

Apocalypse now!

 By [Matt Rose](#)

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2012 is the year of the apocalypse (thanks, Mayans). But if you think about it, in a way they are right. Every year it ceases to be the end of the world as we know it. The world is in a constant state of revolution and innovation.



One of my personal heroes, Marshall McLuhan (the American media guru of the 1960s), said that "[i]n an age of multiple and massive innovations, obsolescence becomes the major obsession." So cheers to obsolescence, Prof McLuhan.

For those who love iron clad five-year plans, imagine how unexpectedly different your goals, priorities and perceptions are to your somewhat naïve answers five years ago. The important thing to do is remain calm. Embrace change and roll with the punches in these uncertain times.

With that said... here are six of my trends for 2012:

1. Infographics

The method and culture of information digestion is changing and different audiences prefer to consume it in different styles. Infographics were a massive hit in 2011 and I strongly believe they will become more popular through 2012.

Implementation of stunning infographics will be more than just displaying numbers or stats on annual sales reports or how many users Facebook has now, but will spearhead a new breeding ground of innovative corporate collateral, such as CVs, restaurant menus, product ingredients, instructional messages and many other forms of communication.

The problem is that we have endless data and are only now exploring the best ways to make that data easily understandable to the masses - Watch This Space.

2. Middle-class mind-set rising

A trend in any nation experiencing an increased distribution of wealth to the middle class is the adoption of more suburban lifestyles. One of the examples I like to refer to in a South African context is the move from pet-ownership to pet-parenthood.

A dog in a middle-to-lower socio economic household is often thought of as a functional guard dog that earns its keep. As middle classes adopt more suburban lifestyles and pets increase in popularity, we see the dog being thought of as more of a part of the family, to be pampered.

'Mass-tige' products offer a previously unseen level of sophistication to everyday household items, and it's a great time to move into a mind-set of trial products, rather than sticking to the tried-and-trusted.

3. Bulking up

The introduction of a retail 'game changer' such as Walmart in South Africa is going to shake things up a bit. Consumers in SA are going to be following the 'bigger is better' approach. The Walmart/ASDA experience is going to redefine what it means to purchase in bulk.

Brands that can ride this wave, by shifting communications to their heftier product ranges, will prosper. Greater value in the consumer's mind will follow from bulk deals, a "more-is-more" approach to household items especially.

4. Instant grass

The symbols of status have become more complex and, more often than not, flashier doesn't translate to higher social status; this is especially true in the premium FMCG brand sector. We are seeing a need for consumers to be able to tell a novel story about why they purchased that a particular product.

Brands that can be instant conversation-starters become points of social interaction. As societies are slowly starting to bestow additional recognition and respect on those straying off the beaten consumer journey, 'new' status can be found in acquired skills, green/eco-credentials, interesting hobbies, and definitely in the influence of one's personal online presence.

This is a marked change in the tone in how consumers relate to each other. This means status and aspiration aren't as straightforward as "big bling" anymore.

5. Network diversity: seeing beyond the giants

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have all been trending for some time now. It's basically impossible to get through a marketing briefing without hearing the words 'social media'. But in 2012 I look forward to a more diverse approach. Facebook and Twitter are just two popular channels but there is a vibrant fringe world beyond them waiting to be explored by brands in 2012.

"Social media burnout" means that networks that have elements of the artistic, exclusivity, niched and personal offerings will carry greater social clout in 2012 than the now-mainstream social networking channels.

Include these less mainstream networks in your next brainstorm:

- www.lockerz.com
- www.instagram.com
- www.pinterest.com
- www.path.com

6. Democratisation of creativity

Brands continue to let the consumer play a role in product development. Crowdsourcing was a buzzword in 2011 also but in 2012 I think we will see it rising further.

I think it goes beyond picking a flavor or new logo, rather into a small of communal achievement. Imagine an online artwork that could only be possible through the participation of 100 000 people. This will give the consumer the opportunity to say he/she was part of something bigger than themselves and a feeling of "I was part of that". Minute contributions that add up to something monumental.

Uniquely African flair

As SA changes and grows as a nation, expect the general trend to follow global counterparts but, as always, with a uniquely African flair. It's great to be in a developing economy as the ratio between opportunity and infrastructure is optimised for innovation.

Innovation is where successful brands thrive. So 2012 is going to be an exciting year for marketing professionals as we learn more and more to allow consumers to become partners in brand development.

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