

Trend Walk™: Reading the Road Signs to Kid Cool

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This is about a new way to be on top of what's happening in the world, how to apply leading edge trends to new business opportunities and have great fun in the process. It's a business called Trend Walk™. It is as obvious as the name, as intuitive as the suggested process. But, it is an enterprise much richer than meets common wisdom. There is method here, more specific and specialized than simply hitting the streets to see "what's going on out there".

Traditional Competitive Intelligence

Our normal course of business leads us to go through a number of disciplines to become smarter about our products, our competitors, the markets in which we compete and tomorrow's potential big ideas. We evaluate sales data. We do store checks. We analyze competitive media. We conduct creative reviews. We do SWOT analyses. We benchmark our businesses against established and expanded competitive frames.

Trend Walk Goes Beyond

Trend Walk is experiential, out-of-the-box, beyond the expected learning. It's about ***reading the road signs to kid cool***. It's about taking in sights, assaulting business sensibilities, and embracing "no idea is a bad idea". It's all about allowing new connections in order to discover new paradigms. Its goal is to turn street lifestyle into kid cool to build new marketing ideas.

Trend Walk recognizes that experience is our best teacher, a unique guide to a broader world that can lead to broader insights. It is a process that pushes us into the streets with experienced trend walk guides. It provides us with an experience of fashion, design, architecture, retailing, music, art, technology, recreation, sports, food, toys, entertainment and more. It's

about taking in forward edge cultural trends as they are reflected and projected on the street that may or may not become tomorrow's mainstream.

The objective is simple – to extend beyond your established business and business practices, to uncover cutting edge trends that broaden your “world view” and lead to bold new product ideas or marketing initiatives.

The methodology is simple:

1. Set business objectives
2. Identify trend walk leaders
3. Define, walk and map the route
4. Open with a trend briefing
5. Distribute notebooks, note cards and disposable cameras
6. Have trend walk leaders guide small groups
 - Have lunch at a trendy restaurant
 - Allow time for self guided trend walk tours
7. Collect and buy relevant mementos
8. Wrap up with idea download/brainstorming
9. Prepare wrap up and new ideas report
10. Schedule trend walk follow ups

Tricks of the trade for a successful trend walk as a participant are to **free your mind and take it all in**. Don't look for easy solutions or immediate business connections. Let the stimuli overcome you as you mix and match and embrace ideas as they bombard you. It's kind of marketing Zen, a new religion that fosters a way of seeing beyond anyone's normal daily walks about town.

Some Global Highlights

To date, we've conducted Trend Walks in a number of cities including New York, London, Los Angeles, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Toronto, Minneapolis, Athens and Istanbul. Trend Walks are on the drawing board for Paris, Seattle, San Francisco and Sydney. The learning is staggering.

And, as one might expect, the more markets we hit, the more broad-based trend similarities we encounter.

Of course, there are local trends and lifestyle cues. But, today more than ever before, global culture is reality as vast global trends and developments readily cross borders. We see kids in similar garb, listening to the same music, watching the same TV shows and movies, playing with the same toys, affecting similar street and sports attitudes in country after country. For us, who work in the kid business, Trend Walk puts an exclamation point on kids as the most global of all markets. They are early adopters, open to new ideas, new behaviors, products, fashion and social codes.

But, Trend Walk is not exclusively a kid method. Much of what we see on the streets is not the exclusive domain of kid culture at all. It's the cutting edge developments across a number of industries put in practice by innovators, pioneers, even outcasts. Many of the most significant trends and the sources from which they become most apparent can be seen in the following areas:

1. Products and places
2. Retail décor and sales staff
3. Food and restaurants
4. Street fashion and personal style
5. Sports and sports attitude
6. Music and crossovers
7. Leisure and home furnishings
8. Technology and communication

Many of these major trends overlap. Increasingly, shops invite consumers to experience, enjoy and spend time in their lifestyles for sale. Stores reflect their "world views" in their décor and sales people. Food is omnipresent as an invitation for consumers to partake in cultural nourishment. Street fashion promotes personal style. Sports and music attitude are expressed in fashion and body language. Leisure trappings

are captured in furniture and accessories. And, technology provides people with access to anyone, anywhere, any time.

So, these are the “road signs” of many of the trends we’re seeing. And we are consistently observing them coalesce into major trend developments. Many of these trends are reactions to social developments. Many of them are projections of global opportunity. Here are some of the big ones we’re seeing:

1. *Fusion*
2. *Community*
3. *East meets West*
4. *Simplicity*
5. *Body deco*
6. *Retro*
7. *Geek Chic*
8. *Exercise and Indulgence*
9. *Crossovers*
10. *Technology*

1. Fusion

Fusion is being led by food. We see it in restaurants and on the streets. Beyond Chinese, Mexican and Indian, we’re now eating new spices and dishes from South America and cuisine from Vietnam and Thailand. Vending machines now bring us an increasing array of hot foods including crisp French Fries. Juices and smoothies have gone new age, with

“flavors” (from Snapple Elements) that include Fire and Rain. People line up for street vendors who sell bagels, chicken stir-fry in pita pockets, Thai food and felafel.

2. Community

Coffee bars are hot and Starbucks is leading a worldwide revolution of coffee to go or a place to sit and drink. In London alone, 75 Starbucks have sprung up within the past year alone. Cyber cafes invite people in for a cup of something and a worldwide connection via the Internet. The first site that greets tourists approaching Kusadasi, Turkey, gateway to the ancient city of Ephessos, is the Kismet Internet café with its invitation to get in touch with anyone in the world. Bookstores increasingly have tables, chairs and sofas for people to sit, relax and read. People are seeking connections. And, where technology is providing increased access, people are seeking new personal meaning in their lives and relationships.

3. East meets West

We see it in fashion. Asian graphics on all sorts of Western casual and dress clothes. T-shirts are decorated with Asian characters and designs. People are seeking their centers in eastern exercise. Tae Bo is the exercise craze in the US. Yoga comes on videotapes. Pokémon, from Japan, is the biggest toy phenomenon in the US.

West continues to go East in music and fashion, sports apparel and Western wear. Cowboy hats of all colors are hot along with sports logos being worn all over the world. Jeans are the international symbol of comfort and youthful attitude. Dressed up with Asian graphic shirts, East meets West on a single person in a single fashion day.

4. Simplicity

Retail has gone minimalist with bare white and brick walls and exposed ductwork and ceilings. Offices are mirroring this simplicity. Open architecture is the new order of the day for workers with workstations

rather than formal offices. Stores like Pier One, Pottery Barn and Crate and Barrel have reinvented themselves with simple, affordable furnishings, accessories and table wear that permit virtually anyone to tastefully decorate at a low price. Sale pricing is less important than service, value and inventory. Mass retailing increasingly offers everything you could want. And, e commerce is vying to become the biggest convenience in shopping ever seen. People want their complicated, busy lives made easier. People want their complicated lives simplified and numerous new ideas in business are actively working to accommodate them.

5. Body Deco

It came on strong in the past five years. Initially, this fashion development was assaultive. It felt more like body violation than fashion expression. But, tattooing and piercing have gone mainstream. In fact, 34% of players in the National Basketball Association sport tattoos. Actors, musicians and other celebrities are similarly adding personal body expression to arms, legs, backs and chest not to mention more private body areas. Multiple piercing beyond two ear lobes is becoming youth fashion of the day. The extra ear pierce, naval piercing and the more radical eyebrow, nose, lip and tongue pierces are more prevalent than ever before. They are statements of young personal style that set personal identification in opposition to parental preferences.

6. Retro

Fashion is walking along many runways and across numerous cultures. Punk and grunge have moved on from the States to world markets. "Fashion" looks of grunge and Goth can be seen in Amsterdam and Istanbul. Flowery jeans, beaded and brocaded, with inspiration from the sixties are high fashion today, sporting price tags that go North from \$65 and can easily sell approaching \$200. Fabrics from taffeta and silk to today's new polyester – microfiber – are everywhere. Today's accessories include beads and crystal to complete decidedly retro, vintage and new-to-look-old fashion statements. It's hip to wear logos from the past, '50's and '60's icons, some defunct, but all funky. And, art shops are doing good

business in selling retro posters and “ad” art from vintage commercial messages.

7. Geek Chic

School is cool and geek is chic. With Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, today’s kids recognize information is power and you don’t have to be cool to be hugely successful. The computer age presents the fantasy -- that could come true -- that someone’s next big idea could create the next multi millionaire. Kids recognize the importance education -- learning and computers are tickets to bright futures. In fact, 70% of kids entering college today will work in a job when they graduate that does not yet exist. So, it is a time of dynamic change fueled by huge and changing opportunities.

8. Exercise and Indulgence

The ‘80’s were about diet, exercise and getting fit. It was hard work and didn’t work. The price to pay for losing ten pounds was too great. So, today, we’ll keep the weight for the enjoyment of red meat, red wine and cigars. Indulgence is in as we’re working hard but chasing greater creature comforts.

New exercise routines come and go. But, the diets of the day are low carbohydrates, which means bring on the fat and protein, lots of meat and cheese. Cholesterol be damned. The game is all about looking good. And, today’s, film and TV stars are going to exercise and diet extremes to be thinner than ever. Kids are chasing the good body dream with mixed cultural messages providing frustration and pressure as they grow up.

9. Crossovers

From music to fashion to food to retail, we’re seeing the biggest mix of lifestyle cues and metaphors than ever. Murals are being painted retail walls. Country music stars are crossing over to the top 40 charts. Sports stars are rapping (Shaquille O’Neal). Hip-hop stars are singing songs for children’s movies (Jay Z, Blackstreet and Mya for Rugrats). Pop stars are

writing poetry (Jewel) and making movies (Mark Wahlberg). Chinese and Japanese diners are combined. T-shirts are worn under sports jackets. Formal shirts go bow tieless. Pants/skirt sets are being worn together. Sneakers have high heels. We're expressing ourselves across a wide array of fashion and sound. And, we're liking the freedom and flexibility that these trends bring us.

10. Technology

We're wired for communication with beepers and cell phones "on board" strapped to our waists, in our brief cases, in our cargo pants and vest pockets. It's 24/7/365. We're always available and on call. E-mail is the killer app. The Internet gives us access to communication, information and shopping. The E commerce war is raging with rapid ramp-ups, branding, advertising and battles over whether the mega store (e.g. Amazon) or the inclusive themed store (e.g. E Toys) will be the winning model. Kids are empowered from computers at home with worldwide communication and information access as never before.

New Products and Paradigms

Out of all this we're seeing a range of new products and lifestyle behaviors, some of which may have staying power and some that may be gone tomorrow. There are new coffee bars and there's caffeinated water. There are oxygen bars and oxygenated water. We have fitness clubs and for the quick hit makeover, there are now day spas. Herbal juices have spawned a dizzying variety of new age beverages from Arizona, Mystic, Reali-T, SOBE and Whipper Snapple to name several. Internet users can surf the web while riding stationery bicycles at their fitness clubs.

From Street Lifestyle to Kid Cool

The secret to applying all of this to kid products is to create connections to kid fun by uncovering rituals in music, fashion, food and fads. The question then becomes how do we tool these trends into innovative new products, promotions packaging and point-of-sale for kids? The signs are

everywhere. And, in the past couple of years, we've seen some major hits come out of nowhere to become kid phenomena. These are new paradigms fueled by crossovers, new technology and lifestyle trends.

Consider the merging of classic nurturing behavior with technology: Tamagotchi combined nurturing play with simple technology. Furby takes it to the next step with learned speech interactivity. Sports trading cards have given way to the Pokémon phenomenon in cards, toys, TV and now the movie. Retro trends have brought with them the return of simple fun with slinky and yo-yos. Hip-hop music has spawned a whole range of Hip Hop clothing brands like FUBU, Mecca and Phat Farm.

The food world for kids has gone completely wild with old ideas in great new kid fun forms. Yogurt has gone portable and drinkable as Go-gurt. Boring oatmeal has added Dinosaur eggs. Fruit snacks have gone to String Thing and Gushers. Applesauce has gone Rugrats and Blues Clues with bright colors and kid fun flavors. Oreo cookies have become Oreo cereal. And snack foods have gone kid friendly as Lunchables, Handi Snacks and Mootown Snackers.

Summary

The beauty of Trend Walk is not that it provides instant answers for marketing questions or opportunities. It is an experience that frees the marketing mind and gets you to look at the world around you differently, more holistically and comprehensively. It's an activity that enables you to better understand trend and marketing developments in other categories.

Can anyone take you on a Trend Walk? You may think so. But, the disciplines and sensitivities that make people really see -- and too often look past -- what is all around us is the art and skill of Trend Walk. For more information or to plan a Trend Walk that will take you and your business into new dimensions and opportunities, get in touch...

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