

# 12 broad (but cherry-picked) trends

 By [Dion Chang](#) and [Raleen Bagg](#)

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Our selection of trends is broad - but cherry-picked - to give you a sense of what the trends are, across a wide variety of industries.

This trend selection is a precursor to a more in-depth, annual trend report called *The State We're In*, which Flux launches in February as a visual presentation in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Aren't you curious to know, what state we're in?

## 1. Data pollution and the rise of the Buddhist geek

From the daily barrage of emails to the detritus of social media over sharing, we're producing data on a massive scale. It's slowly dawning on us that, just as the industrial revolution produced environmental damage, we too are polluting our virtual worlds, becoming counterproductive professionally as well as having a detrimental impact on our personal lives. As a result, a cyber self-help industry is emerging. "Digital Detox" is the new buzzword and the concept of Buddhist geeks the rather odd manifestation. Courses and conferences that aim to connect, and balance, our spiritual beings with our virtual existence are mushrooming. Forget aligning your chakras, hard drive deep-cleansing is the new service industry about to explode.

## 2. Secrecy vs Privacy

Big data collection is the name of the game - ask any government intelligence department. Technology has enabled the collection of vast amounts of data which may or may not be used but is captured "just in case". The motivation is homeland security but citizens globally are not convinced; especially when they've discovered that their social media platforms are being monitored. The fine line between state security and personal privacy are being blurred and it is a bitter pill to swallow when the need for transparency is not reciprocated - I.e. the Protection of Information Bill.

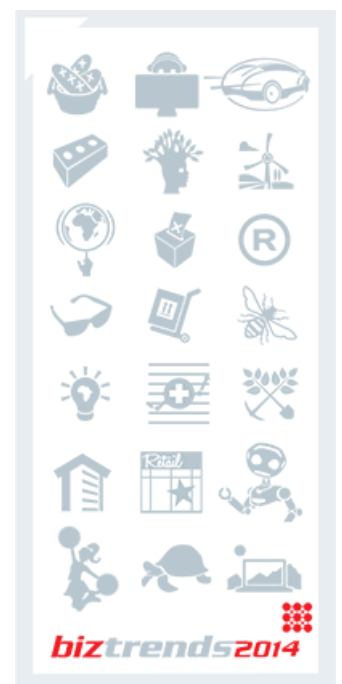
The fact that retailers now also track your in-store movements (not to mention smart TVs that track what you watch) all in the name of providing a "better customer experience" simply creates the feeling that Big Brother is observing us 24/7. Make way for more Edward Snowden's of the world who believe that the line between secrecy and privacy should be more clearly defined.

## 3. Millennial Martyrs (the big data backlash)

Edward Snowden sacrificed everything for his beliefs, as did Aaron Swartz and Chelsea (Bradley) Manning who TIME magazine called, "the Geeks Who Leak": hackers who leak sensitive information that they believe contravene personal privacy and freedom. When Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison he issued this statement:

*"When I chose to disclose classified information, I did so out of love for our country and a sense of duty. If you deny my request for a pardon I will serve my time knowing that sometimes you have to pay a heavy price to live in a free society".*

In a similar vein, actor Wentworth Miller outed himself as a gay man, publically rejecting an invitation to attend the St. Petersburg International Film Festival, citing Russia's anti-LGBT laws. This new breed of martyr is growing.



Governments should watch them closely, as should brands and corporate companies.

## 4. Retail disruption

The rise of online shopping is proving to be one of the most significant game changers for the retail industry. It is not only changing consumer behaviour but, also, the value chains of the retail industry.

Initially, the dilemma of providing either an on- or offline service, has now evolved into servicing a more complicated hybrid shopper. Retailers are now grappling with problems like showrooming, where customers try on merchandise in-store but make the final purchase online. Landlords, in turn, are coming to terms with shoppable windows: touch screens mounted on regular shop fronts that enable passers-by to browse and buy from an online inventory of a retailer who no longer needs to rent the floor space or physically stock the merchandise. These disruptions create new business models for brands and consumers while the landlords are the ones left short-changed.

## 5. Social media commerce. Serving coffee and more

The social media landscape nudges its way towards a more commercial realm. All social media platforms start out as a free service and monetising the machine once the users have adopted the platform is a tricky balancing act which can elicit a backlash from its loyal users. Facebook bought Instagram for US\$1 billion when it was two years old, had nine employees and no revenue stream. Now with over 150 million monthly active users it is gearing up to sell advertising. Designer Michael Kors, posted the first advertisement in November and immediately received a mixed bag of 200,000 comments and likes.

Like it or not, social media advertising has arrived. However, Starbucks (always one step ahead) has already ventured into social media commerce with a "Tweet a coffee" service. It allows app users to buy a coffee for someone via Twitter just by tweeting [@tweetacoffee](#) to (@recipient's Twitter name). What could be more social?

## 6. Social media CV rating

While social media platforms gear up to incorporate more commercial functions, a person's reach and influence on social media platforms is turning into another, unexpected, commodity: as an employment currency. For a while now, brands have latched onto social media celebrities as key "influencers". Employers, especially in the media industries, have now adopted the same principle and have taken to rating the number of your followers just as highly as your achievements on your CV, if not more - and they are surprisingly candid about it. After all, if you want to work in media and can't pull on rank on social media, then what's the point?

## 7. Catering to the Millennial palate

The fast food and fizzy drinks industries are doing a whole lot of soul searching. Not only do they have to adapt to a more health conscious public, their next generation customer base - the Millennials - are proving to be fussier than they thought.

McDonalds is still reeling from being knocked off the top 10 list of Millennial favorite restaurants. The iconic Campbell soup company has literally embraced the hipster within and sent its research team to find the holy grail: a youth appealing formula. The results were "heat and eat-on-the-go" concoctions like Chicken & Quinoa and Spicy Chorizo soups.

Coca Cola on the other hand launched a new derivative called Coca Cola Life, also targeted specifically to Millennials. This new variant has natural sweeteners, reduced calories and environmentally friendly packaging, with most notably, the iconic red label switched to green. It is becoming clear that appealing to Millennial palates is not just a taste twist, it's re-thinking the entire DNA of a brand.

## 8. Clickjacking - slick tricks

Highjacking, carjacking and now, in the cyber age, clickjacking is yet another security threat. Here's how it works: A clickjacked page tricks a user into performing undesired actions by clicking on a concealed link. On a clickjacked page, the attackers load another page over it in a transparent layer. The users think that they're clicking visible buttons, while they are actually performing actions on the hidden page. The hidden page may be an authentic page, which means that the attackers can trick users into performing actions, which the users never intended. As the users would have been genuinely authenticated on the hidden page, there's no way of tracing the actions to the attackers. For example, a user might receive an email with a link to a video about a news item, but another valid page - say, a product page on Amazon.com - can be hidden on top or underneath the "PLAY" button of the news video. The user tries to play the news video but actually buys the product from Amazon for the attacker. And that's really bad news.

## 9. The reassurance economy

Consumer trust is at an all time low. As consumers, and as citizens, we have been bombarded with irrefutable evidence that we've been consistently hoodwinked and lied to by brands, financial institutions, service providers and governments. We're wary of the food we eat, sceptical of the sports matches and athletes we watch, unsure of our social media privacy settings and nervous about the new world of online banking and retail. It is no wonder that word of mouth recommendations from family and friends, as well as online consumer opinions, are the preferred methods of discovering new brands, or the holy grail of brand loyalty.

Trust has become a commodity, and unlike a transient advertising campaign, building long-term trust requires a whole new brand strategy. It's like a slow food movement for brands and retailers.

## 10. Mockbusters. Breaking records, not the bank

A great white shark flung into the smoggy L.A. air by a freak tornado is bisected by a chainsaw-wielding hero. That's the least startling thing about a scene in Sharknado. What's more astonishing about the film is that it was seen by more than 1 million people and 300,000 tweeted about it the night of its premiere on the Syfy network.

Sharknado is just one example of mockbusters; a new film genre defined by the internet generation's insatiable demand for off-beat, cheap content. These movies resemble contemporary films but are produced in a fraction of the time (months instead of years) with a budget of usually less than US\$500,000. Despite their poor quality, these films are finding an ever-growing audience and are becoming a booming business.

Veteran producer and executive Kathryn Arnold believes it's all about low-risk, high-rewards: "Taking the blockbuster genre storyline and creating low-budget versions mitigates risk - the storyline has already been tested and satisfies the audience's hunger for content." Nollywood, you have competition.

## 11. Financial and legal advisors for same-sex newlyweds

Sixteen countries around the world now recognise same-sex marriages and, even in countries where it is not officially recognised, there is increased legal protection for common-law same-sex couples. It has become the human rights issue of the 21st century.

Banks and financial service industries have spotted the business opportunity and are gearing up to grab a slice of the DINKS (dual income, no kids) pie. They have realised that financial planning for same-sex couples is not the same as for heterosexual couples and comes with myriad complications. Anything from income tax to life insurance to medical aid needs to be reviewed and the rules rewritten.

This new demographic is already changing the travel and hospitality industries and legalised same-sex marriage will kick-start a massive ripple effect.

## 12. Me. My Selfie. I

The ongoing economic downturn and increasing natural disasters has had a strange effect on people's lives. Introspection has become a pivotal lifestyle trend. It has not only spawned acronyms like YOLO (you only live once) but also instilled in us a "mememe" mantra.

The trend manifests itself in many ways: from a sudden urge to study further to women preferring to remain single or, if married, not to have children. It's all about self (indulgent) improvement so it's no surprise that 'selfie' became the word of 2013. But get ready for the next wave, the gym selfie with hashtags like #workoutoftheday.

Wearable tech will also fuel the Quantified Self trend, where people obsessively measure everything about themselves, from the number of steps they take, to their mood swings, minute by minute. We're becoming so self-obsessed that we now marry ourselves. I Married Me is a "self-wedding" concept: an affirmation ceremony that's "about staying connected or reconnected with you". As a newlywed you "wear a 14 carat gold ring to remind you every day to LOVE YOURSELF" - like we need reminding.

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