BIZCOMMUNITY

Is life the new start-up?

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Our fast-changing and **über**-connected world impacts the way in which we work and live and, to stomach the harsh realities of life in 2012, we will all need to learn how to live!



1. **A South African state of mind**
   South Africans face an interesting socio-political and economic year in 2012. Political parties are gearing up for what could be a watershed year, with a string of significant events on the political horizon.

   The Sword of Damocles hangs over media freedom with the proposed introduction of the Protection of Information Bill. Continued global financial volatility may place us under further pressure, but also presents many opportunities for growth and development.

   Indeed, some business analysts and executives predict a more positive year for SA than most. CEO of FNB, Michael Jordaan (@michaeljordaan) made a prediction on Twitter recently, saying: *"In 2012 the SA GDP growth rate will comfortably exceed that of the rest of the globe."*

2. **Über-interconnectivity or overconnectivity?**

   The heightened global interconnectivity is the subject of concern as global financial markets heave and so it should be.

   First Scientist and now *Forbes* reported on "three systems theorists at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich took a database listing 37 million companies and investors worldwide and analysed all 43 060 transnational corporations and share ownerships linking them. They discovered that global corporate control has a distinct bowtie shape, with a dominant core of 147 firms radiating out from the middle.

   "Each of these 147 own interlocking stakes of one another and together they control 40% of the wealth in the network. A total of 737 control 80% of it all. Economists say the danger comes when you *combine* hyper connection with the concentration of power."

   Interesting times indeed!

3. Rise of second economy through digitisation

Economist W Brian Arthur, longtime visiting researcher at PARC and external professor at the Santa Fe Institute, quantified this phenomenon recently in a PARC Forum video and McKinsey Quarterly article. "The second economy... is vast, silent, connected, unseen, and autonomous (meaning that human beings may design it, but are not directly involved in running it). Arthur argues that this second economy, which author Nick Carr in turn dubs the age of 'deep automation,' may represent the biggest shift since the Industrial Revolution, and lead to increases in productivity output as well as decreases in physical jobs."

According to Arthur's back-of-the-envelope calculations, the second economy could surpass the physical economy in less than three decades. The nature of work will change, jobs will change, organisational structures will change, institutions will change, and economies will change.

4. Rise of consumption equality

Andy Kessler a former hedge-fund manager, told the *Wall Street Journal*: "It used to be so cool to be wealthy-an elite education, exclusive mobile communications, a private screening room, a table at Annabel's on London's Berkeley Square. Now it's hard to swing a cat without hitting yet another diatribe against income inequality. People sleep in tents to protest that others are too damn wealthy.

"Yes, the wealthy can strut around in more foo foo Jimmy Choos and Harry Winston pendants, but so what? That's all they've got left. Being envious of someone's nice outfit is no way to go through life."

Kessler argues that just about every product or service that makes our lives better requires a mass market or it's not economic to bother offering. "Those who invent and produce for the mass market get rich. And the more these innovators better the rest of our lives, the richer they get, but the less they can differentiate themselves from the masses whose wants they serve."

It's the Pages and Bransons and Zuckerbergs who have made the unequal equal. So, sure, income equality may widen, but consumption equality will become more the norm. Compared to 20 years ago, or even five years ago, chances are that you're richer.

I agree with Kessler: we should stop moaning and enjoy it!

5. **Socialisation of everything online**

I don't think anyone would argue this trend with Robert Hof who wrote in Forbes, "With more social network accounts than email accounts as of 2009, there are now 860 million social network users. In other words, it's the next great media platform. The monthly time spent on social networks now has passed that of all the portals, not just Yahoo, but also CNN, AOL, and others.

Then there's gaming (think Zynga, which [went public in December 2011]). All that's going to change completely the world of entertainment, from music to television (if it hasn't already)."

While in SA we continue to lag the developed worldwide average online/broadband penetration trends, the game is changing so very, very fast.

6. **The always-ticking millennial**

Increasingly, corporate business is recognising that Generation Y staffers (the ones called millennials) will not work a 9-to-5 day.

Industry trendspotter Marian Salzman, CEO of Euro RSCG Worldwide PR, says: "The new digital generation works anywhere, anytime. 2012 to be the beginning of an era in which notions of time are divided differently; especially when we all know work nowadays is a 24/7/365 proposition. All hands on deck, but at different times."

SA CEOs, take note!

7. **Transparency vs privacy**

With the proliferation of social and traditional media use, people will start experiencing full-blown information overload and seek privacy. We're seeing it on Twitter, with more and more Tweets suggest exasperation across the globe at invasion of privacy with spam and even the deteriorating quality of some dialogue.

"Do you think Bob Dylan cares what 'How to get more traffic' blog posts have to say? Hell, no." tweeted cartoonist

and author Hugh MacLeod (@gapingvoid).

Despite a personal need for privacy, people will not absolve politicians or companies and will continue to expect them to act transparently. Consumers are realising they have a loud voice online and what they won't say to someone's face, they will say online. Increasingly transparent conversations about brands and companies are taking place.

In SA, Woolworths has been experiencing since the December 2011 period, when its dispute with Frankie's became the centre of a Twitter and Facebook attack on its brand reputation.

8. **Self-care**

Wellness continues to top the global trends agenda. In SA, we're an increasingly unhealthy lot. In fact, our mortality rate will be the same in 2015 as it was in 1955. There are a number of factors impacting on this: childbirth mortality, and poor access to health services, HIV and TB.

However, the SA government has noted its concern about rising levels of obesity and some media suggests consideration is being given to placing restrictions on not just fast food and alcohol advertising, but also a "fat tax" on sweets and alcohol.

The *Economist* recently reported: "South Africa has become one of the world's fattest countries. Six out of ten South Africans are now clinically overweight or obese, according to a survey by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), a pharmaceutical company. So, apparently, are a quarter of teenagers and one in six children under nine. Another study, by London's Imperial College, found as many as three-quarters of South African women to be overweight, up from 57% in 1980; it classified 43% as obese, up from 24% in 1980."

South Africans prepare for the introduction of National Health Insurance, which aims to equalise the access of health facilities across the broader population and improve services to less advantaged citizens. In this scenario, self-care becomes increasingly critical.

I loved this trend from one of the world's leading trend firms, www.trendwatching.com, on DIY health, which it says is a key trend to watch for: "DIY goes 'good for you' in 2012: novel apps and devices will increasingly let consumers discreetly track and manage their health by themselves. The Do-It-Yourself trend is not going to slow down in 2012.

"Now, there are two kinds of DIY: the kind (most!) consumers hate and the kind they love. For 2012, the latter category will show endless innovation driven by, what else, technology, which in turn feeds off a never-ending desire among consumers to be in control."

9. **Eco-cycology**

It's just a sexy variation on recycling, but what a great turn of phrase. Simply meaning brands taking back *all* of their products and recycling them responsibly and innovatively. Says Trendwatching.com, which tabled it: "While in times of recession, economic interests tend to overrule eco-causes, the quest for a more sustainable lifestyle will remain a most pressing issue for years to come. The phenomenon of brands helping consumers recycle by **taking back all old items** from customers, and then **actually doing something constructive with them** is coming to the fore."

In SA, a large waste management market exists through collection of waste by the both the formal and informal sector which make a living off waste; however, to date, brand companies have not taken recycling to the next level as their international counterparts. So here's a challenge!

10. **Be a flexitarian**

More people are becoming "Flexitarians", those who consciously reduce their meat intake for health reasons, but still

occasionally enjoy animal protein. One of the best evidences of this trend is the growing popularity and social media following of the nonprofit Meatless Monday initiative, developed in association with John Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health.

PS it may help with global warming too, less demand for cows, results in a reduction of global emissions.

11. **Cash-less society**

SA banks have already led a revolution locally in mobile banking, which boosted the innovation of cash-less banking and is seeing meaningful penetration across the broad mass market. E-Wallet from FNB, Cash Send from Absa and Vodafone Group with Nedbank and M-PESA all enable customers to send money to anyone with a valid SA cell number.

Globally, Trendwatching.com says we should keep an eye on Google's free, NFC-enabled mobile payment system Google Wallet and the US online payments processor PayPal, which has a mobile payments application for Android devices. Square, an electronic payments service, enables users to accept credit card payments by using a card-reading portable device connected to their iPhone, iPad or Android device. iZettle is a device that enables consumers to accept credit card payments while on the go. The portable chip and pin reader plugs into iPhones or iPads, so that card transactions can take place instantly.

12. **Life is the new start-up**

Euro RSSG's Salzman talks about how people's overtaxed lives will add to the "in the moment" movement, which for many people will be the only way to stomach the harsh realities of life in 2012, and www.GOOD.com asked readers to predict trends for 2012. I'll end my predictions with one of its readers' choices and my favourite: ***Life is the new start-up.***

When it comes to distracting us from what is going on in LIFE, we are masters. TV, social media and gaming consoles provide continual escape. iPods, Driftas, iPads all desensitise us from physical activity, and music and Blackberry and friends numb our interaction with family and community.

Our brains occupy a constant state of analysis, worry and prediction, leaping from one thought to the next. In order to thrive in an over-connected world, we'll have to learn to live in the moment, free from doubts and worries, to experience life unbarred and allow some refuge from a world in turmoil.

As Seneca the Younger (BC4 to 64AD) said: *"As long as you live, keep learning how to live."*

Note: All references include the links, so you can explore these ideas and trends further. Trendwatching.com, quoted above, sends out monthly trend briefings to more than 160 000 subscribers worldwide in nine languages.

For more:

- Bizcommunity Special Section: Biz Trends 2012 - sponsored by Aegis Media
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- [2013 trends] A virtuous cycle - appscriptions, augmented, apocalypses and other apt trends - 25 Jan 2013
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