



Book 2011

Trendspotting for the Next Decade

Richard Laermer
McGraw-Hill, 2008

Recommendation

This entertaining book touches on multiple areas that will affect your life during the next decade. However, it is not set up to be a serious treatise on future trends, but a rambling ride through them. Just an alert to those who are sensitive to strong language, the expletives are not deleted here. Nonetheless, Richard Laermer writes with charm and bouncy style in this fun, somewhat informative read. *BooksInShort* recommends it as more of a witty, light-hearted guide to the future than as a substantive business road map. While you will need to take this advice with a grain of salt, you will find some tasty morsels along the way.

Take-Aways

- Trends indicate broad changes that are difficult to spot in the beginning, but visible to everyone in the long run.
- Technology will continue to change faster than people can adapt to it.
- People will slow down their lives. For example, they'll take time to make decisions, rather than rushing forward at top speed.
- More people will work from home as the workplace and home environments mesh.
- Flexibility and results will rule in the next decade.
- To put the media to work for you, mine every source you can find to get solid information. Always consider the source of what you read and see.
- Customers are tired of hype and dishonesty. Be honest and upfront in all your advertising and communications.
- Online identities are merging with real identities in unexpected ways.
- Daily language will become more direct and less dependent on made-up terms.
- People will expect more from their leaders, so lead like it matters – because it does.

Summary

Trendspotting for Rookies

Before digging too deeply into what might be in store for 2011 and beyond, getting a few basic facts straight about what's coming in the future is a worthwhile exercise. These aren't hard and fast predictions, but they serve as general ideas about some areas that will shape your future.

- **You “will work while...sleeping”** – The technology for this is already available.
- **“Self-involvement evolves into an art form”** – Everything will be about you and that's okay.
- **“Slow attention span takes precedence”** – The breakneck pace at which decisions are made will begin to slow down.
- **“Customer service finally becomes law”** – To survive, companies will have to pay better attention to customers' demands.
- **“Look forward to turn-of-the-decade syndrome”** – 2011 will be the year for a new “reboot,” just as 2000 was.
- **“There's a movement to stay at home”** – As work and home overlap, many people will naturally want to stay home rather than commute.

“Perhaps the biggest difference between the ancient art of fortune-telling and modern futurism is that the fortune-tellers sought to identify events that were inevitable, while futurists – even ones like me who scoff at the notion – are interested in revealing the contingencies of the future.”

This is just the beginning of the changes in store for the next decade. Literally hundreds of other factors will influence your company and your private life, which will increasingly overlap. As you examine those areas, keep in mind that these trends form a general map of the future, rather than a specific forecast or prediction.

“Human choice and action can make the difference between one future and another.”

Flexibility will be increasingly important beyond 2011. Even as individuals try to slow their lives back down, most processes will move too fast to allow you to become stagnant or mired in old methods. To get the results your work will demand, become like the cartoon character Gumby, so you can flex, stretch and bend into new kinds of thinking. You’ll need flexibility about where you work. In the past, the workplace was boring and far from your home environment, but the trend for the next 10 years is toward work as an extension of home, or at least as a place with similar comforts. Expect this trend to continue, as telecommuting will come to dominate certain sectors.

More Trendspotting – Beyond the Basics

Following trends and getting the most from them requires becoming an early adopter. If you see a trend developing, join it rather than waiting for others to come along. That’s how to maximize the trend for your benefit. To become adept at spotting trends:

- Become an expert at mining information from various media sources.
- Get cozy with the people your business is trying to reach and heed their advice.
- Identify ways to achieve your business goals and check results against reality.
- Look for answers that give you goals to work toward.
- Share information with your target audience to make sure you’re on track.
- Influence trends by creating news media content of your own.
- Make sure your message steers you in the direction you intend.
- Use expert sources to hone your message.

“The challenge is not to predict the future so much as to show readers how to think about and forecast and chart possibilities for the future.”

Understand the difference between a short fad that doesn’t create transformation and a long-term trend. Trends are more widespread and point to big changes. Be ready, because sometimes these changes follow planet-altering events (such as September 11, 2001). You can’t prepare for such things, but in the calm after the storm, you’ll see that it cleared the table for broad changes.

Becoming a Smart Seller

Some corporations have raised the bar, and increasingly savvy customers now expect a certain level of caring and support. However, other companies remain entrenched in the old ways of working with customers. If that includes your firm, turn it around so that it provides the level of service you demand when you’re the consumer. If you don’t, your customers will buy from someone else. Take care with how you talk to customers. In the next decade, consumers will be even more aware than ever when a company or an individual isn’t shooting straight. Recovering from such errors will be much more difficult. A slick ad campaign may find its way into everyone’s psyche, but a highly publicized mistake takes much longer to erase. This applies to various forms of lying. Exaggeration is one thing, but corporate lies will rarely go unexposed. If something your company does requires a public explanation, talk about it promptly and candidly. People always have been adept at recognizing dishonesty, but with the increase in information and the ease of access to it, being forthright in dealing with any situation will be even more crucial.

“The future of the future is a huge idea. It scares...me.”

Most people can sense the hidden meaning or “fnord” behind a message. Robert Anton Wilson coined the term fnord to refer to “the stuff between words – where we hide all the intention.” People sense fnords and advertisers use them to communicate meaning they wouldn’t say outright. Some fnords are intentional and some aren’t. The key is to know what the public thinks of your message. If it hides a fnord, it may not convey your intended meaning. When customers become aware of a duplicitous meaning, your ad loses power and they lose respect for your company. For example, be careful about stressing your products’ health benefits, unless they are truly substantial. People have become more suspicious that corporate America does not really care about their health, so such promises rarely ring true.

“Informed people wish to be told what’s up and are more inclined to believe those who don’t pander.”

Although customers are important, all customers are not created equal. Some customers cost companies untold sums because they use more valuable resources (primarily employee time) without adequate return. Of course, admitting that to your customers is unwise. In 2007, Sprint cut off cell phone service to people who called customer service too often. Even though Sprint’s decision was backed by sound business reasons, its competitors had a field day swearing that they’d never treat customers that way. Still, understanding the truth about the cost of certain customers can help you identify new ways to avoid big expenses. Instead of publicizing the results like Sprint did, figure out a way to use the information to change your business model.

“Within its limits, the Internet has made each of us his or her own Creator.”

In a world where aging baby boomers drive marketing and profits, the trend will be toward products that improve the quality of life, not those that help people live longer. Generally, people don’t want to admit that they’re going to die one day. They just want to enjoy the time they do have, and that will be reflected in the things they buy – and sell.

Technology and the Next Decade

Everything changes; technology changes most of all. Not too long ago, “digital audio tape” (DAT) was poised to be the next big thing in recorded music. But how many people ever had a DAT recorder? The iPod and mp3s now dominate the music industry, but you can count on that changing in the future.

“An audience that does not understand you will not buy from you.”

E-mail communication is another area of rapid change. Your inbox now gets packed full of information you may once have requested, but now it is in your way. A move toward fewer such communications is under way. E-mail is dying. Teens prefer instant messaging and see e-mail as something “old people” use. With so many ways to communicate, people find that most of the messages bombarding them are useless. Upcoming devices will prescreen the people who are allowed to send you messages. Not everyone needs to communicate with you. In the future, consumers will begin to retake control of their inboxes.

“In the next decade, pay careful attention to your timing! Your brand’s lifespan will be finite, so be careful of limited shelf life.”

Identity theft is already a huge problem, but the ability to create an entirely new you online also carries another set of issues. The increasing number of people who “exist” in online communities, such as Facebook and MySpace, make it obvious that identity is becoming relative. Real identity and online identity have already collided in numerous court cases. In seconds, total strangers can damage your reputation with far-reaching consequences and no accountability.

“The creators of products that allow us to live better will win out over creators of those that make us live longer.”

When your computer is down and you can’t get online, do you feel disconnected? Lost? Sick? Many people do. Studies show that a large percentage of computer users can’t go more than two weeks without getting online and most can’t bear to be offline for more than a week. Computers and the Internet are so pervasive that when access is cut off, bereft users become like people at the mall who step onto a stopped, broken escalator, and need a few seconds to realize that they can just walk up or down like they can on any staircase.

“It doesn’t matter how chipper we act day to day; we’re facing an uphill climb that we did to ourselves by living well.”

For this reason among others, in 2011, people will start to put down their cell phones, PDAs and the other devices that run their lives now, and start experiencing what’s really happening around them. Commerce will always offer a new toy to obsess over, but that doesn’t make it essential.

That’s Not Entertainment...Anymore!

Hollywood award shows are going to begin to lose their appeal (and already have if you check recent ratings for some of them) as people begin to give themselves more accolades than they give entertainers. Getting a real reward for doing great at work will become the norm.

“This is our clarion call to look beyond...subjective self-awareness; existential dread compels us to find out exactly how we should relate when we are presented with drastic change.”

In the years ahead, becoming well-known, or even famous, will matter to you and your company. Learn to use fame advantageously. Plenty of tools will be available to help you direct and control your image. In public, be consistent, specialize and make lots of contacts. Your payoff will be increased fame. In terms of entertainers, people in the 2010s will care more about the celebrities who are most like them. Fake celebrity will stop being entertaining. With technology, you will be able to talk to celebrities and you’ll know more about them than ever. The more they seem to be like you, the greater their appeal will be. Remember how out of fashion lying will become. The same holds for fake celebrities, who are easy to see through and will become obsolete.

Get the Media on Your Side

“If you take the news of the day and hold it up for a hard look, eventually you can see how transparent it is.” When you view any news story, first consider the source. Who is sponsoring it? Who gains from it being in the public eye (aside from the advertisers)? When you depend on the media for your worldview, you risk losing your objectivity and independence. The solution is to read and view different sources to get a more complete picture. Don’t limit yourself to a favorite network or a particular news source. Branch out and form your own opinions. The importance of the press will decline in the next decade. You already can gather information as fast as the press can deliver it or sometimes faster. What is left for it to tell you, aside from its spin on the news? Dependence on the media for facts has already faded and will fade more. Why do you need someone else to tell you what you can find out yourself?

Language and Life

As in every decade, language – the words and catch phrases in daily use – will change, but none of the changes will last. Many words used today have no inherent meaning. A lot of this parlance is tied to corporations. Everyone knows what it means to “Google” something, and people have accepted that company’s presence in their lives, along with other brand names disguised as new words. The trend will be toward phrases with meaning. People have texted and IM’d so much that their words often say nothing. Expect a change, because human beings can’t keep communicating so poorly.

Society’s Evolution

Changing technology has a societal impact. Even Apple, with its hip styling and snazzy marketing, is affected by the marketing rule, “With success comes the inevitable erosion of hipness.” Remember when Microsoft was slammed for trying to monopolize your Web browsing by imbedding Internet Explorer with Windows? Apple was always the hip upstart that surely would not do such things. But witness the iPhone, a technology platform owned by Apple that requires customers to use Apple’s versions of all sorts of software. iTunes also has set requirements, another example of the same change in a once-hip company. By being successful, the hip has become the unhip.

“The next decade, the one that rises above mediocrity, will be the one where people begin to count not their blessings, per se, but the wonder of it all...one that says, heck, it’s amazing we’re even still around.”

People have lost faith in leadership. From President George Bush to corporate CEOs tainted by greed and scandal, people have gotten tired of so-called leaders who fall short of even their own stated positions. Teens will remain self-centered, but even they will expect more from their leaders. In the next decade, the citizenry will go

back to demanding better leadership and in turn will begin to treat its leaders with respect once more.

About the Author

Richard Laermer is the author of six nonfiction guides to business, including *Trendspotting* and *Full Frontal PR*. He also is the founder and CEO of a PR agency.
