



# **THE PAST YEARS' NON-OBVIOUS TREND REPORTS**

**(2011-2012)**

# OVERVIEW:

## How to Read These Past Trend Reports



“THE EVENTS OF THE PAST CAN BE MADE TO PROVE ANYTHING IF THEY ARE ARRANGED IN A SUITABLE PATTERN.”

—A. J. P. Taylor, historian and journalist

There was a moment several years ago when I was on stage after having just presented one of my trend reports and a gentleman stood up to ask me a question. “It must be easy,” he started “to publish your trend report when you get to change them every year. How do you know whether any of them were actually right?”

His question was a fair one. After all, there is plenty of evidence to suggest experts routinely miss predictions and are often just plain wrong. What makes my method or the past trends any different? Of course, every author thinks his book is brilliant, just as all parents imagine their child to be a genius. What is the truth?

In this section, you’ll see a candid, unedited review of every one of my previously predicted trends from the past four years of the *Non-Obvious Trend Report*. While some of the descriptions have been edited for space considerations, none of the intentions or meanings have been updated or revisited.

Instead, each trend is accompanied by my own Trend Longevity Rating, which aims to measure how much the trend, as originally described, still applies or has value today in 2015. Predictably, the 2014 trends fared better than the 2011 trends, but the process of going backward and taking an honest look at past research was illuminating for me, and I hope it will be for you as well.

In assessing these trends, my aim was to treat them in as unbiased a way as possible, and where something was wrong or not quite right, I tried to assess and grade it truthfully. For each trend report, there is also a link at the end of the corresponding appendix where you can go back and see that full trend report with no edits, as it was originally presented.

It may be a hard line, but I have done my best to draw it authentically and without embarrassment or defensiveness. If there is anything that has helped me get better at doing this year after year, it's the act of reviewing, grading and critiquing past trends—especially after some of them turn out to be not quite right. I hope you enjoy this journey back in time and the ideas it sparks for which trends stood the test of time and which didn't.

# APPENDIX A: 2011 Trends



## THE BACKSTORY

The first edition of the *Non-Obvious Trend Report* was inspired by five years of blogging. I released it exclusively in a visual presentation format and heavily featured marketing and social media trends that I had written about throughout 2010. The trends were far more limited in scope than later editions of the trend report and featured less description and less actionable advice. They were also not separated into subcategories, but instead presented as a full list of 15 marketing and social media trends that mattered. Each trend featured a short description, along with some quick tips for brands on how to use the lessons in the report to power their marketing strategy.

## RETROSPECTIVE - HOW ACCURATE WAS THIS REPORT?

The report was one of the first to predict the rise in importance of content marketing through curation and also predicted the rapid growth of real-time customer service through social media. It analyzed the increasing number of marketing campaigns featuring employees as a sign of corporate humanity, and introduced the idea of how social media was making unreachable celebrities more connected and approachable. Overall, there were relatively few big misses or trends that completely imploded or reversed themselves. The biggest idea from the report was undoubtedly the first trend *Likeonomics*, which ultimately inspired me to write a book of the same name (released in 2012) to build the idea out further.

# THE 2011 TRENDS: RECAP AND ANALYSIS

## 1. Likeonomics

Brands, products and services succeed by being more human, mission driven and personally likeable through their policies and people, gaining an advantage over less-human competitors.

*Examples Used:* Ford Explorer Facebook launch and Innocent Drinks

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*The fundamental truth of human relationships underlying this trend continued to grow in business this past year as more brands focused on being more human, building personal connections with customers and trying to be more consistently likeable.*

## 2. Approachable Celebrity

As social media allows direct access to previously unreachable celebrities, politicians and professional athletes, we increasingly see their real personalities (for better or worse) and can engage with them as real people.

*Examples Used:* Cisco's "Do You Flip?" campaign and tweeting celebrities

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*This direct connection to celebrities has continued to grow as YouTube creates more celebrities who have huge personal followings, and notable people from all industries continue to share their real personalities and opinions through social media without filters or PR spokespeople.*

## 3. Desperate Simplification

Information overload causes consumers to desperately seek simplicity, leading them to aim for more balance through reduction activities like de-friending and actively seeking out new products and sites to help them simplify everything.

*Examples Used:* iPod, Tumblr, Animoto, Amazon, and Path

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B-**

*While “infobesity,” as information overload is increasingly being called, continues, the desperate need for simplicity has given way somewhat to more tools that focus on optimizing or curating instead of just culling friendships or content. As a result, this trend continues to matter, but the level of desperation from consumers doesn’t have the same intensity it once did in past years.*

**4. Essential Integration**

Marketers’ biggest problem continues to be integrating efforts, which can be highly difficult and lack good examples, yet the biggest successes of the past year, in terms of award-winning marketing programs, feature a new level of integration that is still rare in the marketing world.

*Examples Used:* Old Spice Guy and Best Buy’s Twelforce

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*Over the past four years, integration has become an even greater issue for marketers and one that most struggle with on a daily basis—yet there are also more tools and platforms enabling this to happen more easily. This makes it still a trend that matters, but one that is less urgent, problematic and lacking in solutions.*

**5. Rise of Curation**

Brands increasingly use curation as a much-needed filter to help find and bring together useful or entertaining content in an effort to win more trust and attention from consumers.

*Examples Used:* Paper.li custom newspapers and the Pharma and Healthcare Social Media Wiki

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*The past four years have delivered an even bigger explosion in content. The algorithms are getting smarter but are not yet smart enough to collect content into truly meaningful arrangements. As a result, curation has become an even bigger part of the content marketing strategy for brands, as well as a method for individuals to share their expertise or passion about any topic online.*

## 6. Visualized Data

To make sense of a real-time stream of information on any topic, more and more event managers, news organizations and brands are turning to visualization as a way to leverage their data, better understand it and tell a clearer story.

*Examples Used:* The 52nd Annual Grammy Awards and CNN's Magic Election Wall

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*While data visualization is still frequently used, the widespread overuse of infographics over the past several years has weakened the focus on visuals as a way of using data to tell stories. Instead, more companies are combining the idea of visualization with better user interfaces, gamified design and narrative data storytelling to broaden their methods for getting value out of analyzing data and making it more shareable.*

## 7. Crowdsourced Innovation

Brands turn to crowdsourced platforms to collect ideas from consumers in exchange for the reward of recognition, financial earning and simply being heard by the brands they purchase from every day.

*Examples Used:* My Starbucks Idea and Kickstarter

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*With the growth of Quirky, Kaggle and other platforms for everything from idea generation to problem solving, this trend has certainly continued to grow. My original definition was narrow and focused on brands and consumers, but this has given way to larger ecosystems and marketplaces that exist today with only limited brand support or sponsorship.*

## 8. Instant PR & Customer Service

Real-time contact becomes essential as communications teams focus on instant PR to manage social crises and augment customer service with methods for dealing with problems in the here and now.

*Examples Used:* JetBlue's big media hit and Zappos' Golden Philosophy

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*When I first wrote this trend, the idea of customer service through social channels was mostly driven by negative situations and the need for*

*instant PR. Over the past several years, this has exploded into social customer care, a field that almost every large business is investing dollars and time in to figuring out how to do right.*

## **9. App-fication of the Web**

As more innovative apps let consumers bypass the web for transactions and leisure, a large number of activities from online banking to online shopping will shift to apps instead of the web.

*Examples Used:* Flipboard “The Web Is Dead. Long Live the Internet” from *Wired* magazine.

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: C+**

*There is no denying that the prevalence of apps has grown dramatically over the past several years, but idea of “app-fication,” where everything is done through apps, has not quite come to pass. Instead, responsive design and the focus on making everything work for multiple screens has made apps just one part of the overall multiscreen experience most consumers have.*

## **10. Re-Imagining Charity**

Brands and entrepreneurs create innovative new models for social good, reinventing how people can do everything from donating money to sharing time and specific skills.

*Examples Used:* Jumo and Yoxi.tv

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B-**

*The year when I first spotlighted this trend was one where the pace of growth in how nonprofits and charities were using digital tools was explosive. This speed has slowed somewhat as many of these same organizations shifted from doing something completely new online to focusing on how to optimize their efforts and gain better results in more recent years.*

## **11. Employees As Heroes**

Brands of all sizes aim to demonstrate their humanity by putting a spotlight on employees as the solvers of problems and creators of innovation. Organizations feature employee stories as anchor points to describe what the company does in the world.



*Examples Used:* Intel’s “Sponsors of Tomorrow” campaign and IBM’s Smarter Planet initiative

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*The past few years have added several large brands to this trend beyond the (mostly) tech companies like Intel and IBM that I initially featured. Yet the hero aspect of it has dissipated somewhat as brands start to take a softer and more consumer-centric approach to spotlighting employees. Those same employees are still an important and human part of the brand story, but they are presented more often now in terms of how hard they work, what value they bring to customers and why they are passionate about what they do.*

**12. Locationcasting**

More consumers choose to broadcast their locations, enabling brands to tailor messages to a specific location and create more opportunities to engage their customers in real life.

*Examples Used:* Foursquare, Gowalla and Scvngr.com

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B-**

*Mobile marketing is growing rapidly, as are methods for geotargeting offers for customers. This still has not become a commonplace activity, though, and it will take time for consumers to get over their privacy concerns or fears of being geospammed as they walk down the street.*

**13. Brutal Transparency**

Aggressive honesty will lead to edgier (and more effective) marketing as brands reveal an unexpected aggressive honesty that consumers welcome.

*Examples Used:* Domino’s Pizza’s “Oh Yes We Did” campaign and Southwest Airlines’ policy to eliminate baggage fees

**2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A-**

*The growth of social platforms and increase in content marketing is allowing brands to share more honest truths about every aspect of their business than ever before. Combined with that, customer expectations are growing around the basic level of transparency they expect and brands need to meet the demand—even if the truths shared don’t seem quite as brutal as they may once have.*

## 14. Addictive Randomness

Brands will increasingly use the addictive power of random content to engage consumers and this will lead to more consumer-generated campaigns where people can add content to a central archive that anyone can browse.

*Examples Used:* Red Cross' "Why the Heck Should I Give?" campaign and PostSecret.com

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: C**

*This principle still applies in a limited scope to campaigns featuring a random sort of interface or user experience, however it never quite became large enough to be truly considered a trend lasting far beyond 2011.*

## 15. Culting of Retail

The best retailers create a passionate following of users who not only buy products they like, but also rave about their experiences so completely that they will inspire a significant portion of their social networks to try the experience for themselves.

*Examples Used:* Groupon and Gilt

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A-**

*If anything, the rise of social media has enabled this culting of retail to happen even more frequently. New boutique services and websites pop up nearly every day, and the ones that survive rely on their most enthusiastic customers, whose willingness share their brand passion online influences others to become customers as well.*

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# APPENDIX B: 2012 Trends



## THE BACKSTORY

This second year of the trend report featured a broader look at business beyond marketing and brought together the worlds of corporate marketing, charitable causes, the marketing of death and more. Like the first report, it was only released exclusively in visual presentation format online. This report tackled the sensitive yet emerging field of the digital afterlife of loved ones who have passed on, as well as the rising sense of social loneliness that people felt. In contrast to my 2011 report, the theme of this one moved a little further away from marketing campaigns and took a more human tone as many of the trends featured cultural or consumer-based trends instead of those inspired by what brand marketers were already doing.

## RETROSPECTIVE - HOW ACCURATE WAS THIS REPORT?

More than any other year, the 2012 report had a few big hits and several big misses. The overall trends that centered on the growth of humanity in companies and consumers worked out well. This report was one of the first to explore the potential of big data to impact everything from optimizing supply chain logistics to measuring and quantifying every aspect of our lives. On the flip side, the trends that made bigger bets on niche concepts like *Pointillist Filmmaking* or *Social Artivism* did not quantifiably catch fire, either in adoption or in the behaviors they described.

# THE 2012 TRENDS: RECAP & ANALYSIS

## 1. Corporate Humanism

Companies find their humanity as they create more consumer-friendly policies and practices, spending more time listening to customers and encouraging employees to more publicly represent their companies.

*Examples Used:* Aviva, Ally Bank, Domino's Pizza and Best Buy

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*If there is one trend that perhaps describes the past decade of corporate evolution, it is this one. Every year there are new signs of how companies are finding their humanity and avoiding the facelessness that once used to be a hallmark of business.*

## 2. Ethnomimicry

Ethnographic analysis of how people interact in the real world inspires new social tools or products that mimic human behavior and social interaction, and fit our lives.

*Examples Used:* Google+, Emotion Lighting and Microsoft Kinetic

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*I am keenly aware that any trend which used Google+ as an example can't be scored particularly high as a matter of principle, however this idea of companies watching human interaction in the real world and tailoring products and services to mimic those behaviors is still a common design principle and frequently results in valuable and useful products or services.*

## 3. Social Loneliness

Despite online social connections, people feel a real-world sense of loneliness, causing them to seek deeper friendships instead of many superficial ones. As a result, people seek new ways of knowing friends beyond their latest tweet.

*Examples Used:* Toyota Venza's "This Is Living" campaign and Couchsurfing.com

#### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*This sense of social loneliness is still present with interactions online, and it is a concern particularly for teens and adolescents, but there is far greater awareness of the issue along with more innovation from startup products and services that connect the digital world more deeply with the real world.*

#### **4. Pointillist Filmmaking**

Named after the painting form using millions of dots to create larger images, this trend describes a form of collaborative filmmaking where a large number of short clips are merged together in order to tell a broader story through video.

*Examples Used:* Mont Blanc's Beauty of a Second Challenge and One Day on Earth

#### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: C**

*This trend was an example of an overly fancy concept that ended up being too limited in scope to really become an impactful trend over the long term. The experience of writing this and reviewing it years later, though, was a perfect lesson in the importance of making sure that an idea is big enough to truly accelerate in subsequent years. This one was not.*

#### **5. Measuring Life**

A growing range of tracking tools offer individualized data to monitor and measure all areas of your life to allow you to track your own health, measure your social influence and set goals.

*Examples Used:* Jawbone Up and Klout

#### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*What was a big idea back in 2012 is now mainstream as new wearable devices are seemingly launched every week and the Internet of Things dominates headlines among the many technology trends that matter for the future. While much of that growth to date has been in the areas of health and fitness, other industries are becoming more active and will be launching their own measurement and tracking devices the coming year.*

## 6. Co-Curation

Curation gets more collaborative as amateurs and experts combine forces online to add their unique points of view and bring together multiple angles of every issue.

*Examples Used:* Storyful & Futurity

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B+**

*Curation continued to be one of the biggest trends in online content over the past few years, however this idea of co-curation and the central role of collaboration as a part of curation activities online never quite dominated in the way that this trend predicted. Instead, tools make it easier for anyone to curate information more simply and individually without taking the extra time that collaboration sometimes requires.*

## 7. Charitable Engagement

More charities rethink their focus on quick donations and instead actively promote participation through gaming and other methods of behavioral engagement.

*Examples Used:* WaterForward.org and Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*While charities and nonprofits continue to find more ways to engage donors proactively in their efforts, this trend predicted a dramatic shift in the industry that didn't quite come to pass over the past several years. More platforms to allow for convenient donation collection and the ease of online publishing actually led more smaller nonprofits to focus on the fundraising side of the equation for the short term, and on engagement only in the longer term.*

## 8. Medici Marketing

Inspired by the book *The Medici Effect*, this trend describes how thinking from multiple disciplines is combined to make marketing more engaging, creative or useful.

*Examples Used:* The Creators Project and Albam's *Factories* book

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B+**

*The name was a bit limiting to describe the scope of this trend, however the idea that marketing was becoming more of a melting pot for*

*people from nontraditional backgrounds including journalism and art certainly has continued throughout the last several years and for the foreseeable future.*

## **9. Digital Afterlife**

Over the past year, more companies have started to focus on the digital afterlife, creating tools, education and services to help manage all the data that loved ones leave behind after they die.

*Examples Used:* 1000memories.com (since acquired by Ancestry.com) and Aftersteps.com

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**

*This is the perfect type of frustrating trend prediction, that always seems to be on the cusp of emerging as a mainstream idea but never quite makes it. Over the past several years, there is always a steady drumbeat of stories and attention on this idea of the digital afterlife, but it rarely translates into something bigger.*

## **10. Real-Time Logistics**

Tech-savvy businesses use real-time conversation in social media to generate insights that help with supply chain and logistical planning to eliminate wastage and maximize profits.

*Examples Used:* Walmart Labs and SAP's social supply chain

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*Supply chain software continues to get more and more sophisticated as large retailers and other distributors continue to implement new tools to get better forecasts and leverage social conversation data to run their businesses better.*

## **11. Social Activism**

The intersection between art and activism known increasingly as *artivism* starts to get social as more artists see social tools as a way to reach more people and create greater social impact.

*Examples Used:* Activist Film Festival and the Estria Foundation's Water Writes Project

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B-**

*Art is still used frequently for activism and social media continues to amplify it, but this trend never accelerated beyond several interesting examples. Even today, there are examples of this same principle, but not enough to make this a top-rated trend.*

## **12. Civic Engagement 2.0**

A growing range of digital tools allows people to engage more actively with local governments on everything from reporting potholes to offering suggestions for improving their communities.

*Examples Used:* CitySourced and Give a Minute

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B+**

*Though civic engagement hasn't quadrupled year after year, these tools to allow for deeper citizen engagement continue to grow and be adopted by more and more people. Though there hasn't yet been mass consolidation or a tipping point in usage, a growing number of tech-savvy cities are leading the way to help this trend continue to accelerate into the mainstream.*

## **13. Tagging Reality**

Better-quality mobile cameras allow developers to create tools that can tag any object in reality to unlock interactive content.

*Examples Used:* Layar and Sony SmartAR

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: C**

*This was a perfect example of the type of trend that may have been better explored as an element of a broader trend. Alone, it described a few isolated efforts, but over the course of several years, the trend never quite accelerated as quickly as I first described.*

## **14. ChangeSourcing**

Crowdsourcing itself is evolving beyond information sharing to a point where people can use the collaborative power of the crowd to achieve personal, social or political change.

*Examples Used:* Self-reported clinical trials and Peerbackers.com

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: B**



*The basic idea behind this trend was focused on how crowdsourcing was moving beyond information and into action as people tapped the power of crowds to achieve real things. This trend continued with multiple new sites and efforts using it in past few years.*

## **15. Retail Theater**

In the coming year, more retail stores will create unique experiences using the principles of theater to engage customers with memorable experiences.

*Examples Used:* Puma Creative Factory and Villa Sofa

### **2015 Trend Longevity Rating: A**

*Over the past several years, retailers have tried to get even more theatrical to combat the dangers of showrooming and the rise of online retail. If anything, this is making retail experiences even more interactive and dramatic than before.*

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