



# CK's Epiphanies

Inspirations & revelations from the mind of a marketer.



## trends: Hot Trend or Pure Hype? (A tell-all on trends)

In this issue we're getting trendy. Trends are frequently at the center of my conversations with clients, colleagues and press. Understandably, trends and fads merit much discussion—and many dollars—as they affect perceptions, preferences and purchasing decisions.

Identifying trends takes precision, prowess and some prescience. Overestimate a fad for a trend and you've overstocked a warehouse with worthless widgets. Underestimate the trajectory of a trend moving mainstream and you're deemed irrelevant by your buying audiences.

### Introducing the epiphany:

*Today's fad is tomorrow's flop and tomorrow's trend is today's opportunity.*

We marketers face a triad of trending tasks, namely:

- Monitoring our markets for emerging trends (and exiting fads)
- Determining if developments are trends, fads (or flukes)
- Developing plans accordingly to make the best use of budgets (and brains)

While trends and fads are indeed fascinating, for marketers aiming to tap their profit and promotional potential, they're equally challenging.

### Trends vs. Fads: Hot Trend or Fleeting Fad?

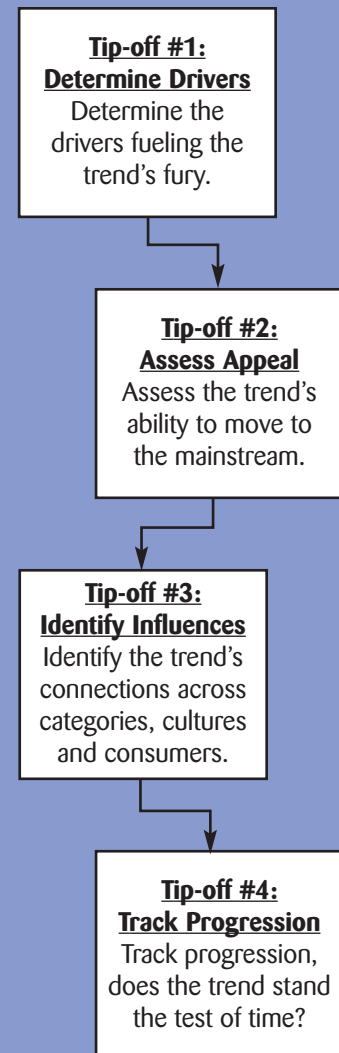
First some definitions—and clear delineations—are warranted. **A fad is a fast and furious practice, product or interest**, fueled by tremendous hype and followed by a deep decline. Usually isolated to a few market segments, or particular demographic groups, fads are self-contained, short-lived phenomena.

*Think fashion rages, dance crazes and crash diets.*

Fads can be big business—but they're a gamble requiring big budgets. Take the deep-pocketed movie studios constantly concocting breakout talent and blockbuster genre, or the top designers fervently fashioning the hippest, hottest haute couture. Fads require finding a niche, saturating the marketplace and producing a bevy of buzz in tight timeframes.

### Trend, Fad or Fluke? Tip-offs Tell All!

Tracking a trend? Need to know if it's a trend, fad or fluke? These tip-offs put trends to the test:



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Some savvy marketers leverage fads not as a core offering, but as a tactic to promote their products or services. Be it *The Gap* showcasing sexy celebs to push their pants, *Pepsi* enlisting a cadre of chart-toppers to sell soda or *McDonald's* featuring toys from the latest Disney movie to hawk happy meals, these marketers ride the wave of fads to ensure relevancy and profitability.

Not for the faint hearted, fads necessitate a do-or-die mentality and an endless amount of originality—as once you've divined the next "big thing," next season you're starting from scratch.

**A trend, on the other hand, is a slower, steadier development,** supported by metered adoption rates by far-reaching market segments. Trends are characterized by new ways of doing business, new lifestyle practices, the changing needs of customers and new products or services that render older ones obsolete.

**Think globalization, consolidation and electronic communications.**

While trends don't usually generate as much enthusiasm as fads and take longer to develop, they are longer lasting and far more widespread. Instead of plummeting to their demise, many trends evolve into permanent shifts in the ways we live, work and interact with others.

There are many types of trends including industry, economic, societal, cultural, demographic and technological. Fads span several categories as well, most notably, entertainment, fashion and lifestyle. Both trends and fads begin on the fringe and move toward the center (the mainstream) but fads fall away, while trends continue to penetrate larger groups with lasting effects.

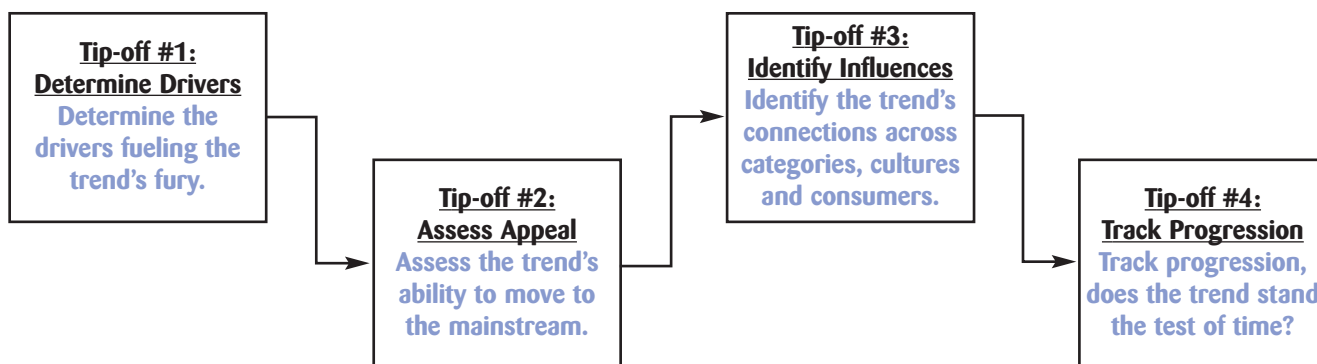
#### Uncovering the epiphany:

**Fads create a frenzy and fade; trends spur a transformation and transpire.**

More fascinating still, many fads are the byproducts of larger, looming trends. Take the portable music trend spurred by the 80s boom box, which then evolved into the 90s walkman and matriculated into the millennium with the *iPod*. While the hardware has been replaced with devices that are more popular and portable, this trend has rocked steady for decades (and may already be classified as a permanent shift).

#### **Trend Tip-offs: Marketing Potential (Hot Trend?) or Marketer's Pipedream (Pure Hype?)**

The issue then becomes how marketers determine if the development they're tracking is a hot trend, or just a bunch of hype. These tip-offs replace the mystery with certainty, providing marketers with a sure-fire method of trend tracking.



#### **Tip-off #1: Drivers—the fuel behind the fury.**

Determine what's driving the trend's development. **Trends are fueled by a myriad of strategic factors—a confluence of events—that culminate and fortify one another to produce fertile ground for the trends to take hold.** Such drivers include: technological innovations, government regulations and deregulations, economic developments, demographic shifts, lifestyle changes and new values, attitudes and preferences.

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Fads are also fueled by various factors, the difference being that they're more tactical, or short-term, in nature like pop culture, fashion and media hype.

Take the hot-and-heated issue of outsourcing. Many argue this trend is bolstered by cheap labor rates, and while the significant savings is a hearty incentive, it's not the sole driver of this trend. Had it not been for globalization, eased trade regulations, sophistications in developing economies and the ease of electronic communications, the current outsourcing trend could not have amassed the "fuel", or strategic factors, to gain ground.

**Tip-off #2: Appeal—mobility to move mainstream.**

Assess its overall appeal, **the trends' ability—and mobility—to achieve mainstream status.** Gauge if it's easily adopted by various demographic groups and widespread market segments. Is the price point tenable, or too prohibitive? It took producing a mid-market SUV before this automotive category was declared a trend. The same goes for the home computer; in the 70s computers were far too clunky, and much too costly, to achieve mainstream adoption.

Equally important is availability; is the product readily available to the mainstream through various distribution and direct-response channels (retail, Web, 800#)? And speaking of availability—is inventory on-hand or backlogged by six months?

**Tip-off #3: Influence—connections across categories, cultures and consumers.**

Identify the trend's level of influence, **is it an incident isolated to one or two market segments or is it broadly based?** How readily does it replicate across market segments and societies? Remember, fads fade and tend not to replicate, but trends transcend such barriers and manifest themselves through an array of related tendencies and cultures. Chart the trend's connections to—and manifestations within—other categories, cultures and consumer segments.

The rise of holistic practices provides an excellent example; these practices connect to, and are influenced by, a renaissance of eastern religions, the rising integration of alternative and modern medicines and a shift in mentality from quick cure-alls to preventive measures. Further, these practices are manifesting over a cross-section of consumer groups opting for meditation over medication, Pilates over power aerobics and pure foods over processed alternatives.

**Tip-off #4: Progression—standing the test of time.**

Track the trend's progression. Is it progressing or regressing? **Trends steadily progress and build momentum over time.** Take hip-hop, a two-prong trend encompassing entertainment and lifestyle preferences. While in it's hey-day for the mainstream, rap actually made its way onto the music scene in the 80s. Had hip-hop been a fad, it would have come and gone (and come and gone again) during the last two decades. Instead, hip-hop has proven itself as a highly profitable business of music, movies, apparel and accessories (bling!). And rap music has established itself as a respectable genre in its own right (arguably a permanent shift for the music industry).

**Countertrends: Care to counter that trend?**

An area that doesn't receive nearly the coverage it should is the countertrend. **Simply put, each trend is matched by a prevailing countertrend.** Look at the growing obsession with organic foods and the rising levels of obesity. Sure, people are trying to trim down with healthier diets, but processed food revenues are growing at equally compelling rates. *McDonald's* leveraged both sides of the spectrum by introducing salads at approximately the same time it unveiled the "McGriddle", its' fattiest breakfast sandwich ever. Both their health-conscious salads and saturated-fat sandwiches are served in mass quantities—and both are serving shareholders well.

Donald Trump, a highly hailed counter-trender, builds bigger apartment buildings when the market is skewing towards smaller, community-style apartments. While he watches his competitors erect small-scale buildings, his counter-intuition tells him that a glut of small buildings will produce a

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housing shortage. By divining how the current trend will counter itself, Trump exploits a countertrend.

Music and fashion thrive on counter-trending (though, since we're talking fashion and music, I suspect it's more of a case of counter-"fadding"). Look at Avril Lavigne poised as the anti-Britney, or Ashlee Simpson, primed as the antithesis of her songstress sister Jessica. But the marketing Grammy most decidedly goes to Madonna, who has worked wonders for decades due to constantly countering her current image—she's far more of a marketing genius than musical goddess.

A formidable new competitor on the catwalk, *Juicy Couture*, capitalized on countertrends by ditching diva designs for the comfort of savvy sweat suits.

Many times there is so much competition tapping the hottest trends the smartest strategy is to cultivate countertrends. You'll still need to validate the trend; you'll just need to map it to its counter-equivalent and promote accordingly.

### **Inspiring the epiphany:**

**For every trend, there is an opposite—and equally marketable—countertrend (just waiting to be exploited by smart marketers).**

All told, trends are complex creatures and fads are a lot of fun. Engendering marketing opportunities and profit potential, it's critical to identify trend from fad so that you set realistic returns for your business.

But before you hang your hopes on a bunch of hype, leverage these lessons—and exercise my epiphanies—to reap the rewards of today's trends (and tomorrow's emerging ones).■

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## **who is CK?**

CK is Christina Kerley.



Since '91, Christina has been identifying and developing marketing epiphanies for up-and-coming Start-Ups and formidable Fortune 500s. Passionate about working on extraordinary projects and providing exemplary service, she formed ckEpiphany in '99.

Strengthening marketing efforts one epiphany at a time, the business develops client strategies, plans and programs. For more information on CK and ckEpiphany, please visit: [www.ckEpiphany.com](http://www.ckEpiphany.com)

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