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ONE DOLLAR

The Crystal Ball: What's Ahead in Ads

by Louise Story



Photo: Millions of people inhabit "Second Life," a Web site that lets participants create a parallel existence made only of pixels—and their imagination.

AS the New Year approaches, advertising executives are busy divining the future, compiling lists and predicting hot brands and consumer trends.

Not surprisingly, many agencies are focusing on how the digital world will continue nudging the offline world in new directions, and consumer-generated content is in the forefront of everyone's mind. But ad executives also say they think companies should pay attention to shoppers' interest in knowing more about the products they buy and to their desire to turn their cellphones and BlackBerrys—gasp!—off sometimes.

Here are some of the most common scenes for 2007 that ad executives see in their crystal balls:

CONSUMERS WITH A CONSCIENCE: Americans have been talking the talk for a while, but 2007 is the year they're ready to walk the walk, ad executives said. Consumers want to know where products come from, how they were made and what companies and brands believe in.

"Consumers are asking, 'What do these companies stand for? How does that match my values? And how could I learn from those brands?'" said Andrew Benett, chief strategy officer at Euro RSCG Worldwide, which is part of Havas.

Consumers want to learn the origins of

everything in their shopping carts, ad executives said, but food is the most natural place to look for narratives about product origins. Mr. Benett said the next craze in the restaurant world might be celebrity farms, rather than celebrity chefs.

Consumer interest in environmentally friendly

products will grow, as will interest in the local stories of products, even those that come from halfway around the world, said **Marian Salzman**, chief marketing officer of **JWT**, a **WPP** Group agency, and co-author of *Next Now: Trends for the Future*.

"Every brand is going to now have to have a social conscience, and they're going to be evaluated for their social consciousness as much as for their products," Ms. Salzman said.

LIFE ONLINE OR OFFLINE? Consumers spend so much time online—working, playing, sharing personal details with the world and living out fantasy lives—that the online terrain is blurring with the physical world. Faith Popcorn's BrainReserve, a trend consultant, predicts that people will start bequeathing their avatars—the characters that represent them in online fantasy worlds—to their friends or families.

Already, some retailers are starting to use online shopping behavior to guide the way they design and stock their stores.

And, advertising executives said, companies making even basic products like doorbells should consider the large group of younger people who use their thumbs more than their index fingers because of all the time they have spent

sending cellphone text messages and playing video games.

In 2007, more companies will start adding social networking and user-generated tools onto their intranet sites, predicted Clark Kokich, worldwide president of Avenue A Razorfish, an agency owned by aQuantive.

"People in the younger work force are going to look for an experience on intranets that looks more like the experiences they have on the Internet," Mr. Kokich said.

Mr. Kokich also predicted that more brand Web sites would start incorporating features from the video game world, making their pages more fluid and dynamic and inviting Web surfers to live a bit in that brand's world, much like the 3-D online world of Second Life.

At least two Publicis Groupe agencies—Bartle Bogle Hegarty and Leo Burnett—have created virtual ad agencies in Second Life, a Web site that describes itself as "a 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents," and claims to be "inhabited by a total of 2,231,337 people from around the globe."

PUSHING THE OFF BUTTON: Even as consumers are networked in and logged on most hours of the day, some ad executives say they think workers will be quicker to separate their work lives from their personal space. Some hotels are now offering to lock up guests' cellphones and BlackBerrys to give them a break, said Kiwa Iyobe, trend manager at Faith Popcorn's BrainReserve.

More workers with home offices will push their desks and computers upstairs, away from their entertaining spaces, and people out to lunch with friends will be more likely to turn off their cellphones, said Ms. Salzman of JWT.

But will workers log off their work e-mail when they're visiting friends in Second Life?

USER-GENERATED ADVERTISEMENTS: Ad executives are not going to be quick to give up their paychecks for creating ads. Still, a growing list of brands—among them Converse, Chevrolet, Doritos and Dove—are asking consumers to design commercials for them.

“Consumers are demanding and getting a seat at the table and defining what the brand experience is about,” said Allen P. Adamson, managing director of the New York office of Landor Associates, a WPP Group brand consultancy, and author of *BrandSimple*.

Videos created by ordinary people are not going away anytime soon, but advertising executives said consumer brand companies were already trying to exert more control over consumer-made ads posted to their brand sites.

WHAT’S A BRAND TO DO? Advertising executives said brands should focus on clear, simple messages that were consistent across consumers’ online and offline lives. Companies that scored the highest in a national brand study earlier this month were ones with well-known mass appeal, like Google, Las Vegas, the N.F.L., Sony and Amazon. YouTube, iPod and Yahoo also made the list of “top brands,” though they came in a bit behind Google.

Other brands could learn from Google’s simple message and wide range of offerings, said Mr. Adamson of Landor Associates, which co-sponsored the survey with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates.

Still, other advertising executives said there was only one Google. Many brands may need to reach different consumers with different messages at different times.

As targeting and behavioral technology develop, consumers can look forward to seeing advertisements different from the ones beamed to their neighbors.

What is the next year’s YouTube? If you knew, would you tell?