



## 5 Ways to Predict a Trend

*Useful, Broad Appeal, Sustainable, Aligns with Other Trends, Not Completely New*

*By Jean Van Rensselar*

A trend is the distillation of a novelty---a novelty plus time. You can predict a trend by anticipating what will remain of a novelty in a year. In short, a novelty is the tidal wave and a trend is what's left on the beach after the tidal wave recedes.

Anyone can recognize a trend once the tidal wave has receded; the trick is to predict what will be left on the beach while the tidal wave is still on the horizon. Those who can do this have a significant business advantage. But being able to do this with accuracy takes practice.

Following are 5 Traits of a True Trend. You can examine anything that's still in the novelty stage to see what aspects (if any) have these traits.

- It is obviously useful
- It has broad appeal and application
- It is sustainable
- It meshes with other trends
- It has some history

### 1. It is Obviously Useful

While novelties have obscure value, trends are straightforward—it's easy to think of ways to take advantage of a trend. An example is hybrid cars. When Audi introduced the first hybrid to the market in 1997, the technology was new, gas prices were low, and the price of the vehicle was high. Owning one didn't make sense for most people. The novelty evolved into a trend (wide acceptance) after consumers became comfortable with the technology, became concerned about gas prices, and the price of the vehicle came down appreciably.

## 2. It has Broad Appeal and Application

A novelty tends to appeal to a small segment of the population, a trend has broader appeal—this is usually due to cost. A novelty has a very narrow set of applications, while a trend has nearly unlimited applications. In fact, trends develop more and more applications over time, while novelties have fewer and fewer. An example is mobile phone technology. The first mobile phones were introduced in the 1940s. Because they were extraordinarily expensive and unreliable, very few people had them (not much opportunity to call other people on their mobile phones). While there was some advantage to being able to call landlines from a job site or car, there was almost no mobile-to-mobile advantage. As the price came down and networks expanded, users were able to tap into an army of fellow mobile users. And as the number of mobile users expanded, so did the applications. No matter what the product or service, there is nearly always a direct correlation between the number of users and the pace of innovation.

## 3. It is Sustainable

Many novelties could evolve into trends except for the fact they cannot be profitably mass produced for very long. An example is biofuel. Ten years ago, biofuel was supposed to solve the world's energy problems. More and more fuels and greases were including plant-based components like soybeans. It looked like a long-term trend waiting to happen. The problem is that researchers, chemists, and manufacturers have discovered that they cannot produce crops necessary to grow (or even sustain) the current biofuel market without seriously cutting into the world's food supply.

## 4. It Meshes with Other Trends

According to expert trend spotter Lisa Suttora, most major trends are the result of a process she calls trend blending. This happens when multiple less significant trends merge to form the next big trend. In other words, the new trend is just a logical progression of events. An example is e-tax filing, which was made possible by tax software, which was made possible by spreadsheet programs. Electronic tax filing doesn't replace tax software or spreadsheet programs, but it's achieved widespread acceptance because it meshes well with both. The more emerging trends it continues to mesh with (paperless documentation, cloud computing, mobile technology, etc.), the longer its staying power.

## 5. It has Some History

Like fashion, most trends are not new. They've appeared in some form in the past. They seem new only because they never appear in exactly the same form twice. What makes them new is the new environment (context) and thus new applications. An example is synthetic fabric—which is actually plastic. Polyester, acrylic, and nylon have been around since the 1920s. But there was a resurgence of synthetics in the mid 1990s. CoolMax®, Ultrex®, and Ripstop®, are much newer versions of those three basic plastic fabrics.

Look at aspects of a novelty through these 5 lenses and you'll be able to pull out the trend before anyone else. What about the novelty is obviously useful? What has broad appeal and application? What is sustainable? What aligns with current trends? What has appeared in some form before? If you were looking for B2B-friendly social media trends using these criteria 3 years ago, you would have been one of the first adopters of Twitter. Not a bad position to be in...

### About the Author

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