

## 10 Cultural Trends for 2012 (And How To Market Accordingly)

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Keeping up with ever-changing consumer habits is critical for a successful business. Economic uncertainty, new technology and the idea of shared responsibility are at the center of key trends that will drive or significantly impact that behavior for the near future, according to a year-end forecast from marketing and communications consulting firm JWT Intelligence, part of the marketing firm J. Walter Thompson.

The conclusions are part of the company's "[10 Trends for 2012](#)," an annual look ahead at what businesses can expect from their consumers.

"We aim to bring the outside in — to help inspire ideas beyond brand, category and consumer conventions and to identify emerging opportunities so they can be leveraged for business gain," said Ann Mack, director of trendspotting for JWT. "Trends, like any complex and dynamic human phenomenon, are not preordained — once they are spotted, they can be shaped."

JWT's seventh annual year-end trends forecast is the result of quantitative, qualitative and desk research conducted throughout the year. The research includes surveys of more than 1,000 adults in the United States and United Kingdom as well as interviewed experts and influencers across sectors including technology, luxury, social responsibility and academia such as Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of [Reddit](#), [Ken Dychtwald, president and chief executive officer of Age Wave](#), Brian House, creative technologist for The New York Times Co. and Kathleen D. Vohs, associate professor of marketing and McKnight Presidential Fellow from the University of Minnesota.

Here is a rundown of this year's key cultural shifts and their implications for marketers.

### **Navigating the new economy**

Brands can't continue waiting for things to go back to the way they were before the economic downturn. That means finding ways to offer more inexpensive products to consumers who now are much more price-conscious. An example is Heinz, which is introducing several reduced sizes of ketchup and mustard packages for just 99 cents.

***What this means for marketers:** Marketers will find new opportunities in creating stripped-down offerings, smaller sizes and otherwise more accessible products and services.*

## **Live a little**

With consumers' increased self-control in recent years has come the desire to splurge on a few things without necessarily having to pay a lot for them. Ultimately, many people would rather have a little of something good, rather than a lot of something mediocre. More consumers will decide there is a time for everything — both restraint and rewards — in order to avoid the feeling that life is passing them by as they spend frugally, eat conscientiously and behave more responsibly.

***What this means for marketers:** Marketing messages can appeal to the growing desire to live a little by discouraging overthinking and encouraging more spontaneous enjoyment of life's pleasures (or your products or services).*

## **Generation go**

Whether it's because they're out of work or just [unhappy with their current job](#), 20-somethings will lead an entrepreneurial charge. This entrepreneurial-minded generation — the largest and most diverse in history — will use the youthful energy once focused on climbing the corporate ladder to forge their own paths to achievement. Enabled by technology that has removed the traditional barriers to starting their own business, more than half of millennials in the U.S. said that if they lose or have trouble finding a job, they'd start their own business, according to a JWT survey.

***What this means for marketers:** If you're a business-to-business marketer, you're soon going to be talking to a new generation of business owners. It may be time to rethink your message and your communication methods.*

## **The rise of shared value**

Rather than simply passing out checks to good causes, many businesses are adopting a new [socially conscious model](#) that combines a for-profit business with nonprofit sensibilities. The goal is to create shared value, a concept that reflects the belief that generating a profit and achieving social progress are not mutually exclusive goals.

***What this means for marketers:** By putting shared value at the center of their strategy, brands can benefit their business, their customers and society at large. By reconsidering products and target demographics, forging partnerships with local groups and improving productivity in the value chain, companies can become a force for positive change while enhancing their long-term competitiveness.*

## **Food as the new eco-issue**

The environmental impact of our food choices is becoming increasingly clearer to consumers. Those in the industry need to [adopt new, greener practices around food](#) as demand spikes, natural resources get squeezed and climate change wreaks havoc on the supply chain. As consumers grow more aware that their everyday food choices make an environmental impact, they will

slowly begin to change their own habits and expect food brands to similarly evolve.

***What this means for marketers:** As environmental impact becomes a more significant consideration factor for shoppers, marketers of all sorts will need to highlight what steps their brand is taking to lessen the impact of their production and distribution — whether by reducing waste, ensuring products are sustainably sourced, supporting green farming practices or helping to drive smarter consumption.*

### **Marriage optional**

While marriage was considered a must for women in the past, that's not the case in today's society. "Happily ever after" is being redefined as a household of one or single motherhood, as many women no longer feel societal pressure to rely on a man for their own well-being. [Single women who were once pitied by their married counterparts](#) are part of a growing demographic living life on their own terms. No longer social outliers, they are increasingly accepted and sometimes envied.

***What this means for marketers:** Marketers must recast their image of single adults. No longer can they afford to bombard single women with images of the happy homemaker. Single women are buying homes, cars and other big-ticket items on their own.*

### **Re-engineering randomness**

In a world dominated by personalized and niche content and experiences, a greater emphasis will be placed on re-introducing randomness, discovery, inspiration and different points of view into our worlds. An example is Airtime, which is set to launch this month and being touted as a random, real-time video chat platform where strangers will be "smashed together."

***What this means for marketers:** Increasingly, breaking through the personalization bubble will become an important way to grab consumers' attention. By providing a dose of the unexpected, brands can inspire consumers who crave discovery, and perhaps find new markets as well.*

### **Screened interactions**

The use of [touchscreen devices](#) will become much more prevalent in the coming year. Interacting with screens in more ways and more places will become a part of everyday behavior for many consumers as technology rapidly advances, costs drop and retailers and marketers find innovative ways to use them.

***What this means for marketers:** Touchscreens can attract customers' attention and provide a great deal of detail about the products and services a customer is most interested in.*

### **Celebrating aging**

Eighty is the new 60. Popular perceptions of aging are changing, with people of all ages taking a more [positive view of growing older](#). This leads to a redefining of when old age starts, and what

the term actually means.

***What this means for marketers:*** More than ever, marketers need to discard old assumptions about how consumers see their own age and that of their elders. While most everyone wants to look and feel young, not everyone will yearn to actually be young or fear getting older. Brands can widen their criteria for models and spokespeople, moving further away from the pretty young things and toward those with more depth and texture from every generation.

### **Objectifying objects**

The digital world has made receiving something you touch and hold more appealing. As a result, the trend of adding "motivational objects" to digital items is one that is set to increase. An example is [Sincerely's postagram app](#), which allows users to turn snapshots into snail-mailed postcards.

***What this means for marketers:*** Marketers need to highlight the enticing qualities of their brand's products, in order to create premium offerings that serve as unique gifts or collectibles.