

Generation Change



Since the recession hit, changes in society have affected how consumers view brands. With a revival of post-war ideals, economy and childlike experiences, people's lifestyles are changing – but what does that mean for future marketing campaigns?

With post-recession austerity measures starting to bite, consumers are tightening their belts and what John White – chief executive at MadisonSoho – describes as the “new normal” is a society of fear, uncertainty and doubt.

But this doesn't mean that shoppers can't be reached. Consumer anxiety mixed with technological advances and a change in the dominant generation has had an effect on society and an impact on brands, but innovative campaigns that focus on people's new ideals will reap rewards.

Speaking at the BCSC SCM conference in Edinburgh last month, White said: “People are moving away from material, designer and ‘bling’ brands and towards experiential desires, good design and heritage. They're learning to budget again and they're enjoying it.”

As part of this, White explains, is a revival of community, family tradition and a linking of the home and garden.

He gave a few examples. Last year was a record year for seed sales – White advocates thinking about opportunities to introduce seeds to a centre's product mix. In the same vein, a million urban households in the UK now look after live chickens, and in London there is a twenty year waiting list for an allotment.

“Post-war ideals are coming back,” explains White. “Larders are starting to be used in family homes again – people are more mindful of the environment and they don't want to be wasteful.”

White warns marketing teams not to bombard consumers with too many brand messages.

“Consumers no longer consider white wash or fluff,” he says. “Collectively people will no longer be dictated to – that's very important in your communications. Also, if you're sending out a green message, it needs to be genuine.”

Brands are adapting too. Starbucks has fundamentally changed →

→ its strategy, moving away from branded stores, getting rid of the word 'coffee' and changing to a local-feel store format.

"They're going for a personal approach and not corporate mantra," explains White. "The local manager now has the power to organise community activities like book exchanges and mother and baby sessions without going to head office."

There is also an impact on food and catering. Because for many 'staying in is the new going out' cooking and eating in is becoming fashionable again, something inspired by programmes like Jamie's 30-Minute Meals – the accompanying book sold 735,000 copies in just two months, making it the fastest selling nonfiction book of all time.

"People are moving away from material, designer and 'bling' brands"

In a reflection of the home-cooking trend, research has shown that Green Thai Curry has taken over from spaghetti bolognaise as the UK's favourite family meal.

WHAT'S COOKING

Teaching people to cook for themselves is big business.

Chefsonstage.com hire out cooking demonstration stands complete with celebrity chef and compare depending on the budget.

As well as being involved with BBC Good Food, Ready, Steady, Cook roadshows for ITV and the NHS Change 4 Life campaign, Chefs on Stage have worked with a number of shopping centres including Metrocentre, Meadowhall, Cabot Circus, Westfield London, Galleria Hatfield and Gunwarf Quays in Southampton.

The pop-up Chameleon demonstration theatre is a self-contained unit with a built in oven, fridge, microwave and hob, with panels that can be tailor-made for branding purposes and screens or mirrors to make

viewing easier for audiences. It can be set up and working within 30 minutes of delivery.

The company works with countless celebrity chefs including Saturday Kitchen's James Martin, This Morning's Giano di Campo and Ready, Steady, Cook regular Leslie Walters.

"It's all about increasing footfall and it's different to fashion shows and kiddie events," says Chefs on Stage brand development director, Eve Bryan. "Celebrity chefs are really big in the public domain and with healthy eating promoted by Sainsbury's and Jamie Oliver, what better way to share easy recipes than with live cookery theatre."

Bryan says the benefits are many. People are drawn to watch and pick up cooking skills and tips, the demonstrations are short and easy to remember and recipe cards can be downloaded from the centre's website helping to drive traffic there as well as in the malls.

There are several different options depending on budget constraints.

Celebrity chefs cost between £3,500 and £10,000 for a full day. Typically they do three 45-minute demonstrations throughout the day as well as spending time on the malls talking to shoppers, local radio stations and the press or doing book signings.

If budgets are tight, lesser named professional chefs can be hired for £350 a day or in some cases centre management might enlist the help of a chef from one of their own catering outlets or a local restaurant or hotel, in turn helping the community.

In Bryan's experience Sainsbury's, Waitrose and other supermarkets will often provide cooking ingredients free of charge, helping to reduce costs and opening communication channels by encouraging tenants or local retailers to support or sponsor the event. Some centres might also incorporate a local farmer's market.

For centres that have a bigger budget, Chefs on Stage will provide a compare – usually a freelance broadcaster for BBC or ITV – to keep things running smoothly and on time.

"Themed events are always popular," adds Bryan. "At Easter, we can show people how to cook with chocolate which children love, or there might be a special Mother's Day recipe or even a Spanish or Italian themed event."

"There are so many cooking programmes on at the moment and everybody enjoys the demonstrations, even people who never cook. →





→ The food is good, honest and healthy and people can get great ideas.”

Highcross Leicester has homed-in on the importance of food, enlisting the expertise of local food and fashion lover, Lucie Kerley, as the voice of a new lifestyle blog to help shoppers make the most of a visit to the shopping centre and the city.

The ‘Lucie Loves... Highcross’ blog includes food and drink reviews and tips on the latest fashions in-store.

“We first noticed Lucie’s blog around six months ago, and thought it was a great asset to the city, with delightful tales of life in Leicester,” says Michael Holland, marketing controller at Highcross. “Her reportage style highlights the hidden gems of the local fashion and entertainment scene perfectly.”

A NEW WAY

Fiona Hamilton, partner at King Sturge who also spoke at the BCSC conference in Edinburgh, predicts that in the next 10 years, a lot of malls in the US, Europe and the UK are going to fail. She thinks the only way to survive is to combine experience and technology like touch screens and body scanning.

She spoke of a new way of doing things.

“Ravensraig [a new town under construction in North Lanarkshire, Scotland, which will include 900,000-sq ft of retail and leisure space] is as groundbreaking as Bluewater was,” she says. “They are working closely with retailers and encouraging them to sponsor areas, having them named after the brand, Avon Mall, for example, instead of being physically in the centre.”

She also mentioned Sony Centre in Berlin, where the anchor tenant creates inspiration for the brand and brings in similar retailers.

“Anything we think is a little bit out there I think is going to become a reality,” she says.

Katie Coombes is marketing director at Maynineteen. She agrees that there are different ways of doing things.

“Can retail destinations compete with a walk on the beach or a

trip to the park?” she asks. “If the shopping centre has the right space, then why not? Both these experiences, along with many others, can be created within the centre to give customers a unique and memorable experience.

“Offers and discounts all have their place in the marketing mix when times are hard however, offering free craft workshops for kids, styling sessions for mums or even creating new and unusual event spaces within centres, gives the customer something relevant and engaging and, most of all, what they really want - something for nothing.”

Hamilton reiterated the importance of brand integrity and agrees that things like cookery classes or teaching people to plant their own vegetables would give add-on value and engender “customer delight”.

“If people are going to stay in, help them to cook a good meal,” she says.

David Virgo of Virgo Consultancy who devises marketing campaigns for the Mander Centre, the Quadrant in Swansea, Martineau Place in Birmingham and Crompton Place, Bolton, among others, says there’s a new focus on community.

“There certainly has been a change in how consumers view brands and how they do their shopping,” says Virgo. “Now a marketing strategy needs to encompass shopping experiences and the role of a mall within the community.”

Two years ago Virgo Consultancy developed a campaign, in conjunction with Crompton Place shopping centre, to encourage junior school children to recycle. Four local schools were invited to take part and were required to collect recyclable material during term time. The centre collected and weighed the material at regular intervals and the school that collected the most recyclable material won twelve bicycles together with all the relevant safety equipment and cycling proficiency training.

The result, according to Virgo, was: “Recycling conscious youngsters, very happy - and fit - winners, excellent relations with the participating schools and children, and excellent PR for Crompton Place shopping centre.”

In terms of promotions, Virgo believes that there is a need to recognise that people’s mindsets have moved on. People no longer have the time to fill in answers to questions to be in with a chance of winning a weekend away. Instead, he advises using high tech, interactive ways to reach them and to collect data.

Virgo has recently started using ATM machines to run promotions. “People using a cash point can get a voucher for their local shopping centre and print it off as a receipt,” he explains. “And it’s easy to evaluate.”

The consultancy also run internal campaigns to encourage retailers within a centre to cut down on their use of power, running retail awards with a category recognising the retailers which have saved the most energy, encouraging community involvement and initiating and supporting community projects.

White gave his opinions on the shopping centre of the future.

“By 2025 I suspect shopping centres will be much more societal,” he says. “A blur of pleasure, business and home and not just a destination where one goes to shop.”

“We need to be much more creative in supporting retailers in our schemes and thinking about the customer journey not just in the centre but before and after their visit as well. Shopping centres have a responsibility to offer excitement using the digital spectrum and in flexible ways.

“Once we’ve got a sure footing things will be more positive but we won’t move away from family values as quickly as we have done in the past.” ■

Find out more:

For more information, please contact the author:

→ mia.hunt@jldmedia.com

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TIM LANGFORD

020 7843 4317

tim.langford@jldmedia.com

www.shopping-centre.co.uk