

## Sphere Trending



Photos by ERIC SEALS/Detroit Free Press

Maxine Lauer of White Lake is the CEO, or Creative Explorer of Opportunities, of Waterford-based Sphere Trending. The company, which employs a dozen people, does product and trend research for local and national clients then also translates its findings into product design.

# Firm's niche is to link trends, product sales

By JOHN GALLAGHER  
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

At the small but growing firm Sphere Trending, founder and boss Maxine Lauer is the CEO — but she swiftly explains that stands for “creative examiner of opportunities.”

That phrase, in turn, explains the purpose of Sphere Trending and the reason for its rapid rise. Founded just 10 years ago with one employee and about \$300,000 in initial contracts, the firm now employs a dozen people, and expects to hit around \$2 million in billings this year.

How? By blending a sophisticated type of trend-spotting with precise attention to turning those observations into marketable products and services.

“We bridge the gap and bring it home into a process and a recommendation that is actionable and that will turn into dollars at the cash register,” Lauer says.

Based in Waterford, the firm's clients include major national retailers and consumer product companies such as the Behr paint company, Delta faucets and Agio outdoor furniture.

Some of what Sphere Trending delivers is advice on store locations and what



To generate their ideas, Lauer and her team at Sphere Trending go on 10 city tours twice a year and visit 45 trade shows a year.

### Sphere Trending

**What:** Consumer products research

**Where:** Waterford

**Employees:** About 12, plus freelancers

**Revenue:** About \$2 million this year

**Founder:** Maxine Lauer

**Web site:** [www.spheretrending.com](http://www.spheretrending.com)

buyers want. But Sphere Trending designs products, too, from patio grills to stationery to packaging.

Lauer spent most of her career with major corporations, including Kmart, be-

fore launching her firm in 2000. She hoped to bridge the gap between spotting trends and designing products from that research in a way that hadn't been done.

The team she assembled drew from many disciplines, or as her Web site described them: “consumer intelligence specialists, color gurus, retail & marketing ambassadors, design experts, social media junkies, brand champions, interior designers and trend addicts.”

Unlike most start-ups, she never took out a loan nor advertised. “Haven't had time,” she says, laughing.

To generate their ideas,

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Lauer and her team scour the world. They split up for 10 city tours twice a year (such as San Francisco, Portland, Ore., Austin, Texas, Boston, Miami, Richmond, Va., and Nashville, Tenn.) and visit 45 trade shows. They interview experts close to consumers, like Realtors and retailers.

And, of course, they consult with the younger consumers Lauer calls Gen Now. Those twenty-somethings do so many things differently from their Baby Boomer elders. They're a more intuitive generation, Lauer says, less likely to follow group signals on hairstyles or clothing. For example, more than 50% of Gen Now buyers change a consumer product that they buy — personalizing a backpack, say.

Such insights hopefully will continue to pay off for Sphere Trending clients.

“We've been told that we actually make money,” Lauer says. “We don't cost money, which is great for a consulting firm.”

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