

New social trends will emerge as US reacts to recession

From sonic fabrics to mining the solar system, the zeitgeist for 2009 is all about being resourceful to make the world a better place, says **Cheryl Swanson**, Toniq

'SURVIVAL OF THE FASTEST' has been a driving socio-cultural macro trend since the late 1990s. Characterised by technology becoming our personal sustenance, it affects all levels of western culture and is rapidly infiltrating the developing world.

Twenty years ago, the annual US spend on food and beverages was \$614 billion; \$2 billion was spent on computers—a ratio of 300 to one. Today, that spending ratio is at parity. We spend as much on technology as we do on our nutritional needs and our lives have been radically transformed.

We find ourselves living at the 'speed of technology', ever more productive and connected, but also disconnecting from our biological rhythms. While we have managed to adapt to 'living fast' over the past decade, we generally feel depleted.

The global economic malaise, coupled with the decline of America as the world's sole superpower, is now jolting us out of our hyper-tasking stupor and compelling us to focus on what really matters. Meanwhile, the election of Barack Obama has begun to imbue the global community with a sense of cautious optimism, a hopeful seedling planted for 'thriving' in the coming decade.

Most consumers have been operating in recession mode since well before the R-word was made official last December. They felt the pain of rising housing, gas and food prices and job losses. They reduced their use of gas and electricity (67%), cut back on out-of-home entertainment (56%), spent less on apparel (55%) and left their cars at home more (54%). After covering essential expenses, Americans are now saving whatever is left. These behaviours are seeding key trends that should play a significant role in marketing plans for 2009.

In a good cause

'Causism' – making a mark through the support of important causes, whether the discovery of resources, research to vanquish disease or planetary recovery – will replace 'consumerism'. People of all ages, genders and backgrounds will reconsider their place in the world – their purpose, contribution and legacy.

There are various brand implications. 'Cause marketing' will move from niche status to a more central place in brand communications. Sustainability will no longer be an option as cause affiliations become prominent for the next few years. Cause marketing, which has been primarily female-focused, will evolve to include men, children and teenagers. Noteworthy examples include: Starbucks (Affinity card), Gap/Amex (Red campaign), Nike (LiveStrong), Campbell's and Revlon (breast cancer awareness).

Fantasy as fuel

A heightened interest in fantasy will propel us into the future as the creative role of daydreaming becomes better understood (Harvard University research has determined that daydreaming is the brain's normal state). Daydreaming and fantasy are the fuel for imagination, the key factor that makes us human and helps us solve/create our futures.

Our fast lives are forcing redefinition of personal and collective tempos, so fantasy – spontaneity, creativity and daydreaming – becomes an antidote to technology. The ability to imagine liberates our creativity and leads to optimism. In the long term, fantasy and imagination will lead to new discoveries and collective problem-solving. Fantasy will ultimately provide the cornerstone to a restored economy as new businesses are reimagined, enabling us to live non-toxically.

Brands that liberate our imaginations and reconnect us with our creativity underscore this trend. One key example is Disney's positioning to adults. Through its ad campaigns using photos by Annie Liebovitz of celebrities in Disney style scenarios, it aims to liberate the "kid who wonders" inside of us.

Art and the creative spirit

A renewed respect for art is helping to unleash our creative spirit by providing new ways to connect beyond social networking sites, texting, email and emerging 'fast' connections. Artists push issues that challenge and enlighten; creativity suggests possible solutions and scenarios. Artists are showing us how to reclaim our



Grown-up fantasy: Disney's campaign using Annie Liebovitz's photos was aimed at adults

'stuff' in compelling ways. For example:

- Sonic fabric: Alyce Santoro's voice- and music-filled fabric is made from reclaimed cassette tapes.
 - Sculpture made from newspapers, cardboard, plastic and cans by artist Steven Siegel.
 - Bel-Air sculpture: French artist Mathieu Lehanneur collaborated with American scientist David Edwards to create a 'clean air sculpture' – a mini mobile greenhouse that inhales polluted air, forcing it through natural filters (plant leaves, roots and a humid bath) to purify it.
- The art resurgence has many business implications. According to Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind*, "an arts degree is the hottest credential in the business world". Some brand examples include:
- Le Méridien Hotels & Resorts, which is

Cheryl Swanson is principal managing partner of Toniq, which, through its proprietary 'Brand Effervescence' process, develops names, positioning and brand essence concepts for clients including Gillette, Pepsi, Unilever and Nestlé.
cheryl@toniq.com



ly haven through transformational elements that let rooms serve multiple functions. Much like an iPhone – which is a phone, camera, mini-computer, GPS and game player – rooms require multi-functional flexibility as we stay home more.

The implications for brands are significant. As budgets tighten, the design ethic going forward will be 'flexible reinvention'. A living room is for cocktails, but also a place where the family gathers for movies, games and reading; seating and tables must be reconfigurable. Bedrooms and dining rooms serve their primary purpose, plus other functions, such as home office. Watch for:

- Low stools and benches that serve both as seating and tables.
- Lamps with several settings and adjustable arms for different needs.
- Sofas that reconfigure, breaking into chairs, daybeds, loungers or sleepers.
- Dining tables transforming into desks.
- Room screens that instantly transform one space into another.

The visual language of "flexible furnishings" will emphasise comfort without harsh lines or angles. We want creature comforts with human-friendly forms. Brand examples include Apple TV.

Science and discovery

A renewed respect for science is burgeoning, based on a collective need to understand how to perpetuate and expand our place in the universe. While we explore inner space and map the human genome for life-saving tools, we are expanding to outer space to discover new resources. What was once science fiction is now just around the corner:

- Harvesting hydrogen from Mars to convert into water.
- Mining the inner solar system for water resources.
- Converting Helium 3 from the moon into alternative fuel.

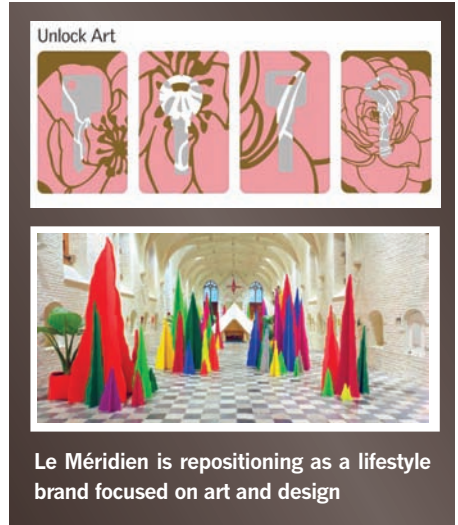
The private sector is leading science expansion, which is fast becoming 'cool' in mainstream culture. Some evidence includes: New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg promising \$100 million to fund stem cell research and Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page fund-

repositioning as a lifestyle brand focused on art and design. It has 'cultural concierges' and room cards with information about nearby cultural events. Its keycards are designed by artists and are considered collectible. Le Méridien hosts art exhibits and lectures so that "when a person leaves the hotel, they have a feeling that their life has been enhanced".

- Designers becoming the artists of business, creating success through 'applied art' – as seen in the success of Karim Rashid's Kurv, Kone and Kruz vacuum cleaners for Dirt Devil.

Home as haven

The harsh realities of the economic downturn are creating a collective need to re-focus on things that really matter, rather than 'stuff', and on connections with family and friends. The doorway of the home marks the way to familiarity, comfort, joy and connection. Home becomes a heaven-



Le Méridien is repositioning as a lifestyle brand focused on art and design

ing resource exploration on the moon.

Brands need to think beyond quarterly financials to focus on the big picture, by exploring alternative life forces that will propel us into the future. Why shouldn't Aquafina lead the search for off-world water sources?

More tangible examples include:

- Café Scientifique cafes and pubs, which are opening across the world, providing lively debates about current science between scientists and aficionados.
- The Discovery, National Geographic and Science channels, which are experiencing record ratings with programmes about scientific developments and space exploration.

Optimism and vitality: 2D to 3D

We have spent a decade being over-scheduled, staring at computer screens, tickling Blackberries and isolated by headsets. Initially, technology made escape seem desirable, but now we aspire to engage in genuine, three-dimensional experiences, versus two-dimensional, virtual lives. There is a desire for memorable, life-affirming experiences – to live 'full-out'. Businesses need to heed these implications.

- Baby boomers want to 'live younger, longer', yet we see evidence of this trend across all age-groups. Everyone wants to be their best self and have the energy to engage in life through high-impact sensory experiences.

2009 trends



● Five years into the blogosphere (which has lost its grass-roots appeal to megablogs) and the rise of 'fast networking' sites (Twitter, Facebook), people want to disconnect and spend time with others. Some brand examples include Ford Mustang (a high-impact, sensorial experience) and Liptons Tea (a healthy vitality drink).

Culture of mobility

Our fast, portable, global lifestyles are creating a culture of 'modern nomads', who metaphorically pitch their tents anywhere as long as they have their gear: mobile phone, laptop, grooming products and change of clothes.

To thrive, our gear requires multi-functionality, must be almost weightless, while our environments need to be free-flowing and without obstruction, allowing us to navigate unimpeded.

Key attributes of this nomadic style are that it is mobile, portable, convenient, free-flowing, light, airy, weightless, global and multi-functional.

The marketing implications cross the spectrum. Interior designers such as Philippe Starck, Karim Rashid and Marc Newsom, and architects such as Rem Koolhaas, Richard Meier and Frank Gehry, understand that we need to create a modern global landscape as free from impediments and 'stuff' as possible.

Brand examples are fast emerging, such as the iPhone – not just a phone, but a streamlined mini-computer that fits in

your pocket; the Clear system, allowing unimpeded flow through airport security; Puma's 96 Hours trainers; and EZ-Pass, which does away with the need to stop to pay tolls on US highways.

Authenticity has been the socio-cultural driver for the past five years and shows no sign of abating. It intersects with several aspects of the culture, from the 'local' food movement to craftsmanship and heritage brands. Authenticity reflects our desire for the 'real' – no hype, no spin and no gimmicks. When money is tight, people want to believe in the integrity of the brands they buy, even if they pay more and buy less 'stuff'.

Time-honoured brands

The brand implications are paramount. Heritage brands are hailed by all generations as authentic because they have stood the test of time. Leveraging this historical pedigree in a modern, relevant context is the key.

Brand examples include the Coca-Cola Designer Series, which leverages the visual equities of the classic brand in a new context by being distributed at select clubs and lounges around the world. The iconic bottle shape has become a 'canvas' for contemporary artists. Burberry, meanwhile, leverages its iconic plaid and logo across a rejuvenated, relevant product line. Levi's employs artist Damien Hirst to leverage the equities of this heritage brand with a controversial artist for a

limited line of T-shirts and jeans. Shaving brand Gillette is passed on from one generation to the next, thanks to its longevity and record of innovation.

Our new era of austerity forces everyone, at every economic level, to budget. This newly forced frugality can also be fun, however, and many consumers are approaching 'belt tightening' in an optimistic, creative manner. For example:

- Reading what we have: instead of making impulse buys, creating reading contests or groups at home to read what's on the shelves. Most people will admit there's a lot there they have forgotten.
- Public spaces: enjoying public spaces - parks, free concerts, art galleries and science museums.
- Repairing versus replacing: repairing becomes a creative endeavour – restoring furniture, rewiring a lamp or making a slipcover for a chair.
- Getting out the sewing machine or knitting needles: creating clothes, throws, pillows or gifts is a rewarding form of personal expression creativity.
- Thrift stores: scavenger hunts for the best finds.
- Coupons: making coupon-collecting fun by creating new ways to get organised. Engaging the entire family makes it fun, rather than a chore.
- Home-made crafts, arts and gifts: involving the whole family in activities ranging from baking cookies as gifts to creating holiday decorations and DIY home accessorising.
- Cheap shopping: buying at mass merchandisers or discounters, such as Target, Daffy's, BlueFly and eBay, which express a sense of style and fun, or finding bargains at online auction sites.

The new environment presents serious challenges – read as opportunities – for marketers. Brands must engage with consumers' new agenda to prosper in the coming years. This means opening a sincere dialogue with customers, inviting them into the innovation process and treating them as meaningful contributors.

Only by taking note of key trends and fostering brand loyalty will the brands of today remain the leaders of tomorrow.



More on 2009 trends
at www.warc.com