



January is the month where we as researchers and close observers of consumer trends often dust off our respective crystal balls and contemplate the future. Surely the latter half of 2008 witnessed a tumultuous shift in consumer confidence and attitudes, as well as in the fundamentals of our economic system. The impact of these seismic shifts is only just starting to be felt by all of us.

Combine these phenomena with demographic changes – long in the making – and surely we aren't void of many prognostications of the years ahead. Here are five key trends that I will be watching in the year ahead.

1) Zooming Ahead vs. Cocooning. With more baby boomers entering the lifestage that traditionally has shown people slow down and ease into a more sedentary life of leisure, I've done a fair amount of work to test the hypothesis that this group will follow the life patterns of those generations that came before them. In sharp contradiction to what one may assume, The Godspell generation has rejected the notion of "God's Waiting Room," as "retirement" has been redefined. Those that came of age in the '60s and '70s have displayed a greater propensity to remain active and relevant in their avocations and vocations as they stay healthier and expect to live longer than previous generations. With this we've seen the emergence of "adventure travel," the pursuit of "unique experiences" and a more activist approach towards free time that have a variety of implications on the consumer choices this generation will make.

However, juxtaposed against this "zoomer" mentality is the phenomenon that Faith Popcorn termed "cocooning." This is defined simply as a desire to stay closer to home and to embrace more tightly defined communities, often around closest friends and family. Amidst economic uncertainty, it will be interesting to see how these two

ostensibly contradicting values flesh out for the boomer generation.

2) Digital Values and the A.D.D.

Generation. The rampant diffusion of digital technology and "just in time" information flow have fed both a thirst for us as a society to be constantly updated with greater degrees of more detailed information, while simultaneously depriving us of the very thing these solutions were intended to provide – more time. Countless surveys have shown Americans today, despite the informational innovations, feel more time starved than any generation before. There have been several that have put on the Nostradamus hat and predicted the demise of traditional media, while others have remained steadfast in their belief that the likes of magazines and newspapers will continue to remain a valued refuge that leaves the consumer ultimately in control of the messaging that is chosen to be consumed. Be sure to stay tuned on this one. Just when we think it will be figured out, the next solution looking for a problem will emerge in warp speed.

3) The Minority Majority. It has been documented in our lifetime that Caucasian America will become the minority in this country. Many may believe this to be true after the success of the Obama campaign. In my opinion, the success of the campaign was more about the recognition of a diversity of values in this country, and the realization that traditional institutions are not immune to change. Our country was founded on the principal that this was a land of opportunity. Marketers will need to understand this more than ever in the coming years. And that means there will be a need for research to segment consumers by their attitudes, behaviors and cultural mores to meet these changing needs.

4) The New Frugality Means Value Not Cheap. It will take more than the collapse of the housing and credit markets to wean the emerging generation of "Entitled Americans" off of a pursuit of luxury and status. In a country with a negative personal savings

rate, where an "entry level luxury" car is not out of the grasp of lower middle class Americans and where I recently found a Liz Claiborne outlet just off a non-descript I-80 exit in the middle of Missouri, we aren't all going to be shopping at the dollar store. That being said, those marketers that can differentiate themselves by providing a true value message, while still delivering quality, will find themselves ahead of the pack that clings to a belief in unadulterated conspicuous consumption. And for those who believe the truly wealthy are indeed different, I beg you to dust off your copy of the seminal study, "The Millionaire Next Door."

5) The Rebirth of the Entrepreneurial Spirit in the Wake of Institutional Failure. In the aftermath of the Enrons and Tycos of the world, and amidst the rubble that was Wall Street, Americans are losing faith in large, monolithic institutions. Just this morning I read an article in the newspaper about a group of angry New York Mets fans that wanted to re-name the yet to be opened Citi Field to "Taxpayer Field." This was in recognition of the recent government bailout of CitiGroup, and the fact that if the new ballpark was filled to capacity it could not accommodate the 53,000 former Citi employees that received pink slips for the holidays. Waning consumer trust of large corporations spells opportunities for small businesses that can dig deeper to understand and humanely service their customers.



MRA President **Jon Last** is president of Sports and Leisure Research Group, a White Plains, NY-based full-service research and marketing consultancy, servicing the sports, travel, leisure and media industries. He can be reached at jl原因@sportsandleisureresearch.com.