PERSONAL GROWTH | TEAMWORK | VISION

The New Networked Self

The boss of BrainReserve, Inc, Faith Popcorn continues looking into her crystal ball to highlight trends. How's she doing for 2007?

by **Faith Popcorn**

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It's been almost two years since we've shared Ms. Popcorn's predictions. We thought it might be fun, informative and entertaining to see if she continues her record breaking accuracy. Enjoy…

Faith Popcorn's Predictions 2007

Leading future-focused trend consultancy Faith Popcorn's BrainReserve anticipates the forging of a new type of identity in the coming years: ***The New Networked Self***. The technological advances of the information age have produced the most powerful tools yet for shaping our collective human destiny.

> ***The world has simultaneously become more fluid and more connected, one of both infinite possibility and extreme intimacy. As a result, people are turning away from the ego-driven self-aggrandizement that characterized the old era of hyper-consumption.***

The New Networked Self is far more ecologically aware than her predecessor and sees herself as a tiny, but instrumental part of a much

larger picture that is constantly in flux. With this newfound awareness comes a personal sense of responsibility to understand and engage with the whole.

Identity Flux

Technology has enabled us to experiment with different personalities, leading to a much more fluid sense of who we are. Having tasted the nectar of virtual liberation, we're beginning to reject the singularly defined roles we're expected to play in society.

The Future: Gender-neutrality goes mainstream. People list skills on their business cards rather than title, and dress up in various costumes depending on who they feel like being that day.

Liquid Brands

Today's consumers are capricious and non-committal. Brands will have to become more liquid to keep up with their constantly moving targets.

The Future: Chameleon-like brands focus less on communicating a static message and more on being the right thing for the right persona at the right time. Constantly morphing retailers carry products until they sell out and never restock.

Virtual Immortality

Consumers globally are creating fully fleshed out existences in the virtual world—dressing up their avatars, making friends, having affairs and buying property for their pixilated alter-egos. And now that people have multiple lives, who says you can't live forever?

The Future: While some let their avatars drift away to online purgatory, many more leave behind specific instructions on how their virtual selves should proceed. Services offering avatar surrogates flourish, and we bequeath avatars to friends and family in our wills.

EnvironMENTAL Movement

Like the movement to combat environmental pollution, the next consumer-led reaction will be against the mental pollution caused by marketers. With every corner of the world both real and virtual becoming plastered with marketing messages, bombarded consumers are starting to say they've had enough. The current attack against marketing to kids is just the beginning.

The Future: Companies are expected to reduce the amount of damage they are doing to our minds. Savvy companies sponsor marketing-free white spaces in lieu of polluting the environment with models and logos.

Product PLACEment

In the globally networked age, consumers are much more concerned about the consequences of consumption. Is my garbage poisoning someone in a developing country? How much fuel was burned in order to get these strawberries to my local supermarket?

The Future: Enviro-biographies are attached to just about everything, letting consumers know the entire life story of a product: where the materials were harvested, where it was constructed, how far it traveled, and where it ended up after being thrown away or recycled.

Brand-Aides

The government has let us down when it comes to providing the social services we had once expected from it. Brands are stepping in to take over where the government left off. Companies are already finding there's profit to be made from providing affordable healthcare to the masses.

The Future: Socially responsible brands make a buck while providing desperately needed services. Communities are revived by Target daycare, Starbucks learning centers, and Avis transportation services for the elderly.

Moral Status Anxiety

In today's increasingly philanthropic climate, expect conspicuous self-indulgence to go straight to the social guillotine. The globally conscious consumer regards altruistic activities as a necessary part of self-improvement.

The Future: A person's net worth is no longer measured by dollars earned, but by improvements made. Families compete with each other on how many people they fed while on vacation, and the most envied house on the block is not the biggest, but the most sustainable.

Oldies but Goodies

Our culture is suffering from an experience deficit. With the availability of

online knowledge, we're claiming expertise based only on secondary experience. Now that everyone's a web-educated know-it-all, we're secretly longing for authority figures to guide and assure us with indispensable nuggets of wisdom that could only come from having actually accumulated life experience.

The Future: Respect for elders makes a comeback in the form of Ask Your Grandma hotlines and the proliferation of online video clips by seniors showing us how to tie knots and concoct home remedies.

Faith Popcorn, founder of BrainReserve, the New York-based futurist marketing consulting firm, has been tracking trends for more than two decades, looking at patterns of behavior, technological advances, and evolving priorities and tastes to discover what the future might hold. She's been called "the chief trend bender" by *The New York Times* and "the Nostradamus of marketing" in Fortune magazine. She's the author of two business best-sellers, *The Popcorn Report* (which sold over 500,000 copies) and *Clicking.* She first identified the concepts of Cocooning and Icon Toppling; she predicted the fall of New Coke; and has helped create and market many of America's most successful new products.
Visit her remarkably minimal website, here: FaithPopcorn.com