

**Q&A**

AS TARGET'S VP OF TREND, DESIGN AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, ROBYN WATERS HELPED DRIVE THE "UPSCALE DISCOUNTER" TO US\$48 BILLION IN SALES. NOW, AS A LEADING TRENDMASTER, WATERS SAYS SUCH OXYMORONS ARE FERTILE GROUND FOR BUSINESS IDEAS

Profitable paradoxes

PROFIT: In *The Hummer and the Mini: Navigating the Contradictions of the New Trend Landscape*, you write that trends and countertrends now flourish at the same time, such as the concurrent booms in fast food and health clubs. How can entrepreneurs capitalize on this?

WATERS: It's not just about the trend at one end and the countertrend at the other end, but about how you can be inclusive. An example is "luxurious commodities." There are a lot of commodities out there that fill a need on a daily basis, and they're pretty much a price game. At the other end, the luxury business is huge, and people are willing to pay a premium, whether \$300 for an iPod or \$1,000 for a Movado watch. But in the middle, there's some unique ground—and that's where I tell people to explore. Look at the inconsistencies in the marketplace and see if there's a nugget of an opportunity there, something that can be developed.

PROFIT: So, the key is to tap into both the trend and the countertrend?

WATERS: Yes. Starbucks, for example, is expensive in the world of coffee; but in the realm of luxury products, it's a very affordable treat.

It's also about mass customization. Starbucks pours four million cups of coffee every day, and there are 19,000 drink combinations you can order there. It has found a way to customize the experience. I know many people who go into their local Starbucks and they know the barista, and the barista will ask, "The usual?" And that's pretty amazing.

So, [Starbucks is] big, but small; it's luxurious, yet a commodity; it's a product for the masses, but customized for the individual.

PROFIT: How can somebody who's not a trendmaster like you spot promising new business opportunities?

WATERS: It's about observation, about being in very close touch with customers. And that means learning to ask the right questions, not just "How does this work for you?" but "What does this mean to you?"; not just "Do you like this colour?" but "How do you feel about it?" It's about empathy, about connecting. It's about observing, then asking questions that probe the value system of your customers—what's in their hearts, not their heads. You need to find out what they're passionate about, what really matters to them. —JM

5 GREAT SOURCES OF BUSINESS IDEAS

WHERE TOP TRENDWATCHERS TURN TO STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE

1. Wired magazine: The geek/futurist bible is packed with news of innovative concepts, especially from the twin idea factories in its home state of California: Silicon Valley and Hollywood. Its companion website (Wired.com) offers exclusive stories, newsletters, blogs and podcasts.

2. Springwise.com: Dutch trend expert Rainier Evers draws on a global network of 8,000 opportunity spotters to stock his vast database of ideas that are always inspiring, if not commercializable.

3. Statistics Canada: *The Economist* calls it "the world's best statistical agency." At statcan.ca, you can dive into details from the census, 350 active surveys or *The Daily* e-newsletter on topics as diverse as Canada's slowing population growth and our skyrocketing blueberry consumption.

4. Iconowatch: This U.S. e-newsletter delivers bite-sized learning on consumer behaviour, including hard data (e.g., 47% of Americans plan to buy Christmas gifts online this year) and unexpected insights (e.g., most bar-goers under 35 try a different drink every visit).

5. Joshspear.com: Blogger and brand strategist Josh Spear of Boulder, Colo., pounds the global pavement to find truly original products. His visuals-rich site is especially strong on design, gadgets and the impact of technology. —KA

Innovation calisthenics

FIVE EXERCISES TO TONE YOUR CREATIVE MUSCLES

1 GET OUT OF YOUR RUT: Move your watch to the other wrist. Leave your keys in a new place. Take a different route home. Force yourself out of one habit a week, and you'll start thinking in new directions.

2 RECORD IT BEFORE YOU FORGET IT: Don't leave home without a notepad, tape recorder or other means to record ideas as they occur. Then force yourself to add 10 related ideas.

3 IMMERSE YOURSELF IN FRESH VIEWPOINTS: Explore books, magazines, newspapers and websites that are unrelated to your business or personal interests. Travel somewhere you wouldn't normally go. Surround yourself with people from diverse fields whose new-to-you perspectives will expose you to opportunities.

4 REIMAGINE THE OLD: Encourage lateral thinking by taking an everyday item such

as a paper clip or a rubber band and brainstorming 25 alternative uses for it.

5 TAKE UP A BRAIN SPORT: Exercise pumps your brain with glucose, which increases oxygen delivery and nerve connections. Keep your mind sharp by participating in a strategic sport, such as football, hockey or soccer. And loosen up your imagination with a rhythmic activity, such as running, walking or swimming. —KA