

ZOOM OUT

UNCOVERING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TRENDSCAPE

By Peter Spellman, NextCalling.org
2017-18



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TREND MONGERING

When I talk about “trends” I don’t mean ***trendy, faddish or fashionable***. Those are usually short-lived, flavor-of-the-week crazes that grip the market’s attention for a spell and then quickly fade into oblivion. Beanie Babies, pet rocks and 8-track tapes fall into this category.

When I say “trends” I mean ***emerging meta-currents in our social and cultural lives which herald new ways of living and thinking***. These movements are mostly gradual and sometimes difficult to analyze. Nevertheless, they are real and transforming the world we inhabit. It wouldn’t be extreme to say that for the past 50 years the world has witnessed a gradual and comprehensive restructuring of economic and social life.

What follows is a list of trends I’ve been observing for the past few years. The list is U.S.-centric and not comprehensive by any means. It is simply a distillation of trends I consider significant and already impacting life. ***I share the list with you to help stimulate business ideas and opportunities which may spark a special match for your own niche***. I’ve divided them into three broad categories: Socio-Cultural, Technological and Geo-Economic.

As you read each trend, ask: Is there a specific opportunity for me here?

Would love to hear what you come up with!

Please reach out: peter@nextcalling.org

I. SOCIO-CULTURAL: People, Communities, Values

- **Teach Me** – Demand for higher education and training of all sorts is rising daily as technology drives innovation and soft labor market churns.
- **Don't Teach Me** – High School drop-out rate is increasing across the U.S. The national average is 30% though, in some places, it's as high as 80%.
- **Make Together** - Consumers co-create with companies by participating in the start-up and development of new products and services.
- **Cocoon** – The retreat from neighborliness continues as home entertainment improves and perceived threats of violence affect social decisions.
- **Meet my Moms/Dads** – More non-traditional families weave their experience into neighborhoods and schools.
- **Hire Ed?** – The college degree/college debt equation continues to trouble in a tight job market, leading to chronic disruptions in higher education for the foreseeable future.
- **The Everywhere Room** – The shift from *Place*-centric (chatrooms, message boards and other *gathering places*) to *People*-centric (social networks, buddy lists, phonebooks and other *collections of people*) strengthens.
- **Unretirement** - Over seven in ten pre-retirees say they want to work in retirement. In the near future, it will be increasingly unusual for retirees *not to work*. *Note: I'm building my niche business on this one.*
- **Attachment to Place** - Thanks to the Internet and mobile communications technologies people now have huge opportunities for work and communication regardless of their place of residence.
- **Religious Drift** – Changes in global religious demography, such as the rapid growth of Christianity in the global South and increased Muslim

immigration to Western nations, will shape public attitudes and government policies. Growth in ultra-conservative religious believers will have an increased impact, with major policy and security implications around the world.

- **Knowledge Nomads** – The proliferation of high speed internet connections, the growth of low-cost videoconference technology, and the ability to rapidly and easily move around the globe via interrelated networks of airlines will allow workers to complete their work anywhere in the world.
- **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** will continue to grow in prominence and acceptance in urban areas for both individual consumers and restaurants.
- **Info-glut** – Hyper-abundance of information and data leads to a scarcity of context and an opportunity for curation. We are about to enter the “Petabyte Age,” where data saturation is the norm.
- **Back to Basics** – Groundswells of cultural conservatism, traditional values, and eco-sustainability. Along with it, a desire for authenticity and spiritual consciousness.
- **My Way** – A rapidly segmenting marketplace means “mass markets” give way to “micro markets” as customers demand to have it *their way*. Some refer to this as a shift from mass market to “mass customization”.
- **Soft Tech** – High tech creates demand for “high touch” as companies learn to adapt to the time-strapped, screen-addicted customer with love.

II. TECHNOLOGY: Science, Machines, Processes

- **Tech Ubiquity** – Multi-sensory tech makes wearable computing common within five years.
- **Humans Need Not Apply** – Automation and Robotics displacing not only blue-collar manufacturing jobs, but also white-collar professional skill-sets.
- **Cyber Beads** – Electronic monetary transfer continues its global spread and alternative currencies (Bitcoin, etc.) gather steam.
- **Cyber Hacking** – Digital terrorism, in all its forms, threatens to de-stabilize governments, companies and society.
- **Eye in the Sky** – Because of increased demand for security we will see greater surveillance (advanced cameras, spyware, etc.) deployed throughout our cities and towns.
- **An Army of Davids** – Micro-businesses using plug-and-play software, gives them the look, reach and efficiencies only large companies once enjoyed.
- **Data Analytics** – Businesses use of intelligent devices is helping them gain customer insight and improve delivery of goods and services. A new wave of analytical tools is increasing small business productivity and easing management burdens.
- **Geoengineering** – Increasing intervention of humans into the world of weather modification could have unintended consequences.
- **Virtual Worlds** will be widely adopted venues for reaching customers and experimenting with new product ideas and business models. Small businesses will increasingly market themselves through the connected world of cars and cell phones.
- **Outside R&D** – Successful organizations will become adept at integrating large problem-solver networks, linking “answer seekers” with “problem

solvers” across the globe to rapidly harness the brainpower of international experts.

- **Advances in ubiquitous sensors** will result in chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and meteorological sensors in everyday personal devices, such as cell phones.
- **Progress in biotechnology** is leading to bio-implants that provide enhanced human performance. Rapid biotechnology advances will lead to the ability to remotely trigger automatic production of immune response and medicines in the body via implants or other means.
- **Next Tech Wave** - Molecular manufacturing – the ability to construct powerful, atomically precise products at an exponentially increasing pace – will create disruptions, such as an unprecedented invasion of privacy resulting from cheaper, smaller, more capable and widely available surveillance devices.
- **Advances in “wild card” technologies** will lead to the ability to “hack” people via neural, computer or other means to attack cognitive function and neural energy.
- **Innovations in nanotechnology** will lead to a significant proliferation in diversity of high- powered, portable energy generation and storage devices. This will spur the use of renewable electricity generation, which was previously prohibited due to storage deficiencies.
- **Better water filtration** will eliminate many forms of disease from developing countries, spurring their development. In addition, we are close to synthesizing water!

III. GEO-ECONOMIC: Earth, Politics, Power

- **Shifting Sands** – Major economies will confront shrinking workforces and diminishing productivity gains while recovering from the 2008-09 financial crisis with high debt, weak demand, and doubts about globalization. China will attempt to shift to a consumer-driven economy from its longstanding export and investment focus. Lower growth will threaten poverty reduction in developing countries.
- **NGOs** (Non-Government Organizations) will be the fastest growing non-state actors, and will be key to governmental and industry strategies and solutions. Organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will eventually have more influence than national and multi-national organizations when it comes to education and disease eradication in third world nations.
- **Dragon and Bear** – China and Russia will be emboldened, while regional aggressors and non-state actors will see openings to pursue their interests. Uncertainty about the United States, an inward-looking West, and erosion of norms for conflict prevention and human rights will encourage China and Russia to check US influence. In doing so, their “gray zone” aggression and diverse forms of disruption will stay below the threshold of hot war but still bring profound risks.
- **Bittersweet Tech** – Rapid technological advances will increase the pace of change and create new opportunities, but will aggravate divisions between winners and losers. Automation and artificial intelligence threaten to change industries faster than economies can adjust, potentially displacing workers and limiting the usual route for poor countries to develop.
- **Waning Middle** – While decades of global integration and advancing technology enriched the richest and lifted millions out of poverty, mostly in Asia, it also hollowed out Western middle classes and stoked pushback against globalization. Migrant flows are greater now than in the past 70 years, raising the specter of drained welfare coffers and increased competition for jobs, and reinforcing nativist, anti-elite impulses.

- **Resurgent Nationalism** – Slow growth plus technology-induced disruptions in job markets will threaten poverty reduction and drive tensions within countries in the years to come, fueling the very nationalism that contributes to tensions between countries.
- **Labor/Aging Patterns** – People over 60 are becoming the world’s fastest growing age cohort. Successful aging societies will increase elderly, youth, and female workforce participation to offset fewer working-age adults. Median ages will reach highs by 2035 in Japan (52.4), South Korea (49.4), Germany (49.6), and in several other countries. Europe will be hit especially hard, as well as Cuba (48), Russia (43.6), and China (45.7). The United States is aging at a slower rate—reaching a median age of approximately 41 by 2035—and will maintain a growing working-age population.
- **Developing nations** are skipping the whole “industrialization” phase, and going directly from the agricultural to the information age. Urbanization and the youth population bulge will change the make-up and nature of developing nations.
- **Diffused Terror** – The most pressing geopolitical threat will not be al Qaeda or ISIS, but its franchises, the wider network-of-networks spawned and inspired by their ideology.
- **Feed Me** – With more empowered individuals and a growing global middle class, the demand for food, water, and energy will rise by approximately 35, 40, and 50% respectively over the next fifteen years.
- **Global Paradox** – The progress of the past decades is historic—connecting people, empowering individuals, groups, and states, and lifting a billion people out of poverty in the process. But this same progress also spawned shocks like the Arab Spring, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, and the global rise of populist, anti-establishment politics. These shocks reveal how fragile the achievements have been, underscoring deep shifts in the global landscape.
- **Temp Becomes Permanent** – Corporate consolidation and job shedding lead to ongoing structural unemployment/underemployment. “Gig”

economy emerges favoring short-term work contracts, free agency and virtual labor.

OUTRO

What should you do with these trends? Commit to becoming *pre-active* rather than reactive, an *opportunity-manager* rather than a crisis-manager. Most long-term plans fail because they start with the present – year one – and proceed to year two, year three, etc. As a result, all the specifics tend to be front-located and based on current reality. As the plan carries forward it gets more and more vague. By planning backward, fronting the future to the present, we are better able to see where, when, and how to take action in order to build change into our plan. The best way to deal with the future is to make the future.

Studying trends can alert you to a business opportunity matching to your passion, desired lifestyle, and expertise to a core audience hungry for your business.

If you need help applying these opportunities to your own product or service, consider some **Innovation Coaching with Peter Spellman**.
Contact: peter@nextcalling.org

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