

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Macro trends drive company

Unique niche helps businesses gain edge in products, services

BY KAREN DYBIS
Special to The Detroit News

About five years ago, Sphere Trending noticed something about that mysterious species known as the American teenager.

Unlike previous generations, today's teens tend to work, play and interact with their eyes focused downward. That is because most of the technology they use — cell phones, computers and handheld video games — pull their gaze toward the object they are holding.

So the Sphere Trending team of artists, designers and trend forecasters started informing their retail and manufacturing clients about this trend. The trend, called Raising the Sightlines, impacts how people shop, respond to visual cues and live in their environments.

This awareness of macro consumer trends, combined with design trend forecasting, is how Waterford-based Sphere Trending is making a name for itself among national firms.

The company's unique niche, consistent insights and commitment to social marketing tools like



Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Sphere Trending, located in Waterford, is making a name for itself by identifying opportunities for businesses based on trends in how people work and play. One trend identifies how young people read and see differently.

their trending blog, has given them a reputation as experts in helping firms understand future innovation opportunities in product, services and design.

Every trend has business potential, and Sphere Trending's purpose is to help its clients find those money-making opportunities before they fade away, said Susan Yashinsky, the firm's vice president of marketing. Raising the Sightlines is one such opportunity.

"To get this critical consumer to notice your product and displays, you must raise their eye up in a gradual manner, beginning on the floor where the eye is first resting by using something visual interesting, such as a floor graphic. Then, the eye will naturally go way up," Yashinsky added.

Adding to this intuitive observation is the research scientists are doing that shows Generation Y or Millennials actually read differently, see differently and have a smaller visual field, which causes a different way of responding to shopping environments.

"This makes sense since this generation has been exposed to billions of input via the Internet and their eyes have learned to scan much more effectively than older consumers as a mechanism to sift through the tremendous amount of information," said Maxine Lauer, the firm's CEO and president.

Lauer founded Sphere Trending nearly a decade ago. Her career spans more than 30 years of executive management experience in retail and manufacturing with a focus in the areas of design, marketing and product development.

How they did it

Strategy: To differentiate themselves from other trending firms, Sphere Trending added new and previously unavailable services to its services portfolio, making itself a national trend expert.

Location: 1116 Voorheis Road, Waterford.

Information: www.spheretrending.com or (248) 681-3945.

Her goal was to create a firm that not only saw trends as they emerged but could help its clients use that information to create and sell new products. Today, its client list includes a variety of Fortune 500 companies, national retail chains and more. Their trend forecasts cover an array of products from home goods to crafts to appliances. The firm specializes in environments: home, work and leisure.

Much of its staff of 14 travel constantly, visiting more than 45 national and international design shows, trend-spotting in key cities around the world. Part of this traveling is to give Sphere Trending insights into what consumer groups large and small are doing — and to find the little details that will soon emerge into giant, game-changing trends.

Lauer's insights were a key component to the recent Las Vegas Market, the fastest growing international trade event dedicated to home furnishings. Organizers partnered with Sphere Trending to give participants a view into what would be on the horizon, said Dana Andrew, vice president of marketing and public relations.

"There were a number of trend-

worthy introductions that took place during our Summer Market, and we wanted to put these styles into a useful context for retailers and designers who desire to stay ahead of the curve," Andrew said.

Some key areas Sphere Trending is studying include:

- The "New Mom." These savvy 30-something shoppers are into coupons and bragging about their bargains, something very different than previous generations. They breathe technology, which impacts their expectations on shopping, what they buy and how they live.

- Buying local and community. Supporting your local community is the new Buy American and it is also where Sphere is seeing a lot of new exciting retail concepts that will challenge the big box stores. Reaching In and Reaching Out is the term Sphere is using to describe this new trend of supporting local businesses, growing your own food (which includes both backyard and frontyard gardening) and embracing activities that harken back to a less complicated time with a modern approach.

- Celebration of the Industrial Era. This trend combines the romance of the early transportation era, with its steam-powered trains and aviation with a new futuristic feeling that younger generations find attractive. The movement started as Steampunk several years ago and has evolved into a viable mass design trend. An example is Restoration Hardware's recent line of living-room tables, which look like a mix of railroad ties and industrial materials.

Karen Dybis is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.



Unemployment drops, stocks gain

New York — Stocks climbed Wednesday following a drop in weekly unemployment claims to the lowest level of the year and a rise in new home sales. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 30.69, or 0.3 percent, to 10,464.40.

The market's gains were modest on light trading volume ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. The government said new claims for unemployment insurance fell by 35,000 last week to 466,000. That's the fewest claims since September last year, and better than the 500,000 that economists had expected. In other news,