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WORK IN PROGRESS
10 TRENDS FOR 2007
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Can it really be just seven years ago that the world celebrated the dawn of the 21st century? We're now well past the midpoint of the first decade, and 1999 seems like a lifetime away, like the start of a roller coaster viewed from several loops into the ride.

Change is happening fast, and it's getting faster all the time. Today, the balance of economic power is shifting to the East as China and India find their stride. All over the world, extremism is spreading, feeding on itself and creating anxiety for societies and new worries for governments everywhere. Old media and new media bombard us with fragments of pictures, words and sounds from around the world at every time of day. It can be a struggle to keep up with it all, let alone make sense of it.

Everybody in the developed world and many in the developing world are living lives shaped by the pressures and pleasures of globalization, technology and consumerism. The speed, intensity and unpredictability of those forces make for a lot of upheaval and anxiety. What is normal life? What is business as usual? Which way is up?

Not surprisingly, many of the habits that have evolved over the past six years are self-soothing. Those who can afford to are cocooning in luxuriously appointed homes and getting away to spas. And most people, wealthy or not-so-wealthy, can find some escape in technology, take comfort in chocolate and treat themselves to a little retail therapy.

The following 10 trends build on forces already in motion. But in the momentum, we can see our future.

1
THE OLD WORLD
TAKES ON NEW
WORLD HABITS

It seems Europeans' *joie de vivre* is catching up with them. Europeans have always drank, smoked and eaten with a superior air of nonchalance, congratulating themselves on the slimmer waistlines and more relaxed attitudes that seemed to elude their cousins across the pond. But it now appears that when it comes to obesity and smoking, Europeans aren't all that different from Americans—they're just a few years behind the curve.

Visitors to Europe will notice heavier Europeans, particularly in the land of fish and chips, bangers and mash and kidney pie. About 23 percent of Brits are now obese, not so far off from the USA's 31 percent. Even the French, always held up as a people who know how to eat well and still maintain a svelte profile, are going down that greasy, slippery slope.

Obesity in the land of fine cuisine is rising at an annual rate of 6 percent among adults and 7 percent among children. More than 40 percent of French people are considered fat, the same proportion of fat people in the U.S. in 1991. It is no irony that in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, John Travolta names McDonald's menu items in French—the French love McDonald's. The home of gastronomic pride is one of the biggest and most profitable European markets for McDonald's, and KFCs are now spreading across the country as well. So much for diet guides like *French Women Don't Get Fat*. *Quelle horreur!*

That's not the end of the story. As Europeans embrace America's love of fatty foods, they are losing their attachment to an unhealthy habit once considered a mark of continental character. More and more European countries are instituting no-smoking laws. Ireland was the first to ban smoking in pubs and restaurants in 2004, and a host of nations followed suit, including Norway, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. A U.K. ban will go into effect in 2007.

But just as the rise of Le Big Mac has its detractors, so too does the American attitude toward smokers. Germany, for one, remains a smokers' haven. And in France, where the government is considering a complete ban on smoking in public places, editorials denouncing the anti-smoking movement are starting to pop up.

2
IN GOD WE TRUST?
SECULARISM
APPROACHES ITS
TIPPING POINT

In times of turmoil, many Americans turn to religion for reassurance. And the mood of the country is more anxious than ever as the war in Iraq continues, conservatives and liberals grow further apart in the domestic culture wars and sexual and domestic-abuse scandals roil the Republican party. But God can always be counted on.

Over the past few years, politics and religion have melded in a way once thought unimaginable in the U.S. President Bush is an evangelical Christian—elected, in part, by a large, like-minded constituency. Religious beliefs have overtly informed policy decisions on flashpoints like evolution, abortion, gay marriage and stem cell research. And, for a while at least, it seemed there was no surer way for a politician to get elected in some parts of the country than to note his personal relationship with Jesus.

Americans are not alone. Across the world, secular societies are growing uneasy as small groups of Islamic fundamentalists insulate themselves in ethnic enclaves and make headlines as religious and political dissidents. In Europe and Australia, segments of Muslim youth, some of them second- and third-generation immigrants, have sought to define themselves as Muslims first, representing a rising Islamic tide that many Westerners find threatening. And no one is unaware of the fundamentalism that has been appropriated by those with terrorist agendas during the past decade. But it's not just Islam that has people looking over their shoulders. In New Zealand and Australia, for example, ultra-conservative Christian groups like the Exclusive Brethren have set off some alarms with their covert attempts to influence politics and elections.

Now the world could be poised for a pushback, at least in countries where the separation of religion and government is part of the national tradition. In the U.S., the power in Congress is shifting away from the Republicans who owe their majority to fervent religious supporters. Not only have Americans elected more moderate politicians who have promised progress on topics like stem cell research, but prominent citizens have begun speaking out about the need for a greater separation of church and state. Jimmy Carter is one of those voices, citing the biblical quote, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

In the U.K., a Muslim teacher's refusal to work without her niqab (the veil that covers everything except a woman's eyes) has sparked a public debate, with moderate religious leaders and lawmakers warning that covering one's face encourages a sense of separateness. The Dutch government recently announced its intention to pursue the banning of burqas and Muslim face veils in public. The place of God and religious observance in government may well be at the center of international conversations for years to come, as we muddle through the meaning of everything from democracy to prayer to patriotism.

TrendByte: As some Americans push back against the power of organized religion, look for more marketers to cash in with products geared toward Eastern-minded practices like yoga, tantra and feng shui.

3. MR. SANDMAN, BRING ME A DREAM

The world is beset by anxiety and over-stimulation. Deadly hurricanes and tsunamis, global warming, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and nuclear ambitions held by North Korea and Iran all put our teeth on edge. In days gone by, we needed only to tuck into a warm bed at the end of the day to escape our worries. But now our bedrooms are replete with televisions, laptops, cell phones or Blackberrys for last-minute communications—turning even our inner sanctums into less-than-sacred spaces.

With too little time to spare and too much input coming from all manner of media, sleep itself has become a luxury. Human beings can survive longer without food than they can without sleep, but in our frenetic lives, most of us are getting by on less sleep than we need. Americans sleep on average 6.9 hours a night instead of the recommended 8.5.

When we want to sleep, we can't. More than half of us have trouble sleeping at least one night a week. It's the same story around the world: Two out of three Britons suffer from some form of insomnia, three out of four Swedes are afflicted and 45 percent of Germans have difficulty sleeping at night, according to a recent survey. In Latin America, 70 percent of Buenos Arians suffer from insomnia. In Asia, some workplaces have adapted by incorporating midday naps. During lunch breaks at Acer in Tapei, for example, pillows come out, lights go down and workers nap with their heads on their desks.

Scientists have found that skimping on shuteye may be responsible for far worse than a face plant into your morning bowl of cereal. A U.S. study has found that some children who do poorly in school may have a sleep disorder that leaves them fatigued. And several studies have linked lack of sleep to obesity, on the theory that hormonal changes caused by lack of sleep can spark cravings for sweet and starchy foods. People who sleep four or fewer hours a night are 73 percent more likely to be obese, according to one study. "We have to realize that sleeping is not a waste of time; we have to recognize that it impacts our health," urges Shahradsad Taheri, author of a study conducted at the University of Bristol in the U.K.

More of us will come to the conclusion that sleep is worth a serious investment. Already, elite consumers are bedding down on \$10,000 Dux mattresses, while those in more middle-class brackets are shelling out upward of \$2,000 for the Tempurpedic brand. Then there are Tempurpedic pillows from Brookstone, white-noise machines for parents and baby and soothing scented candles. Those who really want to ensure a luxurious night complete the picture with 300-thread-count Ralph Lauren or Lulu Guinness sheets. In 2007, watch as marketers pour more money into selling sleep as sensory indulgence, with deluxe duvets, mattresses and pajama sets as accoutrements for that elusive night's rest.

4 ENTERTAINING OURSELVES

It's been more than a few years since entertainment evolved beyond must-see TV and a bowl of popcorn. Advertisers have scrambled to keep up with innovations like DVR devices, downloadable movie rentals and online video gaming. Now, consumers are making their own fun, enabled by technology that's changing the very nature of entertainment.

We are no longer simply interacting with entertainment—rating it, talking back to it—we're creating it. Technology is allowing more amateurs to express themselves at minimal expense or risk in formats that range from blogs to video clips to mash-ups (videos or songs edited together to create new pieces). There's even a partially viewer-created cable channel, Current TV, which allows people to submit short videos, or "vods," to the Web site, where voters determine what gets on the air.

There's no doubt that in 2006, YouTube brought the do-it-yourself ethos of Web entertainment to the masses, inspiring the most contagious water cooler conversations since *Sex and the City*. The video-sharing site, named *Time's* Invention of the Year, showcases a seemingly endless array of free clips, spanning the spectrum from goofy stunts to classic opera performances. YouTube and platforms like it are making celebrities out of regular Joes—at least, regular Joes with a healthy dose of talent, personality or, at minimum, chutzpah. "Funtwo," a Korean guitar wiz, has racked up close to 11 million views for his rendition of Pachelbel's Canon; LonelyGirl15 was adored by hoards for her quirky video diaries (recently revealed to be fictional). Rooke Brodack, who posted homemade music videos, faux news reports and comedy skits, became the first YouTuber to be "discovered" earlier this year when Carson Daly offered her an 18-month contract to produce content for his late-night talk show.

Blogs, which have been around since 2000, are now exploding around the world. In the West, they allow people to funnel their passions for fun and, sometimes, profit: A foodie's blog on restaurants and recipes can generate enough traffic to attract advertisers. And in countries where free speech is repressed, blogs can be vital forums. In Iran, for example, hard-line president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has successfully banned Western music and ads, but he cannot rein in the country's 100,000 blogs. "This is the place Iranians call 'Weblogistan': a land of noisy and irreverent free speech," Ben MacIntyre wrote in the *London Times*. And in Southeast Asia, young people express their opinions online with a freedom that is normally impossible in their hierarchical societies.

"The age of personal or participatory media" is upon us, says *The Economist*—and as fast connections become increasingly common, more of us will start to contribute as much to the Internet as we take from it. In 2007, look for even more rank amateurs to chalk up their 15 minutes of fame online. (As new technologies take hold first among teens and tweens, many of these new stars will be youngsters.) More of us will find something to share, posting our stories, rants, videos, photos and more for public consumption.

TrendByte: More and more, we're seeing the mainstream press pick up and report on the contents of amateur blogs, thereby giving bloggers a greater level of responsibility (moral, if not necessarily legal). In the age of blogging, we're all just a Web-page view away from fame, from infamy and even from finding ourselves in the midst of a cybermob lynching.

5. THE DISAPPEARING GENERATION GAP

Fourth-graders dial up their friends on cell phones, and teenage girls strut down the street in Ferragamo pumps—while their moms sport canvas Converse and their grandparents buy up Rolling Stones tickets. The generation gap has nearly closed, at least in the West, where medical and cosmetic advancements are redefining our ideas about age and aging.

It seems we're spending a lot more time together. No longer are children flying the coop the moment they can. Many of today's late teens and twentysomethings have settled at the crossroads between autonomous living and relying on their parents, happily stuck in a new life stage dubbed "adulthood." More than 18 million Americans 18 to 34 years old live with their parents. The stay-at-homes—many of them already burdened by debt—are variously termed yo-yos, boomerangs or kidults. In Italy, where it's called *mammismo*, it's always been that way; some parents love having their grown children around so much, they pay them to stay. In Germany they're called nest hockers, or nest squatters, and in Japan they're known as "parasite singles."

"The stigma of depending on your parents is gone," says David Morrison, president of research firm Twentysomething Inc.

And as parents live longer, it seems more of their children will be taking them in, especially with social protection systems on the wane. Americans are increasingly skeptical that Social Security and Medicare will keep seniors afloat, and older workers are postponing retirement in an effort to sock away more cash. Europe's graying population is making its traditionally generous social programs appear increasingly untenable—the continent has some of the lowest birthrates in the world, meaning there will be too few workers to fund those protection systems. And according to a study conducted by Virgin Money, more than 8 million British workers have no privately held pension provisions.

According to the AARP, an estimated 44 million Americans are providing unpaid assistance to their elders. But while elder care is already a cultural phenomenon, it's only going to get more entrenched. In another decade, there will be as many as 78 million aging baby boomers, many of them hanging around their children's homes even as their grandchildren refuse to move on.

TrendByte: Watch for the growth of multigenerational households, with three or more generations living together under one roof.

C
THE NEW
WOMAN'S
PREROGATIVE

No longer trapped by the domestic constructs of the 1950s or even by the corporate expectations of the 1980s, women are in greater control of their lives than ever before. Growing numbers of women are through with the 9-to-5 grind that kept them at the mercy of their employer's policies on child care and maternity leave; instead, they're harnessing a spirit of entrepreneurship.

"Women-owned businesses are growing at twice the rate of all U.S. firms," noted U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao during a Women's History Month celebration in March 2006. "And as entrepreneurs, women are creating jobs and strengthening our economy." Likewise, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce estimates that 1 million Canadian women will own a small business by the year 2010 and that the number of women-owned businesses is growing 60 percent faster than those run by men. In Europe, the female entrepreneurial imperative, especially when it involves work at home, has been driven for some time by a traditional social structure (for example, some parents are required to provide lunch at home for children on school days). And in Southeast Asia, where mothers have been returning to full-time work since the 1990s, cheap nannies, housekeepers and live-in grandparents have helped women devote the time they need to grow their own businesses.

The gender revolution that launched more women into self-employment is affecting all areas of society. Men are reconsidering their roles as primary breadwinners and disciplinarian-style fathers. They are developing their emotional intelligence, seeking flexible schedules at work so they can spend more quality time with the kids. Some are choosing to work from home, and a small but growing contingent is dropping work altogether to be dads full-time.

Meanwhile, more women are putting off marriage and family into their 30s, 40s and sometimes 50s as they establish careers and financial security. Some are postponing marriage in favor of long-term cohabitation, others seek "friends

TrendByte: Increasingly, time-pressed mothers will meld "me time" and "mommy time" by including baby in their pampering. SpaFinder, for example, has added a Mommy and Baby category to its online spa guide.

with benefits” to fulfill their needs and many more are signing up with online dating sites like Match.com to find their ideal mate. Society is slowly accepting these choices, and in many cases marketing to them. Consider the success of the “Right Hand Ring” as a symbol of independence—not romance—as marketed by the Diamond Trading Company.

This is not to say that women are no longer expected to juggle several demanding roles. A successful businesswoman is still under pressure to be a model mother and wife. And while some in the U.K. are happy to act like “ladettes,”—young women trying to be one of the lads by drinking to excess, shouting four-letter words and belching—the other end of the spectrum is daunting. Author Camilla Morton’s *How to Walk in High Heels*, for example, is a guide for the woman who wants to be able to change a tire, play poker and make the perfect poached egg.

As female entrepreneurship rises, watch women hire other women (and men) in roles that once might have perfectly defined the duties of the COW—the corporate officer’s wife of the 1970s and 1980s. As it is, a mini-industry of lifestyle help is popping up for busy women of all stripes who would rather outsource life’s little tasks to personal assistants, who now help with both office tasks and child-minding, kitchen coordination and so on.

TrendByte: Advancements in the fertility industry have been a boon to the woman’s prerogative. The next frontier: A New York doctor is preparing to perform America’s first uterus transplant, a procedure that promises to provide a temporary womb to women born without one or to those who have had theirs removed because of cancer.

7. THE ART OF EATING WELL

A trip to the supermarket has never been more complicated. You may reach for your healthy portion of veggies, but will they be organic, locally grown and blemish-free? Is your bread whole wheat or whole grain? Milk can be whole, skim, soy or rice. Tea can be black, green, herbal or decaffeinated. And is your meat hormone-free and grain-fed or traditionally raised?

Eating now has a moral overlay: If you are what you eat and you eat bad food, are you a bad person? If you do not read nutritional labels, are you to blame for your children’s health problems? Even for those who do pay close attention, the advice of experts is contradictory and confusing, so who’s to say what the right choices are?

One movement that has gained mainstream traction is organic food—once the preserve of Birkenstock-wearing devotees of “alternative” lifestyles and now pervading the ranks of the affluent, educated and socially aware. Organic foods—prepared without conventional pesticides, hormones, bioengineering, radiation or fertilizers—are believed to be healthier, more supportive of local farmers and better for the environment. The U.S. organic market has been growing at a compound annual rate of 21.4 percent, according to Datamonitor estimates, and will be worth \$30.7 billion by 2007. The European organic market is expanding at about the same rate. Around the globe, organic food production is on the rise, according to Organic Monitor, with almost 23 million hectares of farmland now managed organically. Much of the increase comes from developing countries responding to greater export opportunities as more retailers stock organic—from the heaviest hitter, Wal-Mart, to major supermarket chains such as Albert Heijn in the Netherlands. Carrefour, the international food retailing giant, is developing organic produce lines in four major European markets—France, Spain, Belgium and Italy—as well as in Thailand, China, Argentina and Brazil.

As organic foods become just another mass-produced commodity, however, there’s a debate as to whether they are losing the moral high ground as being more sustainably grown and ethical than standard foods. While some proponents of the organic movement say Wal-Mart’s decision to sell more organic is an environmental boon, some worry that the retailer may advocate for more limited requirements regarding just what is called organic. And as bigger farms begin growing more organic food and shipping it long distances, the carbon output to produce that food will grow—a chief complaint levied at processed-food manufacturers and meatpacking plants. The answer, according to some, is to buy only locally grown foods, thereby reducing the fossil fuels needed for shipping. In countries such as the U.S., New Zealand and Australia, farmers markets and small specialty stores are becoming community hubs, with consumers building personal relationships with the people who provide their food. In the U.K., an Organic Action Plan calls for 70 percent of in-season organic food to be domestically sourced by 2010.

As consumers look more closely at what they eat, packaging will increasingly reflect their hunger for more information and a growing yen to buy from local producers. European supermarkets already explain where produce was grown, down to the region and family farm, and under what conditions. And in the wake of mad cow and the recent E. coli scare in the U.S., food safety will become a more high-profile issue than ever—especially as the specter of agricultural terrorism hovers over national breadbaskets like an impending storm cloud.

TrendByte: Watch as the most conscious of conscious consumers shifts away from supermarket organics and toward locally grown organic foods sold at farmers markets.

8. MIDDLING AMERICA

During the past six years, it seemed as if most U.S. politicians had forgotten all about the silent majority: the purple people. The majority of Americans are befuddled by a war in Iraq that may or may not have anything to do with the war on terrorism, the ethical complexities of stem cell research and the purported culture wars between red and blue populations.

The quick labels of red and blue have been extended to brands and cultural mind-sets: Red and blue products and experiences have become variables for how people consume in the marketplace, participate in politics and choose their media outlets. Who's red and who's blue isn't easy to quantify, but the colors clearly demarcate opposing American ideologies. Ann Kornblut, a political reporter at *The Boston Globe*, believes the cultural divide is not as simple as liberal versus conservative, urban versus rural. "I think it's a combination of all those things together, plus what music you listen to, what you like to eat," she told National Public Radio. "It's a divide that's been splitting the country since the 1960s. The words 'red' and 'blue' have taken off, but they really don't describe anything."

The midterm elections, however, uncovered the purple people who have been here all along. Nearly every House and Senate race was incredibly close, with voters split nearly down the middle. In 2007, this could mean that the purple people rediscover their voice in Washington. On TV, politicians are saying they interpret the vote not as a mandate to push liberal ideology, or as a wholesale rejection of Republican ideals, but as a desperate plea for thoughtful, moderate consideration. Even President Bush, who has run an administration fueled by a feverish evangelical base and its right-wing ideology, recognized the midterms as "a thumpin'" and promised to work toward common ground.

What will change much more slowly, if at all, are the strong anti-American sentiments heard around the world. But America is a complex contradiction, and it seems that while its foreign policies—defined most flatteringly as a benevolent hegemony—are generally resented, its culture and image as a land of opportunity are still widely admired. Rampant anti-Americanism is seen from Venezuela to Afghanistan, but we see, too, an overt emulation of America's capitalist, entrepreneurial spirit: A new Silicon Valley is growing in Bangalore; American excess and extravagance are laid out on Dubai's man-made islands; and Hollywood movies dominate Europe's box office, with millions of people pouring into American fast food joints around the continent (even as Europeans readily deride the McDiet in public forums).

In the middle of the last century, Americans were heroes—in their own minds, but also in the minds of many others worldwide—and the next challenge will be to once more build a reputation for the just application of power.

9.
**BUYING THE
EXPERIENCE**

Production assistants who earn \$30,000 a year shop at Tiffany's; high school students clutch Coach handbags; H&M sells budget designs from runway stars Karl Lagerfeld and Stella McCartney. And when "masstige" took off in 2000, the upper crust began to turn away from flaunting high-end accoutrements. Today, they're spending on boast-worthy experiences, everything from luxury safaris to box seats at big-ticket events. The perfect place for a moneyed consumer to blow through upward of \$300 in an evening: Masa, chef Masa Takayama's intimate Manhattan hot spot, which seats just 26 diners for its three-hour sushi feasts.

Average affluent household spending on luxury experiences in the U.S. nearly doubled in 2005, to \$22,746, according to Unity Marketing, which looked at spending on travel, spa and beauty services, dining and entertainment. Travel, especially, is taking on added import: It's a way to both broaden cultural horizons and showcase individuality. Travelers will increasingly seek controlled danger, unusual environments and physical or emotional development, according to Cendant Travel Distribution Services.

It's not just the wealthy who are as interested in accumulating experiences as they are good old material goods. "The amount that people spend on retail goods as a proportion of consumer spending has gone down in the past 10 years," says Nick Gladding of Verdict Research, which tracks trends in the U.K. retail sector. "That money has migrated to restaurants, leisure and budget travel, as well as mobile phone calls."

How are retailers coping? By adding super-premium services to maintain their luxury cachet. The ultimate example is Daslu in São Paulo, Brazil, which sells designer brands along with fine wines, fast cars and yachts: At the exclusive store, champagne flows freely, the staff knows customers' names and sizes and a golf cart ferries guests to the in-house bar, restaurants, gardens and library. In Florida, Lexus owners get privileged parking spaces at sporting events. And at the Polo Ralph Lauren flagship store in Manhattan, sales associates bring customers snacks and beverages, walk their dogs as they shop and provide concierge services.

In coming years, more of us will want a taste of such high-end pampering and a chance to flaunt our own exclusive personal experiences. A range of retailers have already learned how to make the average Joe feel like a king. On Australia's Gold Coast, customers waiting to have their cars serviced at Sunshine Ford are offered espresso, freshly baked cookies, newspapers and magazines in a congenial and spotless environment. Customers at Umpqua Bank in Oregon can use an Internet café, watch financial news broadcasts and enjoy the bank's own branded coffee and chocolate, served on a tray after each transaction. ShermansTravel.com, a purveyor of travel bargains, offers *Luxe 15*, a newsletter for coach-class travelers looking for something special once they deplane in Borneo, New York or Sydney.

10.

TRUTHINESS IN BRANDING

In a world of well over 6 billion people, it's all too easy to feel lost in the crowd. Expect to see more retailers pampering their customers in 2007, doing all they can to make the shopping experience less about shopping itself and more about the experience—especially the experience of being recognized and made to feel special.

“Truthiness,” the American Dialect Society’s 2005 word of the year, is defined as “The quality of stating concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true.”

In popularizing the term, Stephen Colbert struck a nerve: The anchor of the faux news/opinion show *The Colbert Report* found a way to both embrace and satirize the rampant culture of lies and spin that colors the national and international discourse. From politicians to pundits to admen, the communications business today has become all about shaping the facts, or the factoids, to suit one’s point of view—or, in many cases, to obscure it.

Consider U.S. domestic policies like the Clear Skies Initiative or the Healthy Forests Initiative: Both names imply environmental sensitivity, yet environmental groups deem both initiatives to be harmful to pollution control and forestry efforts and a boon to industry. Author James Frey also banked on truthiness in his purported memoir *A Million Little Pieces* by embellishing the facts to tell a more compelling story. It’s not just an American epidemic: In Taiwan, President Chen Shui-bian admitted that he submitted false receipts for reimbursement from public funds and lied to prosecutors about how he spent the money—but claimed to have done so in the name of national security.

Living in a culture of rampant lies and half-truths creates uncertainty, anxiety and, most important, cynicism. In the U.S., *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*—sarcastic, nitpicky and unbound by journalistic convention—allow audiences to laugh at their country’s foibles, but also serve as a way to talk back to the establishment. They speak truth to power by way of a studio audience.

This rejection of “truthiness,” the party line and propaganda is part of what is driving the blogging revolution in oppressive regimes like Iran and China. There are 80,000 live blogs in China and more than 100,000 in Iran: anonymously authored underground forums for people who reject the co-opting of facts for political purposes.

It’s not all political, though. Take the WalMartWatch.com blog, which keeps a close eye on the retailing behemoth, posting entries like, “Is Wal-Mart’s \$4 drug plan a good deal or a marketing ploy?” Ad industry executives are familiar with blogs that critique campaigns, like Adrants.com and Adfreak.com.

And some game designers are holding brands accountable by creating video games about them. According to *Business Week*, an Italian company, Molleindustria, created a game in which players work for McDonald’s, fattening

cows with hormones, firing inefficient workers and ensuring large profits for a sinister Ronald McDonald. It's an update on an old adage: Never pick a fight with someone who posts pixels by the millions.

Because the Web enables total transparency, truth in branding has become more essential than ever. A brand used to serve as a guarantee of a certain level of quality in times when manufacturing standards were patchy, but today most brands are about cosmetic allure, the emotional packaging that will simply sell product. By way of online product reviews, expert evaluations and comparison sites, the Internet now allows consumers to easily see beyond that packaging and make really informed choices. Empowered consumers have at their fingertips a wealth of data on almost any product or ingredient—which means marketing executives will have to clean up their prose when it comes to promises, product info and even emotional connotations.

Pretty logos and slick packaging will become far less persuasive as consumers do more research and look harder for the facts. Watch for truthiness in branding to fall out of style, while truth in advertising reemerges.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?

It seems like only a month ago that we sat down and brainstormed the 10 trends for 2006. What did we write then, and where we are now, a year later?

"Whether 2006 will see another large-scale environmental disaster is impossible to know. What's certain is that people around the world are going to be more interested in the issue than they were a couple of years ago," we said. Indeed, when Bill Clinton spoke at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, he warned that global warming is the only problem "that has the power to end the march of civilization as we know it." Arnold Schwarzenegger has laid out a strategy to bring California's emissions to 1990 levels by 2020; Virgin mogul Richard Branson donated \$3 billion to environmental initiatives; and in Dubai, Pacific Controls Systems received a platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification—joining only 16 other buildings around the world. (In other developing markets, however, eco-awareness remains for the most part a low-priority luxury, and for these regions, balancing interactions with the newly greening developed world while maintaining their dynamic growth may prove particularly tricky.) After the success of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, it was beyond doubt that the environment had become a key issue. Thankfully, we've been spared an environmental disaster (so far), but it's clear to us that the environment's hybrid engine will continue to build pace exponentially.

Last year we suggested under the heading "Living With Islam" that "in 2006 and going forward, coming to terms with the problems of cohabitation and finding solutions palatable to both [Muslims and non-Muslims] will be a matter of urgency for Europe and elsewhere." Today, Islamic relations in socially liberal Europe remain contentious. Early in the year, a Danish newspaper's cartoons

depicting the prophet Mohammad sparked outrage in Muslim communities and palpable tremors around the world. Tensions built as *France Soir* republished the cartoons, arguing that “no religious dogma can impose itself on a democratic and secular society.” In September, Pope Benedict XVI quoted a 14th-century Christian emperor who said Islam had brought the world only “evil and inhuman” things. All eyes turned to Turkey in the last week of November, as more than 25,000 people protested the Pope’s visit. And while he made diplomatic amends, as *The New York Times* noted, the Pope will not retreat from the “truth” as he understands it. Meanwhile, in Germany, a staging of Mozart’s opera *Idomeneo* that depicts Mohammad’s head alongside those of Jesus, Buddha and Poseidon was canceled due to an “incalculable” security risk. The Culture Minister deplored the move, saying, “If fears about possible protests result in self-censorship, then the democratic principles of free speech are in danger.”

“There is little likelihood of large numbers of people anywhere completely giving up the idea of personal mobility,” we wrote a year ago. “But 2006 is certain to see individuals, companies and authorities asking more serious questions about the costs and benefits of mobility.” It’s true: We’re not prepared to give up mobility entirely, but we have started to question the yin and yang of getting from A to B, and the changes are tangible. Hybrids, which accounted for only 0.5 percent market share in 2004, are on track to reach 3.5 percent in 2012, notes J.D. Powers and Associates. From January to August 2006, sales of SUVs in the U.S. fell a further 18 percent over 2005, and a survey by *Consumer Reports* found that fuel economy is now the top consideration in new car purchases. In Thailand, second-quarter growth stalled entirely for the SUV and sedan market, owing to higher fuel prices. Will more of us now decide to give up the workday commute? Home offices are the most requested room in new home designs, and 12 percent of the U.S. workforce is now “distributed.” Work Design Collaborative predicts that figure will reach 40 percent by 2012. Whether or not that figure is realistic, telecommuting is unmistakably on the rise.



466 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017
www.jwt.com

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Editor-in-Chief	Marian Salzman
Editor	Ann M. Mack
Research Editor	James Cullinane
Contributors	Elissa Aguirre, Eric Robertson, Julie Sonkin
Copyeditor	Marian Berelowitz
Design	Paris Tempo Productions

CONTACT:

Marian Salzman
Executive Vice President,
Chief Marketing Officer
JWT Worldwide
212-210-7585
marian.salzman@jwt.com.

For editorial inquiries or feedback:

Ann M. Mack
Director of Trendspotting
JWT Worldwide
212-210-7378
ann.mack@jwt.com

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