

Year of Change Dawning in the East

With the last few days of 2006 ebbing away, trendspotters Marian Salzman and Ira Matathia tell Sarah Freeman what the next 12 months have in store.

Those who claim they can predict the future are usually dismissed as cranks, but in a field of cheats and frauds, Marian Salzman has something of a Midas touch.

Executive vice president and chief marketing officer at advertising consultancy JWT, her job has always been about knowing what will happen before anyone else does, accurately forecasting the temperature of public opinion on everything from children's toys to cosmetic surgery.

"My working life has been spent observing businesses and societies from the bird's-eye view, the worm's eye view and all points in between," says Marian, who recently teamed up with fellow social predictor Ira Matathia to research the major trends for 2007.

"For marketers it's essential to know what's next now in order to understand and capitalise on the future today. "In the best case scenario, a marketer can steer a trend or cultural movement in the direction that is most meaningful to their consumer and business."

Together the pair have more than 50 years experience in the business of trendspotting, so who better than Marian and Ira to guide us through the likely fads, happenings and developments in 2007...

The rise of China and India

In the late 18th century, Napoleon Bonaparte described China as a sleeping giant, in the early 21st century, along with India, it is definitely awake. Iced green tea lattes, chocolate truffles infused with cumin and Bollywood films have already hit the mainstream. China and India are poised to turn the United States into the Old World. How? With cheap, smart labour. While together they currently account for just six per cent of global GDP, according to some experts the figure is set to soar to 45 per cent

by the middle of the century. Dubbed Chindia by economist Jairam Ramesh in 2005, the two are linked by a lot more than geography, with blooming economies and a mutual hunt for new markets, Chindia is poised to shake up international economics, politics and culture, so expect to be seduced by its novel clothes, colours, flavours and films.

The globalisation of everything

Thanks in large part to technology, nations are exchanging ideas, fads, products, and even insults faster than ever before. In areas ranging from religion to education and from products to celebrities, people all over the world are informing and influencing each other. We live in a world of 6.5 billion people, but while cheap, instant and continuous communication is taken for granted, it does have a real effect on our lives. Technology has allowed people access to images, news and events beyond their local and national borders and the specific politics of previous generations are being displaced by more global concerns, international politics, terrorism and security.

Techno-stress

Because of globalisation and stiffer competition, time is — now more than ever — money. Lap tops, the internet and email were supposed to make our lives easier and in many ways they have, but there are downsides, big downsides. Increasingly we use what little time we have to work even more, while the technology that was supposed to free us is only enslaving us — workers may no longer be shackled to their desks, but instead they sleep with their mobiles under their pillow. As time becomes more limited, we must learn to control it better. The alternative is to plough headlong in to gadget meltdown.

Branding

Branding has become a fundamental aspect of modern life. It's the 21st-century way of thinking about identity: "Who am I?" and "Who do I want to be?"

While you may not be a fan of international brands like Coca-Cola, Nike, McDonald's, Toyota and Apple, someone who has never heard of them is either living in the back of beyond or has been on self-imposed retreat for the last few decades. Brands are now companies, places, political parties and it has given rise to a social group we like to call the brand slut. These are people who feel strong emotional ties to certain brands and products that they will buy them consistently and faithfully come what may

The erosion of traditional roles

We are living in a time of ambiguity and change and lines that used to clearly define gender and family roles are blurring, as are the borders that existed between fake and real, private and public, celebrity and anonymity, virtual and actual, local and international. What we have noticed is that as women increasingly take on the stereotypical father role as the main breadwinners in a family, men are more likely to act as mothers spending quality time at home rather than in the office, choosing to go freelance so they can be more flexible with their hours and generally reacting against their own fathers for who often spent more time at work than with their children.

Antisocial is the new normal

We are increasingly interested in creating our own private, personalised environments, our own little bubbles where we can read or listen to our iPods while shutting out the rest of humanity. We have taken privacy and autonomy to a whole new level and while we have access to more ways of communicating than ever before we have been overloaded and crave for our own space where we can't be interrupted by the mobile phone ringing. It's been said for decades, but now more than ever it seems silence really is golden.

Back-to-basics food

If 20th-century science fiction had come to pass our meals today would consist of

highly nutritious little pills. Sadly it didn't, and there is now so much to think about when shopping for food. Eating has moral undertones, chefs are bona fide celebrities and more and more of us are becoming well informed about food. We are now interested in the old-school ways of farming, cooking, presenting—and in authentic ethnic flavours and organic meats and produce. The backlash against diets will continue and instead we will embrace chocolate, coffee and tea as health foods.

Singletons

The structure of the 1950s family is being revised. Today's families come in all shapes and sizes: extended, single-parent, gay and unmarried couples with children, but the biggest change in the last 50 decades is that the singleton has found social acceptance. More people than ever before live by themselves and by 2026 number of married and cohabiting house-

holds will fall from 55 per cent to 47 per cent as many fill the gap of husbands and wives with friends and even pets. Three quarters of dog owners consider their pet a member of the family and while family styles change more slowly than any other element of culture, the trend for staying solo is definitely on the up.

Blogging

In a hyperconnected world of 24/7 media, the status of bloggers will continue to rise. While some have used the internet to tell anyone willing to read about the trivial minutiae of their everyday lives, blogging has serious and often profound implications. In Iran, for example the music of Eric Clapton and adverts featuring David Beckham may be banned, but the blogs can't be stopped giving repressed citizens a much-needed voice. The blogosphere is more than 60 times bigger than it was three years ago and it's doubling in size every six

months, and with the mainstream press picking up on the contents of blogs it really is a force to be reckoned with.

Global warming

The scientific evidence is growing, and headline events such as Hurricane Katrina have gotten many more people wondering: Is the record hurricane count in America last year an anomaly, or the first true warning sign that global warming has inexorably changed the environment, with impending peril to follow? With green issues rising up the political agenda, it's only a matter of time before Britain and the rest of the world gives America the environmental evil eye, and, as the junk piles up we will all have to abide by the call to reduce, reuse, recycle and regulate.

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