

What will be shaping brands, the world in 2013?

 By [Stephanie Houslay](#)

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Making predictions in a world that moves as quickly as the one we live in today is brave and perhaps even a little foolish. But based on the way the world evolved last year, here are a few trends I expect to play out in 2013 and beyond. At the centre of these trends is the way that technology is giving the consumer more power to shape brands than ever before.

Today's consumers scrutinise brands carefully and seek out those with an authentic commitment to creating value for their customers and society at large. That means companies can no longer focus only on maximising profits for shareholders, but must also show alignment with customer values and commitment to creating shared value for a broad range of stakeholders.

Social innovation will be at the heart of any brand's competitive advantage. No longer will companies be able to claim that consumers, employees, and the community are at the heart of their business - they'll need to prove it through actions that bring their values to life in a more meaningful way.

Look out for: The rise of shared value auditors, who score and certify companies' shared value outcomes.

Tech objects embedded in everyday life

Mobility isn't just about smartphones and tablet computers any more. The "Internet of Things" is quickly taking shape as more and more objects featuring embedded sensors, image recognition technologies, NFC payment and wireless connectivity are connected to the web. Innovations like wearable computers, touch and gesture interfaces, are creating more intuitive ways for users to connect with the world and interact with computers.

Many of these technologies may offer strategic business advantage for early adopters or bring potential for significant market disruption. Companies need to use these tech innovations to power smart applications that help their customers and employees to improve everyday life. However, once again the challenge brands will face is to create real value, rather than creating and adopting tech products just for the sake of it.

Look out for: Expect technology to become embedded in more and more objects we use every day - from fridges and televisions to cars and clothing. Consider Google's Project Glass, a set of computerised glasses that lets users take pictures and find information, or the cool head-up display embedded in Oakley's Airwave ski goggles for monitoring speed and reading text messages, for example.

The web gets even more social

Mobile technology means that people are always available and connected - consumers can connect anywhere and can plug in anytime, allowing for social integration on the go. People carry their social identities on their mobile devices wherever they go. With a portable, durable online identity, users have the opportunity to share their data between sites to build, maintain relationships and stay up to date with the people they know and the things they care about.

Brands need to learn to tap into the social identity and integration frameworks that drive the mobile internet. They must apply social thinking at every level of their businesses to successfully speak to and engage with mobile consumers.

Look out for: The most successful brands will embrace the world of social mobility both inside their businesses for internal collaboration and communication as well as with the consumer.

The power of meaningful data

Social media and always-on access to the internet means that companies are able to capture mountains of data about their customers. 2013 will be the year which challenges organisations to work out what to do with all the "big data" they have at their disposal.

Marketers, being equipped with all this data have the opportunity to take personalisation to the next level - with the insights they can uncover in this data, they can better understand the needs of their customers; predict consumer behaviour; and ultimately, personalise, refine and optimise marketing to each customer's desires, behaviours and interests.

Look out for: The true data analyst will have one of the most coveted skills sets on the market since companies will need him or her to make more sense of the customer journey.

The retail experience is everywhere

Consumers are rapidly embracing online comparison shopping, mobile payments and other new technologies as part of their shopping experience. They don't necessarily need to feel and touch to buy, but they do demand a shopping experience they can access wherever and whenever it is convenient to do so.

Consumer behaviour together with new technologies means brands must rethink their "retail space". Today, retail could go nearly anywhere, thanks to mobile. For example, Tesco in the UK did a 2012 pilot of a screen at London's Gatwick airport that allowed travellers to order everyday staples from their smartphones. Their order was then timed to coincide with their arrival at home.

Look out for: The power of "AND", it will matter. Consumers are continuously demanding value, freebies and novelty in their shopping experience.

Urban life gets even smarter

Governments and businesses are looking at ways to leverage technology to offer more sustainable solutions and better lifestyles to city dwellers around the world. Such solutions drive smarter, greener cities for an increasingly connected global citizenry that is informed and aware about the environmental and social impacts of urbanisation.

2013 will continue to guide the rise of a new world of connectedness, networks, central databases which is already resulting in cities providing e-services - e-health, e-education, e-traffic, e-home, e-government and e-offices.

Look out for: The likes of Siemens and IBM are involved in creating collaborative solutions to proactively manage urbanisation, but consumers will demand more from governments and businesses alike.

Stephanie Houslay is General Manager at Acceleration Media. She leads the company's growth in the Western Cape region and she has extensive experience in managing global and local multichannel accounts across industries as diverse as fast-moving consumer goods, pharmaceuticals and telecoms, and is passionate about branding, strategic communications, social marketing and business sustainability.

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