

# 'What Comes Next'

By Sheridan Winn

## FUTURE SHIFT TRENDS

Where do we go from here? What are the big trends for 2007? From China to YouTube, we identify the shifts that will define the way you work and do business.

### 1. GLOBALIZATION: EVERYWHERE, EVERYONE, EVERYTHING.

The whole world exchanges ideas, fads, products, even insults. In all areas of our lives from religion and education to celebrity culture, people inform and influence each other. The world shrinks: borders open, tensions rise. "We are poised at a crossroads with even more to be afraid of than we'd imagined," says Marian Salzman. Globalization, she believes, will be the most important trend. In the physically and virtually connected, high-speed global village, we experience time and space faster. The lines between local, national and international are less distinct. "Suddenly, competitors and co-conspirators are everywhere; influences are everywhere and trends originate," she says.

What a difference 10 years makes. In 1997, US trendspotters Marian Salzman and Ira Matathia published their bestselling book *Next: Trends for the Near Future* (Overlook Press). In it they raved about the Internet, but had a hard time persuading big corporations to take it seriously: it was seen as a slow-paced novelty for consumers rather than an opportunity for big companies. The authors foresaw American superiority being challenged by a United States of Europe; on-demand entertainment; a redefinition of age; and a growing chasm between the "haves" and the "have-nots." In particular, they predicted that the gap between those who have or do not have the new technologies would be far more significant than separations caused by age, geography, sex or lifestyle.

Now, Salzman and Matathia have published a follow-up: *Next Now: Trends for the Future* (Palgrave Macmillan). "A decade is long enough for a forecast," says Salzman, executive vice president and chief marketing officer, **JWT Worldwide**. "Ten years ago, the Internet was for academics and about two million Americans who were actively on AOL: that says it all."

### 2. THE RISE OF CHINA

China and India possess the weight and dynamism to transform the global economy. Their burgeoning middle classes will cause consumer demand to rocket. China will disrupt economies, workforces, companies and industries in ways we cannot yet imagine. Meanwhile, its smart, cheap labor will turn the US into the Old World. Salzman and Matathia foresee that today's exuberance over China will become angst-ridden.

### 3. MAKE HASTE SLOWLY

More than ever, time is money. We will work longer and harder. As time becomes more limited, the technology that was supposed to free us will enslave us, unless we learn to control it better. Technology will be the key to the juggling act of life. "People are unplugging and slowing down," says Matathia. "Not putting your cell phone on the table during lunch will be a real statement of giving your undivided attention."

### 4. BRANDING IS NO LONGER JUST ABOUT BUSINESS

Once there was a product, then there was a brand. Not so, today. Brands are now companies, places, people, political parties,

intangibles such as websites and concepts. Brands and branding are among the most fundamental features of modern consumer societies, the 21st century way of thinking about identity. Brands answer the questions: Who am I? Who do I belong with? How do I show who I am?

### 5. WHAT'S REAL?

It's all a blur in this age of ambiguity and change: 50 looks like 30; men primp like women; and art blends into commerce. The lines that used to clearly define gender and family roles are less distinct, as are the borders between fake and real, private and public, celebrity and anonymity, local and international.

### 6. ANTISOCIAL IS THE NEW NORMAL

As the pace and pressure of life increase, we take privacy and autonomy to a new level. We create our own little bubbles—private, personalized environments where we shut out the rest of humanity while we read or listen to our iPods. But is mass personalization leading to mass rudeness?

### 7. THE TYRANNY OF THE MIDDLE

For Matathia, the overarching business trend is the ever-increasing squeeze of the "middle," across every aspect of commerce. "From the 'middle class' to the 'middle market,' to department stores that face the pressure of the 'specialist' at the high end and the 'big box' on the low end, the 'middle' is not a comfortable, or profitable, place to be," he says.

### 8. WATCH OUT THERE

In 1996, trendspotting was seen as cutting edge. Today it's mainstream—part of business as usual. In the next decade, however, businesses' expertise and creativity will be determined, at least in part, by their trendspotting talents.

### 9. SENIORS GET IT ON

"The magic blue pill, Viagra, has put a swing back into the 60s and a swagger back into the 70s," says Salzman. A National Council on Aging study in the US shows that 71 percent of men in their 60s and 57 percent of men in their 70s engage in some kind of sexual activity at least once a month, while 51 percent of women in their 60s and 30 percent in their 70s are active once a month. The dynamics of relationships are changing: yummy mummies give older men a run for their money; older women are selecting younger partners; and mature singles are turning to the Internet for potential dates.

### 10. THE AGE OF ANXIETY—AND SHOPPING

Age-old certainties have crumbled, replaced by uncertainty. "Changes are coming so fast and over such a broad front that people feel bewildered," says Matathia. "We no longer hold solid, widely agreed-upon responses to questions such as: What's a normal family? Where do babies come from? How old is old? What's a job?" It's not just technology: it's a shift in people's identity and what they feel is their place in the world. As a result, we channel our energies into shopping—the new opiate for the masses.