

# An eye on the micro trends

**DOUG SACKS** has been reading about trends in America and looks at how they affect marketing.

I spied a book at my local library called *Microtrends*, by Mark J Penn and E Kinney Zalesne ([www.microtrending.com](http://www.microtrending.com)). Its subtitle reads, 'The small forces behind tomorrow's big changes': good things for marketers to take note of.

The book contains 64 American microtrends and another 11 international ones. Let's look at a few of these and think of how marketers can reach these segments.

**Romance:**

Sex ratio singles - Single women outnumber single men by 11 million. Yes, this figure deducts for gays of both genders. So a large number of single women are going to stay single either by choice or lack of available partners. The second largest segment of home buyers is single women, buying twice as many homes as single men. Financial services investments catering to single women is another area of growth

Internet dating: 25 per cent of those actively dating use dating websites. So, people who meet each other and 'click' may find themselves thousands of miles apart. Then what?

Internet marrieds: Of the 4.4 million couples who married in 2007, about 100,000 met online. Next up: online marriage counselling!

Animal lovers: No mate? Get a pet - 63 per cent of US households have pets. Pet owning households outnumber households with children by more than 2:1! Pets are cheaper to raise and more loyal. \$40

billion spent on pets. \$9 billion on over-the-counter medical treatments for pets.

**Workplace:**

Working retirees - There are five million over-65s in the workforce and that number is set to explode as more baby boomers reach retirement age and either choose not to, or cannot afford to retire.

Stay at home workers - 4.2 million working full time from home. Another +20 million tele-commute part of the time.

Office perverts: The Internet and social networking is great but it is also fertile ground for sexual predators as well as less harmful voyeurs. Aside from that, porn viewing is growing faster than an old guy mega-dosing Viagra. Ten times as many people regularly visit porn sites as watch base ball. Forty million adults and more - 70 per cent of porn that is downloaded is done between 9am and 5pm. So, guess where all this porn watching is being done . . . no wonder Americans 'work' such long hours and take few vacations! And before you start dissing men as perverse Neanderthals (assuming they would have liked porn) more than 25 per cent of these viewers are women.

**Health:**

Sleep deprived: 34 million Americans are getting less than seven hours' sleep per night and this number is growing fast. Worry, stress, balancing home and work life, plus addictions to electronic gadgets are to blame.

**American marketers continue to marginalise the father figure; depicting him as clueless and laughable. Now, an ad has gone even further showing the wife as a real woman but the husband as a donkey - aka jackass.**



Less sleep equals less productivity and higher rates of domestic discord. And there is also a link between sleeplessness and obesity.

Obesity: In the 1960s, the average weight was 166 pounds for a man, 140 for woman. Today averages are 191 for men, 164 for women. The number of Americans who are 30 pounds or more overweight has doubled in the last 20 years; the number of people more than 100 pounds overweight has quadrupled.

Do-It-Yourself doctors. WebMD.com helps drive this trend and so do long waits in doctors' waiting rooms and high costs for visits, health insurance, and medications. 136 million Americans have used the Internet to seek out health related information, rising 16 per cent in a single year, 2005-06. Plus, no semi-healthy person wants to go to a hospital anymore. Hospital based infections kill hundreds of thousands of patients each year. There has been a surge in over-the-counter drug sales. Drug companies recognise the trend and are inundating all media channels with DM ads.

Hearing Loss: Ageing plus ear buds plus loud music have taken a toll. Also, ambient noise. One in three cases of hearing loss is due to too much noise. Noise pollution is reaching such critical levels that local governments are acting to reduce it.

**Psychology:**

Dissed dads - marketers and advertisers continue to

marginalise the father figure. Most TV shows depict Dad as clueless and laughable. (No wait, that's at MY house!). Now, a new ad has gone even further, depicting a family with the wife represented by a real woman and the husband by a real donkey - aka jackass. Subtle. Real nice. How did they get that donkey to sit on the couch?

Pampering Parents and Helicopter Parents: In 1975 there were 57 parenting books. By 2003, there were almost 700. Spoiled kids with a huge sense of entitlement?

Universities are complaining that incoming freshmen aren't as mature and able to cope as well on their own as those from a decade ago.

**Lifestyle:**

Foreign language speakers: Thanks to British Colonialism and American entertainment, English has become the world's lingua franca. But not in America.

US census reveals that non-English speaking households are skyrocketing in number. And this trend extends to the second generation or native-born. Numbers have increased by 50 per cent to 12 million people, or one in 25 households. Another 25 million have limited proficiency in English. Direct marketers take note. Its time to put up the sign: 'se habla espanol'.

Tattoos: Prediction - the growing popularity of tattoos will soon lead to a new growth industry . . . tattoo removal for the 40+ saggy set.

New Luddites: Americans

are trying to simplify lives that are too frenetic and to become less of a slave to the automobile. Going 'green' has become a big part of this. Pedestrian friendly cities, using cloth shopping bags instead of plastic, re-cycling just about everything, Lifestyle centres where one lives and shops, dines and finds entertainment all in the same area are sprouting up all over. This used to be called a 'city', but for those raised in the suburbs, this is a new thing. Many empty-nesters are selling the big home and moving either to a small city or to a lifestyle centre near a city. Wanting to commute less leads to less willingness to transfer for a job and to more working from home. Americans are still slaves to mobile phones and other electronic gizmos, however.

College drop-outs. More Americans are enrolling in college than ever before. But graduation rates have stayed the same for the past 30 years. This is due to the ridiculously high cost of a college education. There's a tremendous loss of potential here; tuition reform is a must.

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