



2011: Trendspotting for the Next Decade

By Richard Laermer
McGraw Hill, 304 pages, 2008
ISBN 978-0-07-149727-5

This book may be perplexing to many readers. It may be a generational thing: this is most definitely not a “business book” as most of us over 40 would define the term. It is not particularly easy to read. The author says right up front that he wrote the book mostly via BlackBerry, and it does have that impromptu, “I couldn’t see the whole page at once” feel that is increasingly common in an IM age. There are many parenthetical and sidebar comments that can make it difficult for the reader to follow the primary thought. There is a different view of the world here, almost a different language or even culture; certainly a way of thinking and a style of communicating that is not what you will typically find in the Business section of Barnes & Noble. The author admits to being verbose, and he is.

But if you can get past those challenges, there are some interesting and (assuming the author has correctly interpreted his observations) potentially useful insights. A few examples of the trends Laermer has spotted:

- In the future, it will be okay to terminate customer relationships: “the customer is always right” will stop being a holy mantra. Laermer’s thinking is that when customers make truly excessive demands, they consume resources, eat into revenue and deny other

customers “access to deal with legitimate problems.” Companies should and will begin to qualify prospects before converting them to actual customers.

- Products that make our lives better will be more in demand than products aimed at making our lives better.
- “The age of form letters” and generic marketing will be replaced by communication that is produced with consideration for the audience and the circumstances, and with focus and imagination.

Some “trends” seem more like Laermer’s ideas, or wishful thinking, or even somewhat random thoughts. For example: “TREND: You might want to be someone else online, but, gee, be careful.”

This one seemed to translate into the concept that our online identities – through YouTube, MySpace, and even e-mail – will become ever more important and may or may not remain tethered to our “real” identities. Which is extremely interesting to those of us curious about matters of psychology or sociology, but Laermer fails to explain how this is relevant to the world of business. That doesn’t mean the relevance isn’t there: you simply have to figure it out for yourself.

It will take some effort and out-of-the-box thinking to translate many of these ideas into our day-to-day business lives. However, once you become accustomed to Laermer’s style, there are both entertainment and some interesting thoughts to be found here.

Marcia Mather Barkley
Senior Consultant in Management Consulting
CedarCrestone, Inc.

“TREND:
You might want to be
someone else online, but,
gee, be careful.”