list of some of my favorite resources below. (*Note: Several top sources such as Iconoculture have been omitted from this list because most of their research is accessible only to subscribers and not the general public.*)

These organizations and individuals publish consistently insightful ideas and forecasts worth paying attention to. Each is on my must-read list every year and never fails to offer several ideas that inform my thinking annually as I prepare the *Non-Obvious Trend Report*.

1. **Trendwatching.com (trendwatching.com)**

This is hands-down the most useful trend and forecasting resource in existence. Through a network of thousands of spotters all over the world, this is the one resource that I consistently find insightful, valuable and extremely well researched. There are several times, in fact, when seeking sources for a potential trend on my list turns up a very similar idea from Trendwatching.com. Visit their site and subscribe to receive their excellent free monthly reports. If you work for an organization that can

afford it, pay to access their premium service (currently \$199 per month) and use it.

2. **PSFK (www.psfk.com)**

Ever since I first met founder Piers Fawkes at an event more than five years ago, I am consistently impressed with the thinking that he and his team compile on big topics like the future of retail and the future of work. Several of their reports are published in partnership with sponsors, which means they are freely available, but even just browsing their consistently excellent blog will inspire you with new ideas, curated observations and plenty of stories worth saving for later aggregation.

3. ***Megatrends* by John Naisbitt**

There is a reason why this is the book about trends and the future has been a bestseller for the past three decades. In the book, Naisbitt not only paints a fascinating future portrait of the world as he saw it back in the early '80s, but he also captures his own time in the mirror from the viewpoint he writes from. Despite the many years that have passed since the book was first published, it remains a valuable read both for the prescience of his ideas and the how he manages to capture the spirit of his time while comparing it to a surprisingly accurate vision of the future.

4. ***The Trend Forecaster's Handbook* by Martin Raymond**

There isn't really a textbook for trend forecasting, but if there were, this full-color large-format volume from Martin Raymond would come pretty close. It has a hefty price tag (like most textbooks), but the content is beautifully organized and it comes closest to presenting a dictionary-style compilation of everything you can imagine needing to know about trend forecasting. From interviews with top futurists to highly useful sidebars (like how to select and interview an expert panel), this book compiles so much insight that it's worth buying because you'll probably refer to it again and again.

5. **Cool Hunting (www.coolhunting.com)**

If you have ever been to one of those beautifully authentic farmer's markets where the produce is amazingly fresh, but the organization is a big haphazard and confusing – then you'll appreciate the value of Cool Hunting. The site has amazing content and is guaranteed to spark new ideas for you anytime you visit, but you'll have to navigate the busy design and minimal organization alongside those sparks of brilliance. If you can find the patience to browse the site instead of searching, though, you will find the content to be completely inspirational.

6. **The Cool Hunter (www.thecoolhunter.co.uk)**

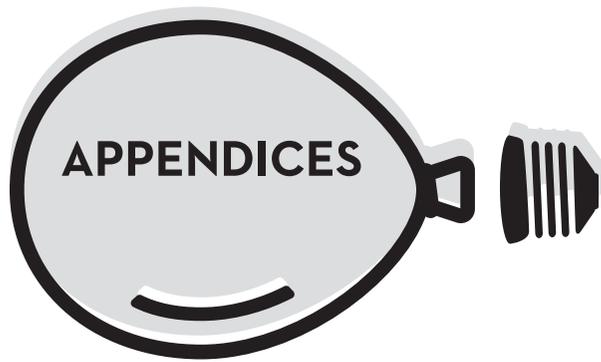
Despite its name, this site has no affiliation with Cool Hunting. Aside from sharing a compendium of ideas, the structure of the sites couldn't be more different. On The Cool Hunter, all the blog posts are cleanly presented in very specific categories from "Exotic Places" to "Architecture." Each post is highly visual and it is easy to browse from story to story. As a result, the experience of navigating the site is a bit like going to a perfectly organized library and pulling random ideas off the shelf.

7. **SlideShare (www.slideshare.com)**

Almost every flawed, lazy or overly ambitious trend report I have ever read was one I found on Slideshare.com, so it probably seems like an odd choice to add to my list of must-read resources, but the fact is you can get a lot of great insights on SlideShare. Some of them relate to trend predictions that are of little value, but learning to *see through* them is a valuable skill in itself. Outside of that, there are plenty of deep, insightful presentations that can offer ideas about new industries and markets, or take you inside an unfamiliar subject in a visual and easy-to-read way.

For an online list of all the sources included here, please visit the link below:

WWW.ROHITBHARGAVA.COM/NONOBVIOUS/RESOURCES



THE PAST YEARS' NON-OBVIOUS TREND REPORTS

(2011-2014)

OVERVIEW:

How to Read These Past Trend Reports



“THE EVENTS OF THE PAST CAN BE MADE TO PROVE ANYTHING IF THEY ARE ARRANGED IN A SUITABLE PATTERN.”

—A. J. P. Taylor, historian and journalist

There was a moment several years ago when I was on stage after having just presented one of my trend reports and a gentleman stood up to ask me a question. “It must be easy,” he started “to publish your trend report when you get to change them every year. How do you know whether any of them were actually right?”

His question was a fair one. After all, there is plenty of evidence to suggest experts routinely miss predictions and are often just plain wrong. What makes my method or the past trends any different? Of course, every author thinks his book is brilliant, just as all parents imagine their child to be a genius. What is the truth?

In this section, you’ll see a candid, unedited review of every one of my previously predicted trends from the past four years of the *Non-Obvious Trend Report*. While some of the descriptions have been edited for space considerations, none of the intentions or meanings have been updated or revisited.

Instead, each trend is accompanied by my own Trend Longevity Rating, which aims to measure how much the trend, as originally described, still applies or has value today in 2015. Predictably, the 2014 trends fared better than the 2011 trends, but the process of going backward and taking an honest look at past research was illuminating for me, and I hope it will be for you as well.

In assessing these trends, my aim was to treat them in as unbiased a way as possible, and where something was wrong or not quite right, I tried to assess and grade it truthfully. For each trend report, there is also a link at the end of the corresponding appendix where you can go back and see that full trend report with no edits, as it was originally presented.

It may be a hard line, but I have done my best to draw it authentically and without embarrassment or defensiveness. If there is anything that has helped me get better at doing this year after year, it's the act of reviewing, grading and critiquing past trends—especially after some of them turn out to be not quite right. I hope you enjoy this journey back in time and the ideas it sparks for which trends stood the test of time and which didn't.

APPENDIX D: 2014 Trends



THE BACKSTORY

This fourth edition of the *Non-Obvious Trend Report* was expanded in several ways from previous reports. The first and most visible change was that the report now featured five categories for trends instead of simply listing 15 in random order. The categories are the same as those used in the 2015 report.

In addition, the report featured deeper examples, more actionable advice and a new visual look that spotlighted each trend more deeply and encouraged people to learn more about each one. The overall report was more than 160 pages.

In an effort to build visibility, in 2014 I also made the vast majority of the report freely available online rather than moving it to an ebook available for sale on Amazon. The result was wider distribution of the report, and far lower sales of the corresponding ebook.

RETROSPECTIVE - HOW ACCURATE WAS THIS REPORT?

Given that this report is only a year old, almost every trend is still applicable to business today. As a result, I was tempted not to go through the process of rating each trend because the time since they were published is so short, but I still think there is value in reviewing them, so you will find the same analysis of the 2014 trends in the following pages.

THE 2014 TRENDS: RECAP & ANALYSIS

1. Desperate Detox (Culture & Consumer Behavior Trend)

Consumers try to more authentically connect with others and seek out moments of reflection by intentionally disconnecting from the technology surrounding them.

Examples Used: Nomophobia, Camp Grounded, Human Mode app, *Fast Company's* #unplug hashtag, Belize and FOMO

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

Technology is only becoming more omnipresent in our lives, making this trend one that continues to grow in 2015.

2. Media Binging (Culture & Consumer Behavior Trend)

As more media and entertainment is available on any device on demand, consumers binge and are willing to pay extra for the convenience.

Examples Used: *Breaking Bad* TV show, *Beyoncé* album release, Netflix, telecom data plans, *House of Cards* TV show and Pocket app

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

Streaming options continue to expand and consumer behavior follows, making this trend one to continue to watch in 2015.

3. Obsessive Productivity (Culture & Consumer Behavior Trend)

With thousands of life-optimizing apps and instant advice from social media-savvy self-help gurus, becoming more productive has become the ultimate obsession.

Examples Used: Narrative, Swiftkey, Manhattan Disney moms and Coffitivity

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

Last year brought plenty of new bestselling books talking about optimizing your life, hacking your daily chores and saving time. To say people continue to obsess over their own productivity is becoming an understatement.

4. Subscription Commerce (Economics & Entrepreneurship Trend)

More unexpected businesses and retailers use subscriptions to sell recurring services or products to customers instead of focusing on the one-time sale.

Examples Used: Adobe Creative Cloud, Amazon Prime, Oyster Books, Pleygo.com, Moviepass, Trunk Club, Bulu Box, Birchbox, Carnivore Club, Love with Food and Shoe Dazzle

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B+

More industries and brands turn to the lessons of subscription commerce, but the more powerful effect of this trend will come from how subscription-based models that were launched in 2014 grow and receive more attention in 2015.

5. Instant Entrepreneurs (Economics & Entrepreneurship Trend)

Better support, incentives and tools mean anyone with an idea can launch a startup knowing that the costs and risks of failure are not as high as they once were.

Examples Used: LegalZoom, coworking spaces, Strikingly, Bitcoin mining, StockLogos.com and Startup America

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

The shift in many industries from full-time employee to entrepreneur continues to take shape as top professionals continue to branch out on their own.

6. Collaborative Economy (Economics & Entrepreneurship Trend)

New business models and tools allow consumers and brands to use sharing and collaborative consumption for new ways to buy, sell or consume almost anything.

Examples Used: Crowd Companies, Heineken Ideas Brewery, GE's partnership with Quirky and Patagonia's partnership with Ebay

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

While growing last year, the shared or collaborative economy has become one of the more obvious trends anyone could point to today, a symbol of its continued rapid acceleration.

7. Branded Utility (Marketing & Social Media Trend)

Brands use content marketing and greater integration between marketing and operations to augment promotions with real ways to add value to customer's lives.

Examples Used: *Content Rules* by Ann Handley and C. C. Chapman; *Ctrl Alt Delete* by Mitch Joel; *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook* by Gary Vaynerchuk; *Weber's Way to Grill* by Jamie Purviance; Charmin's Sit or Squat website and KLM's Wanna Gives

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

As content marketing continues to dramatically change the way that marketers communicate with their audiences, there have been dozens more examples of brands using this trend across 2014.

8. Lovable Imperfection (Marketing & Social Media Trend)

Consumers seek out true authenticity and reward minor imperfections in products, personalities and brands by showing greater loyalty and trust.

Examples Used: Jennifer Lawrence, Domino's Artisan Pizza, McDonald's Egg White McMuffin, *Despicable Me* and MegaMind

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

The impact of this trend was so powerful in business across the year following its initial publication, that the 2015 trend of Unperfection relates directly to this one from 2014.

9. Shareable Humanity (Marketing & Social Media Trend)

Content shared on social media gets more emotional as people share amazing examples of humanity and brands inject more of it into communications efforts.

Examples Used: Mashable stories, Kikkoman and Hopemob,

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B

This was one of the trends from the previous year that was negatively affected by the fatigue some media consumers are starting to experience from overly dramatic media stories and clickbaiting headlines. Regardless, we continue to find human stories irresistible to read and share.

10. Privacy Paranoia

New data breaches are leading to a new global sense of paranoia about what governments and brands know about us—and how they might use this big data in potentially harmful ways.

Examples Used: DuckDuckGo, Lendup.com, Cloaking, International Data Privacy Day and “The Deep Web” from *Time* magazine

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B-

As more tools enter the market to help consumers protect their information and take back control of their privacy, this paranoia is shifting to empowerment.

11. Microdesign

As communication becomes more visual, design gains respect and integrates into business. Demand for design skills also explodes, leading to easier access to bite-sized chunks of design expertise.

Examples Used: Candy Crush, Infogr.am, Visual.ly, PicktoChart, *Microinteractions* by Dan Saffer, Swiftly and Over app

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

The need for design expertise in every corner of business continues to grow, and this trend is still an important one for any type of organization to consider.

12. Overquantified Life

As big data leads brands to overload data with cute infographics and superficial analysis, they add more confusion about what all this data really means, and how it can inform decisions in real life.

Examples Used: Kred, Klout, Jawbone, Fitbit and Google Glass

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B

Connecting all the data we collect on ourselves in a meaningful way continues to be a challenge, however, consumers are feeling less over-quantified and more in control of this data.

13. Curated Sensationalism

As the line between news and entertainment blurs, smart curation displaces journalism as content is paired with sensational headlines to drive millions of views.

Examples Used: BuzzFeed, Upworthy, *Forbes*, ThunderClap and SunnySkyz

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

Media continues to deliver over-the-top headlines and sensationalism that continue to negatively affect consumer trust in media.

14. Distributed Expertise

The idea of expertise itself shifts to become more inclusive, less academic and more widely available on demand and in real time.

Examples Used: Plated, Contently, Vikram Patel, Kaggle, Pop Expert and Clarity.fm

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

Learning through experts online in many formats is still a big trend and one that is powering some of the fastest growing learning platforms online today (including many profiled in this original trend).

15. Anti-Stereotyping

Across media and entertainment, traditional gender roles are being reversed, assumptions about alternative lifestyles are being challenged and perceptions of what defines anyone evolve in new ways.

Examples Used: “Lean Out” from *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Hasbro Easy Bake Oven, *In A World ...* the movie, the Bic for Her pen firestorm, Tide laundry, *Delusions of Gender* by Cordelia Fine, *A Call to Action* by Jimmy Carter and *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele

2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A

The reversing of gender roles continues to be a big opportunity for brands to get their messaging right, or wrong, when it comes to speaking to these diverse groups through marketing and communications.

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