

The shape of things to come—designer dogs and mini-me dolls

What can we look forward to in 2007? James Harkin asks three professional trendspotters

By James Harkin

Arranged marriages

Most people in the west frown on the whole idea of arranged marriages, but the times are slowly changing, according to **Marian Salzman**, a prominent New York trendspotter and executive vice-president of the ad agency **JWT**. Consider, she says, the popularity of the American TV show *The Bachelor*. In what is an arranged marriage in all but name, each season a bachelor is given the opportunity to select a mate from a specially screened group of eager partners. Too harried for time to find suitable mates, Salzman predicts, western singles will turn either to their extended families or to specialist marriage services to find their matches. Cowardice, together with our neurosis about time, however, will lead some of us to outsource break-ups as well as new romantic liaisons. At the end of last month, a German businessman called Bernd Dressler set up a new business offering to dump your partner for you by phone for pounds 15—or in person for pounds 35.

Generational congestion

Grandparents spending hundreds on rock concerts; parents rarely stepping out of their hip jeans; teen girls stocking up on lipstick and perfume and amassing shoe collections that would be the envy of Carrie Bradshaw. All this is what Salzman calls “the disappearing generation gap,” and what other trendspotters call generational congestion. Parents, she argues, are becoming more like “peerents,” working through issues with their children and

sharing experiences in a form of “collaborative parenting.” The British forecasting agency **HenleyCentre HeadlightVision** agrees. “Older people are acting younger and younger people are acting older,” it reports. “People of different ages face the same issues, wear the same brands, listen to the same music and enjoy the same experiences.” Tamar Kasriel of **HenleyCentre HeadlightVision** predicts a growing sense of agelessness in 2007; people are no longer acting their age, and there is an increasing confusion about what behavior is appropriate for different age groups.

Crowdsourcing

Next year, says Reinier Evers of Amsterdam’s **Trendwatching.com**, will see the re-emergence of group decision-making power as organizations of all kinds try to harness the wisdom of crowds. But if 2006 was the year in which DIY or home-made Internet content triumphed over all its competitors in sites such as YouTube, 2007, says Evers, will see talented amateurs on the net demand payment for the stuff they produce. Expect, he says, more and more user-generated content sites and ventures to move to a paid or revenue-sharing model in the next 12 months. An example of this crowdsourcing is the software company **Cambrian House** (www.cambrianhouse.com), which works by inviting huge numbers of people into the production process and then paying them royalties if their contribution makes any money. Even Lego wants its customers to make money. The toy company now lets

online visitors (at factory.lego.com) design Lego models and upload them to a gallery to show off their skills. It recently organized a contest in which the winning 10 models were sold as Lego models, with the creators earning 5% of the revenues. The company is keen to expand the initiative.

Allied to the growth of crowdsourcing, says Evers, will be an explosion of “profile mania,” as people take more care to cultivate profiles on social networking sites. Some companies even offer faked profiles to make you seem more popular and interesting than you really are. Take a look, says Kasriel, at **Fake Your Space** (www.fakeyourspace.com), which offers to find friends for those who do not feel popular enough on social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Friendster. “If you are tired of seeing everyone else with the hottest friends and want some hotties of your own,” the company says, “then this is the place for you.”

Extreme experiences

For at least a decade, futurologists have been waxing lyrical about the emergence of an experience economy, in which thrilling, sensuous or memorable experiences would increasingly take over from goods as what we spend our money on. In 2007, says Evers, this demand for experiences is likely to become ever more extreme.

Dinner in the Sky (www.dinnerinthesky.com), for example, is a Belgian company that offers to make your dining event truly memorable by suspending a table from a

crane, together with up to 22 seated guests, and hoisting it 50 meters above the ground. The specially built table is surrounded by chairs of the type usually found on roller coasters, with four-point seat belts. Safely buckled up and floating in mid-air, guests can enjoy a meal or meeting with three chefs, waiters, presenters or entertainers standing in an open area in the centre of the table. Ideal for next year's Christmas party.

Righteous marketing

Endorsements by churches and religious groups, Salzman has noticed, can do wonders for companies that win their approval. Salzman predicts that churches, particularly in North America but also in Europe, are set to become just another distribution channel for canny marketers, with worshippers serving as word-of-mouth promoters for approved books and movies (the new film *The Nativity Story*, for example) and for goods and services of all kinds. An example of such righteous marketing? Chrysler's sponsorship of R&B legend Patti LaBelle's 14-city tour of American mega-churches in 2006. Watch out, says Salzman, for more "sponsored houses of worship" and for more churches and religious events to secure grand-scale sponsorship deals from big business.

Unplugging

Unwiring and unplugging, says Salzman, will become the most fashionable thing in 2007. If you call designer Philippe Starck's Paris office before 1 pm, she notes, you are told that this is their "thinking time," during which they do not take calls or respond to emails. Likewise, turning your phone off during lunch or not putting it on the table will be a real statement of your undivided attention. Almost anything can become an excuse for unplugging and switching off. Kasriel name-checks WC1, a new luxury loo and powder room in London which, in return for a pounds 5 entry fee, claims to offer "the most glamorous comfort break imaginable for time-poor, cash-rich shoppers and busy career women."

Gravanity

The rather awkward hybrid of "graffiti" and "vanity," gravanity is how Evers describes another of his top trends for 2007—the growing number of people who crave being able to customize their goods and get themselves or their names on display. "Whether it's blogging, participating in *Big Brother*, having a character in a novel named after you or adorning your

car with personalized license plates, the masses want their names out there," he says. Kasriel agrees. The democratization of celebrity, she says, is tempting us all into becoming exhibitionists, and new manufacturing techniques are making this kind of vanity production a viable commercial option.

What's the evidence? Salzman, co-author of the book *Next Now: Trends for the Future*, points out that some perfume houses in North America, such as Creed, are offering to customize, design and name perfumes to order. Evers mentions the American toy company My Twinn (www.mytwinn.com), which lets punters personalize a 23in doll to resemble any child aged between three and 12. The site offers a choice of 15 face shapes, four skin tones, eight eye colors, eight hair colors and 11 hair lengths and textures. Customers can also choose to have a professional stylist do the doll's hair or hand-paint details such as freckles or birthmarks.

In Britain, Cute Little Blokes (www.cute-littleblokes.com) is targeting gay consumers who would like a caricature of themselves or a friend. Customers email a digital photograph and receive their portraits as digital files. Customers receive the finished product in a number of files, including personalized mobile phone wallpaper and a desktop computer background. They can also buy various versions of their portrait, dressed in different outfits or holding props. Likewise, the Norwegian company Norway Post (www.posten.no/portal/privat/Kjope/PersonligeFrimerker) recently launched personalized stamps that customers can have their own pictures printed on. If none of that grabs you, how about a personalized song? One firm is now offering a "custom cut" of the American pop singer Jessica Simpson's new single—one where you can insert your name into the lyrics and personalize the song.

Guerrilla retail

Many retail formats are approaching their sell-by date, argues Kasriel, as a result of which companies are increasingly experimenting with guerrilla retail or "pop-up retail." From gallery-like shopping spaces with one-off exhibitions to mobile units bringing urban chic to rural areas, Evers says that 2007 will be the year in which "temporary retail manifestations" will take off around the world. This summer, he points out, Gap refurbished an

old school bus into a retro mobile pop-up store to market the brand's summer clothing line and took the company's summer fashion on the road—inspired by the summer of 1969, when the first Gap store opened. The traveling Gap bus notched up sales equal to a medium-sized Gap store on a typical summer weekday.

Alternatively, Guerilla Drive-In (www.guerilladrivein.com) organizes spontaneous outdoor film shows on the east coast of America. Viewing locations are secret, audiences are notified through an email list and punters are advised to bring an AM radio and a blanket.

Designer mutts

In 2007, says Salzman, the continued humanization of our pets will pump up demand for luxury pet products and services. Pet coffins, for example, are now big business (see www.puffins.co.uk for a range of sizes). Increasingly, Salzman suggests, we are also transferring our human neuroses on to our mutts and moggies. The pet market now includes Chill Pills, a "Pet Organics No-Stress behavior modification spray" designed to reduce anxiety in dogs and cats, and canine massages at pet spas. But what kind of pets will we want? Whereas pedigree pets were once a must-have in high society, Salzman believes that the new status symbols will be designer mutts—think of the labradoodle, spoodle and puggle, all mixes of various purebred dogs. The market for designer mutts exploded, she says, after *The Sopranos'* James Gandolfini and other stars were seen sporting them.

Middle-aged makeover

The continued weight of the middle-aged baby boomers on popular culture means that even the most unlikely avenues trodden by youth culture will become susceptible to a middle-aged makeover. One new ringtone provider, BooseyTones, offers popular classics such as Beethoven's *Für Elise* for the mature ringtone lover. As the world's largest publisher of classical music, its parent company Boosey & Hawkes can draw on an immense catalogue of music. Middle-aged commuters who turn quietly apoplectic when they hear tinny ringtone renditions of "Don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me" can now respond with equally monotone ringtone versions of Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Britten or Mozart.

Then there are "baby-friendly cinemas." Buffeted by increased competition from

home cinemas, DVDs and movie downloads, cinemas everywhere will tap into the family audience by offering a slow midweek matinee slot to which baby is invited too, Evers predicts. Stars & Strollers, for example, is a regular feature at some Canadian cinemas. In its baby-friendly cinematic experience, the lights are

dimmed rather than turned off, so that parents are allowed to feed their babies or find fallen dummies; baby-changing tables are provided; the film's volume is lowered to avoid damaging or startling infant ears; breastfeeding is welcome; and free parking for buggies and prams is offered. To help ensure that babies sleep soundly throughout,

suspense and action films with frantic soundtracks are avoided. Baby-friendly cinemas are making their way here, too. The Electric Cinema in West London offers a screening slot called Electric Scream, exclusively for parents and babies under a year old.