

ANA

101

Trendspotting

1. The Lowdown.

Successful trendspotting relies on a lot of things, but the process can only get started with one: curiosity. Trendspotters value being random, they look for proactive trend-seekers who are able to take in all the bits of inspiration buzzing about the world and turn them into insights to help clients. Smart scouts are always on call, ears perked, and eyes wide open. They're interested in not only what they've gone out to find but what they never knew existed or never thought could be inspiring.

In today's world this means getting out of the office, exploring new places, meeting local experts, opinion leaders and innovators, and researching in both the physical and virtual worlds. The questions any trends researcher should be asking are: What cultural, consumer and business trends are making a global impact? What are the recurring themes and patterns you can see over time? How can they be developed into a useful, practical business insight?

Here are a few tips on how to go about this yourself.

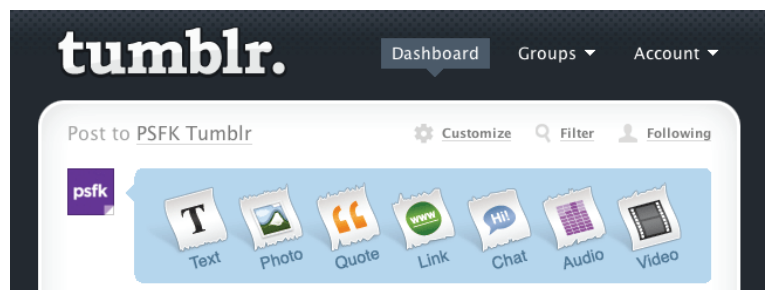
2. Why do I need to know about it?

a) Set your foundation

Before you start on your trendhunting expedition, set up an easy way to manage, store, and share all the stimulus you'll be soaking up. The quickest and easiest way to do this is to start a blog or a Web site. Blogs are perfect for keeping track of all the data, hyperlinks, articles, pictures, and other random inspirations you uncover. Most blog platforms allow you to set up a blog for free and do not require programming skills. Our favorite platform of the moment is Tumblr.com, which allows you to capture and share links, quotes, video, and audio clips with the simple click of a button.

b) Get Inspired

i. Leave Your Cubicle. You'd be surprised how easy it is to find inspiration beyond your computer screen. You can start off by exploring your immediate surroundings: hit the streets, take pictures, meet owners of new and interesting shops, chat with locals. Carry a camera and notebook; write down and capture anything that makes you stop, think, maybe even go, "Whoa."



ii. Do Your Homework. After doing some local research, head back to your desk and get ready to start digging. Look into the inspiration you've seen on the street--but don't stop there. There are thousands of periodicals, Web sites and blogs filled with inspiring ideas, technologies, products, shops, people, and places. The best sites will help make sense of all this stimuli. The sites listed below are great places to start:

- psfk.com
- trendwatching.com
- coolhunting.com
- springwise.com
- core77.com
- notcot.com

Along with the above sites, there are individuals who act as cultural barometers. They spot cultural shifts more quickly than other people and in some cases, have large influential followings.

- Steve Rubel: www.micropersuasion.com
- Ze Frank: www.zefrank.com
- Grant McCracken: www.cultureby.com
- Russell Davies: russelldavies.typepad.com
- Danah Boyd: www.zephoria.org
- Seth Godin: www.sethgodin.com
- Kevin Kelly: www.kk.org

iii. RSS It Up. Once you've got your running list of fodder going, how do you stay on top of it all? With a trend-hunter's most valuable tool: the RSS reader. RSS is a family of Web feed formats that are used to publish and disseminate content from almost any frequently updated Web publication, including blogs, newspapers, magazines, podcasts, social networking sites, and photo and video sites.

Many RSS readers are "smart" enough to pick up the RSS feed of a site if it exists. For example, our favorite RSS reader, Google Reader (reader.google.com), allows you to subscribe to feeds simply by typing in the url of the site/content you wish to RSS, and it will figure everything out. You can choose which feeds and stories to read first and which to save for later, or receive constant live updates.

Other free, easy-to-use reader include:

- My Yahoo! (my.yahoo.com)
- Bloglines (bloglines.com)-allows you to organize your feeds in folders
- Feedblitz (feedblitz.com)-delivers your RSS feed to your inbox in newsletter form
- 3Netnewswire (netnewswire.com)-the most-popular desktop-based feed reader for Macs.



iv. Stay Alert and Analytical. Many services help you stay on top of trends, themes, or topics you're watching with customizable 'alerts'. Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) will send you email updates of the latest relevant Google results (Web, news, blogs, etc) based on your choice of keyword, query, or topic, at the frequency you want (daily, weekly, immediately, etc).

Twitter (www.twitter.com) updates you on the latest 'tweets' (short posts) about ideas/themes/people/words you're following. You can subscribe to the RSS feed of Twitter alerts for whatever keywords you're interested in. If those words appear anywhere in the public twittersphere, you'll be notified.

There are slightly more technical ways of approaching trends too. Algorithm-based tools like Google Trends (www.google.com/trends) and Facebook Lexicon (www.facebook.com/lexicon) analyze the frequency and fluctuation of how trends and topics appear on the Internet over time, giving a more holistic, long-range understanding of trends. These tools can help identify patterns and turn hunches into profitable insights.

Tip: Get more than just textual inspiration by subscribing to the RSS feeds of photo and video content specific to your interests. For example, you can subscribe to the RSS of all the photos uploaded on flickr.com tagged with the word "play"; every time a new one is added, you'll be notified.



3. Meet Your Inspiration.

If you're still growing your personal network of opinion leaders, tastemakers, and innovators, reach out to the bloggers and inspirational folk you're reading about. Most of them will have their contact information listed on their sites, and you'll likely get a response from a good number of them. If you publish their answers on your blog, it's free publicity for them. A simple three-question interview is a good way to get the ball rolling. Some possible questions to ask:

- Who are you and what are you working on now?
- How are you changing your industry?
- What's turning you on right now in your field?
- Who's inspiring you right now?
- Name five sites that inspire you.

If any interviewees seem especially friendly, try to arrange video interviews—they make for great blog content.

4. Synthesize and Share.

Write about what you find—privately, internally, and publicly. The cognitive process of republishing makes you consider information in a deeper way. Sharing your findings also establishes you as someone in the know. Once you've established a good amount of content, contact the publications and sites you find inspiration from and let them know about yourself and your discoveries. Link back to their sites and encourage comments on your posts.

Tip: Some creative ways to share your findings:

- Create mood boards by tearsheeting and image hunting online. The visual effect of mood boards can often explain an idea or trend better than words can.
- Start open Flickr pools to encourage others to collaborate in your trendhunting
- Create profiles on Blip.tv, Vimeo.com, or other media-sharing sites dedicated to tastemaker interviews, city tours, and other points of interest.

4. The thing to remember is...

Trendspotting is as much about casting a wide net as knowing which fish are tasty. Being proactively curious at all times will give you the most inspiration to sift through-meaning a bigger grab bag of cool stuff to pick from, and eventually, a more solid understanding of the patterns and trends around you. Once you have a foundation to build your insights, do some research. Scan the Web, publications, and books for trends and ideas that stand out and learn as much as you can about them. Discover and reach out to experts in different fields, and instead of seeing them as competitors, treat them as collaborators. Learn from them and they'll learn from you, too. Pretty soon, you'll find people will be coming to you for your input and insights.

Last but not least share! Don't hoard your insights or hide your knowledge. Sites like PSFK have always freely shared inspirations and insights with its readers, because they know that 300,000 minds are better than 1. Rather than a one-way speech, start a dialogue about the trends you're seeing and following. You'll come to a better understanding more quickly and, hopefully, stumble upon something truly business changing.