

Nostalgia Aiming At The Heart Of Your Consumer

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Nostalgia is always 'in' with consumers. Forward-thinking brands know that nostalgia never went out of fashion. Looking for a new USP for an existing product or service, or one taking its first steps into emerging or mature markets, it's hard to go wrong with this approach.

Key trends

• Good old fashioned retro revivals around the world; • The meeting of cyberspace and nostalgia. Commercial opportunities

• Tap into the positive consumer associations with rose-tinted memories to market and sell your product or service. Don't exclude innovations from this retro treatment; • Think of an 'oldie worldie' or retro slant to existing or new offerings and combine it with rarity appeal. Background

When it comes around again – they say it never went out. There's nothing like nostalgia for moving consumers to buy. It's not only for consumer groups such as 'middle youth' in their late-20s-early-40s, known for their fondness for fads past like 'Space Invaders' video games to help fight off middle age. Youth also have their 'nostalgia moments'. Trend observer, Sally Horchow, believes 'Generation X and Y' interest in retro is nostalgia mixed with a quest for 'cool' – someone is young and wasn't around when Pac-Man was played – they're just embracing it because it's cool and different.

While few consumers can give up their cell phones or online access for long, they are using modern tools to look up to the old wisdom. There is a resurfacing consumer respect for things past and the wisdom of older generations.

Numerous consumer 'types' are amenable to a dash of the past, not just 'fashion tribes' who have never been ashamed to plough the depths of the style cellar to add cool. Consumers buying into the current passion for 'storylines', luxury 'connoisseurs' and consumers interested in green products and reducing their carbon footprint are at the interface with nostalgia, for example through their concern for locally-sourced products. The World Music trend is seen as a consumer-fuelled revival of music traditions from Irish to Latin and a rejection of the surplus of electronica. Consumers in a post-9/11 world, concerned about their altered identities post-globalization and the stamp of sameness brought by bodies like the EU, and inferior cheap imports etc. are keen to buy into the benefits and values of an idealized past.

Brands, from white goods manufacturers to fashion chains, are aware that when in need of a new trendy twist – think retro. For today's consumers, 'retro' typically adds a quirky and attractive element to a product or service which becomes infused with 'retro chic'. It signals a shift in the way we relate to the past – half ironic and half longing. Tivoli radio models, for instance, combine high-tech functionality with a retro look, and rank among the most popular items with Amazon.com buyers. Their analogue interface and 'old-fashioned look right down to their cherry wood cabinet' make them stand out from brash competition that's big on huge digital displays and futuristic design. Good old fashioned retro revivals around the world

The Japanese have a soft spot for packaging design as a prelude to an ideal consumption experience. 'Kawaii' (cute) packages often feature retro designs and are especially popular with young women. For Yoko Moringaya, a 'product stylist': – "The young female consumer is much more romantic than designers and manufacturers realise. She hankers after the genuine." The most popular designs are those that have remained unchanged over the years. Said one 'boomer' purchaser of Roza confectionary, – "It reminds me of a time when Japanese lifestyles were less coarse, less rushed." The latest issue of History Today magazine has a 'Cruising to History' piece on growing consumer demand for historical tourism menus. Demand for anthro-tourism (authentic cultural encounters) is also up; The UK's Past Times chain now boasts over 70 retail outlets and three outlet centres. Its USP is hard-to-find quality products themed by historical period, with bestsellers Victoriana and 'fashionable retro from the '50s and '60s'; Luxury UK store Harrods, just concluded its 'Timeless Luxury' season with offbeat topics such as Pucci designs on the Apollo 15; 'Up-dos' are in demand and broadcast extra attention to grooming. – "Going to the hairdresser no longer has the stigma it once had," says Luke Hersheson, creative director of his hair salon and London's Up-Do king. – "There's a whole generation of women who don't remember their mum's rollers, tongs and 'helmet hair'." Last year, Hersheson opened a blow-dry bar in fashion chain Topshop that churns out over 100 of these Up-Dos weekly; Sports brands such as Adidas, Puma and Nike all have divisions specialising in retro products; 'Ostalgie' – nostalgia for life under old socialist systems in East Germany, Poland

and Russia in particular has had market impact. Vita Cola, originally a GDR Coca Cola imitation, has proved one of the most popular brands revived after the onset of Ostalgie, and now sponsors FC Hansa Rostock, an East German football club; Bangkok's The Nation newspaper has detected a shift by local creative consumers towards the traditional: 'Arty types and environmentalists see the beauty in traditional cloth bags. Rare ethnic-style examples have become collectors' items'; Young designer, Mae Fah Luang 'combines modern designs with the craftsmanship of hill tribe weavers from northern Thailand'; Maccabi Healthcare, one of Israel's four semi-privatized health funds, is basing its current membership drive on free access to complementary medicine; The Slow Food Movement, originating in Italy and now enjoying global support, celebrates earthy ingredients and mealtime togetherness; Fiat previewed the all new 500 in March 2007, exactly 50 years after the first Fiat 500 was presented. This well-reviewed car features a distinctive retro-look just like the Volkswagen New Beetle and the BMW MINI but is likely to be cheaper. The meeting of cyberspace and nostalgia

The net, for all its futuristic aura, is steeped in nostalgia. A longing for community is the backdrop for much online activity. The upsurge in social networking sites globally, including in Asia, can be seen as a longing for the recreation, albeit a virtual one, of social ties. Consumers, including consumers on the move such as mobile and migrant workers, feel isolated, and are willing to share innermost thoughts, even if under the guise of online personas, in their bid to connect. Sites like Friends Reunited, are part of a similar bid. Surprisingly, 'silver surfers' are a growth area.

So much of the blogosphere features people trying to recreate chat they would once have had with neighbours. For every stylish, minimalist designer interior site for 'home improvers', there are dozens more cosy recipe and homemaking hubs with an 'oldie worldie' checked kitchen tablecloth design and feel.

With so many consumers living vicariously via the secondary experience the net offers, they still crave for 'nuggets of wisdom' that are the fruit of accumulated life experience. Witness the rise in

'Ask Your Grandma' hotlines and the growing online video clips by seniors showing consumers how to create home remedies etc.

Swiss Netgranny is a collective of 15 grannies recruited by the Tarzan Swiss fashion label. The grannies knit socks on demand and sell them online. Customers can choose their 'favourite' smiling, knitting granny and a colour or let 'their granny' choose a surprise design; Danish Mormor.nu sells traditional handmade baby and children's wear. Their youngest employee is 68, and all clothes come with a nametag signed by the grandmother that made the item; Video-Sharing website YouTube serves an important function as a place where consumers can 'share' practical tips as well as celebrate revivals of past TV series and films of their youth; The purchase of used goods has been a huge online hit. eBay and sister auction sites have made buying secondhand more acceptable. Amazon.com's 'marketplace' (note the traditional name) means that cheaper used alternatives pop up next to almost every product search; Websites include Retro To Go.com, retro-food.com (older recipes) and Retro Thing (vintage gadgets and technology). Outlook

The future looks set to hold on to the past, albeit a continuously re-invented one.

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