

Would your consumers eat bugs?

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Savvy marketers know just how to tug on consumers' heartstrings to build brand loyalty to effect sales. But do you know how to also leverage their guilt, grab the attention of the new hipsters, and work with bacteria and bugs?

Knowing your customer intimately is becoming easier as technology becomes more personal and measurable. But it also requires a whole new skill set for marketers or a whole new career in digital marketing to familiarise oneself with the software and other analytics needed to get to grips with the massive amounts of data out there.

Whether it is through new data sets and technology or observation and feedback, tapping into what the consumer wants, when they want it, is key.

In a great article, Canada's [Marketing magazine](#) looks at what customers want this year - and that includes innovative products with bacteria; and bugs as a potential protein substitute.

We all know we play host to trillions of bacteria (100 trillion precisely), but we don't particularly want to meet them. Microbe-based products in the medical, food and health and beauty industries are set to explode. Scientists and researchers are developing an international database of microbial genes to reference all gut bacteria, which most people are aware by now plays an important role in our daily health. This could mean "personalised medicine and nutrition". *Marketing magazine* references cosmetics colossal L'Oréal, which is studying how manipulating strains of human bacteria can improve our complexions.

These are some of the other consumer trends that *Marketing magazine* has highlighted, which should be on our radar:

1. "Bug bistros"

We have 'meatless Mondays' in South Africa already and many consumers who are not vegetarians are opting for meatless meals more often and protein substitutes such as Tofu and Quorn (the fungus-based meat substitute), but *Marketing magazine* postulates that we might be eating bugs as protein substitutes in food soon - crickets specifically.



Image via Jeffrey Reed

There are already 25 small companies based in North America, such as Millennium Farms, which are promoting "edible-insect" ventures and "bug bistros". They even have a honey mustard-roasted cricket variety. Quite frankly, I'd rather starve to death. That's one 'back to nature, hippie, eco-friendly, reality show, survival-of-the-fittest' trend that will have to do without this writer.

2. "Glam up geekwear"

Wearables are a massive trend, that we know, in the workplace, fitness and health industry and smart home environment particularly. But now the fashion industry is getting involved in "glamming up geekwear" to make the various accessories and essential smart products more mainstream. Fitbit already has a brass pendant and bracelet option and fashion designers are increasingly getting involved in designing fashionable wearables or incorporating wearables into their collections, as [CNBC](#) reported, too. Anything from solar panels to store energy, to stylish [school backpacks](#) that provide light in the evenings from a South African entrepreneur.

3. "Gender neutral"

This was one of the 2015 trends we highlighted in Bizcommunity.com's [BizTrends2015](#): that Generation Z, the generation under 18 years currently, is far more gender neutral than any other generation in living history. Retailers are following this trend and some, like Harrods and Marks & Spencer, have either created gender-neutral toy departments or done away with gender-specific packaging; Greyscale Goods is a new start up in Canada that sells brands that are "androgynous" or "non-gender-conforming" clothes.

Which is why it makes it so strange that brands like Kinder Surprise Eggs recently introduced distinctive blue and pink eggs to denote 'boy' and 'girl' toys in the chocolate eggs in store in South Africa. My three-year old loves her cars and her dollies equally. I don't want her to feel that she has to choose the pink egg because she is a girl. Gender stereotyping of that nature is outdated branding thinking.

4. Tap into "eco-guilt"

Consumers are starting to reject products that cause excessive waste. We are environmentally-aware enough these days to know that product waste is a design flaw - as is espoused by current design and creative thinking at world class convocations like Design Indaba. The popular Nespresso brand and others have had to face backlash over the single-serving coffee pods or K-cups, which are being touted as the new ["eco-villain"](#) in town. Products that embrace sustainable values are starting to win with consumers.

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