



HOW TO SPOT TRENDS AND PUT THEM TO WORK • 2026

Trendwatching

Every big wave of change began as a ripple nobody took seriously.

Olya Lakt

An award-winning marketing and media executive, YouTube and TikTok producer, startup advisor. Along the way, I launched industry-defining communities and events, and learned that the strongest brands don't just sell products — they create movements.

olyalakt.com • [Substack](#) • [LinkedIn](#)

Methods in this guide are from TrendOne, the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (CIFS) and Lumiknows; the cases and the mistakes are mine.



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INTRODUCTION

What's in this guide

I've collected the methods that help you spot signals of the future in the news we usually walk past without a second thought.

Armed with this knowledge, you'll start seeing the weak signals of a future that will catch up with us in three, five, ten years.

My track record with trends

How do you repeat a success that first came on gut feeling?

When I was just starting out as a manager, my inexperience was an advantage: my eyes were fresh, unclouded by the industry's clichés. That fresh view helped me see where B2B marketing was going — from business-to-business to business-to-human, a focus on people even when you sell banks software that makes them more efficient — and what we could do to stand out from the competition.

Through marketing alone, with no direct sales, this took my company, Sumsb, from zero to €60M ARR in five years — in a hyper-competitive market and with almost no outside funding. Later, at other companies, my attempts to find the right pain points and emotional triggers with business frameworks or by intuition didn't always work.

I needed a method that would let me see what resonates with buyers — reliably, and before others do. Not just their corporate pain points, but the human level and the zeitgeist: individual emotions, and the ideas and sentiments that dominate society now.

So three years ago I turned to trendwatching. My teacher, Ekaterina Khramkova, PhD, CEO of Lumiknows, since the '90s, has worked in trend units at Philips and Samsung in Israel and Japan.

Trendwatching is used by large corporations, but startups and small and medium-sized businesses rarely apply the method — except for PR and social media teams chasing today's trends to ride the wave.

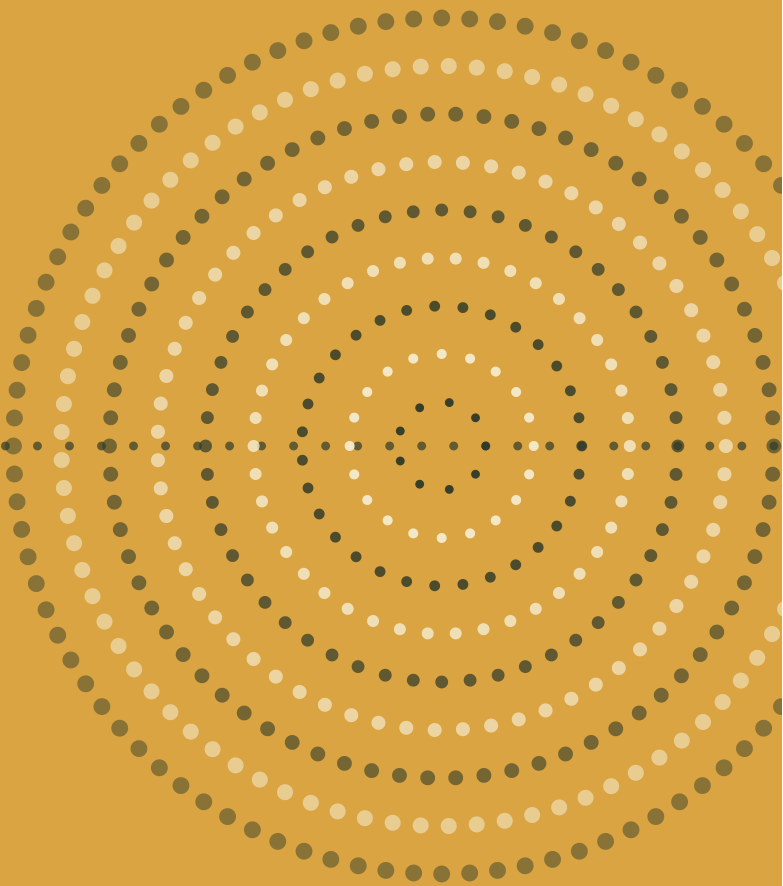
Yet it's an incredibly rich source of insight, and I want to share these methods with my community.





PART I

Why read this guide



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IKEA: picking a collection theme that would hit the mood of the moment
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How spotting the body-positivity trend early doubled Dove’s sales



In June 2026, SpaceX held the largest IPO in history, raising over \$85 billion at a \$1.77 trillion valuation.

Yet analysts are sharply divided on whether to buy the stock. Leading economists point out that the company is priced at roughly 100 times its revenue, and openly call the S-1 filing absurd. Still, the company got exactly the valuation it wanted. Why?

From a trendwatching perspective, the world is now at a technological fork between two versions of the future: “Phantomatics” and “Grounding.” The difference between them is the ‘access point’ to tomorrow’s products, solutions and resources.

In the case of Phantomatics, we get a business model built around one (and only one) ‘assembly point’ for everything there is: a single global platform where you’ll do EVERYTHING. Pay for services, get the information you need, store your medical records, educate your kids, pay taxes, buy bread, sign up for courses, watch movies, find friends, pay for the AC repair, and so on and so forth. Just imagine what a platform like that could do!

Grounding is the opposite path: an environment that runs by analog, not digital, laws.

What we’re watching in the news today is, at its core, a global race to build such a platform with the widest possible reach. Artificial intelligence plays the key role here.

Elon Musk is ahead for now with his product lineup: X + xAI/Grok + Starlink + Neuralink. The point is that all of these businesses are perfectly interlocked when it comes to providing a single platform for living.

I think this is a rather historic moment — from now on, life ‘in X format’ (everything you do, run through a single app) will develop at a rapid pace across the US and Europe. In China’s sphere of influence, the same concept has been developing for several years now on the basis of WeChat, Chinese AI and the social credit system.

But all these businesses may look ‘unrelated’ unless you understand the overall logic of the Phantomatics scenario: the shift from fragmented customer experience (Customer X) to holistic human experience (Human X, HX) ... And all of this runs straight through the human brain — Neuralink and Starlink are supposed to link the whole system, from a single person to the entire planet, into one infrastructure.

Now we’ll watch a micro-messenger turn into an Everything App. That’s what the \$1.77 trillion is buying: not a rocket company, but a bet that the Phantomatics future arrives — and that Musk’s platform is its access point.

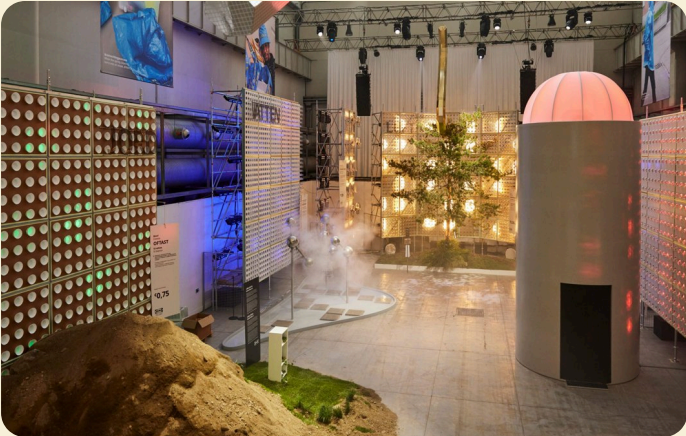


PART I

IKEA: picking a collection theme that would hit the mood of the moment

Trendwatching can help with more down-to-earth tasks than tracking megatrends, too. Here are a couple of examples from marketing and from strategic bets more broadly.

At Milan Design Week 2023, IKEA unveiled its pavilion *Assembling the Future Together*: an immersive exhibition about the company’s history since the 1950s and its vision of the future... Interest in vintage design, the company says, is growing worldwide — which is why it launched the new *Nyttillverkad* collection.



PHOTOS: INTER IKEA SYSTEMS B.V.

What's behind it

In early 2023, while preparing a trend report for one of our clients, we identified a long-running visual trend we called the ‘Low-Tech Archetype,’ part of a higher-order trend, ‘Putting the Digital in Its Place’... In other words, the interest in vintage design is largely driven by a civilizational fatigue with ‘high tech’ — which leaves no room for uniqueness, surprise and serendipity, unpredictability, or intuition. The world is tired of complexity — it wants something simple, human, understandable.



Result

IKEA doesn't publish revenue or sales-share figures for its collections. But Nyttillverkad came out in **six drops over 19 months**, while IKEA's well-known collaborations (Virgil Abloh, Swedish House Mafia, Gustaf Westman) were each released in a single launch — an indirect sign the collection did well.

The numbers on vintage: the global second-hand furniture market was estimated at \$34 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach \$56.7 billion by 2030 ([Market.us](#), [Grand View Research](#)). Sales at resale marketplaces such as Chairish and Kaiyo were up 33% from 2019 to 2023 ([GrowthHQ](#)).

Pop culture is feeling the same pull toward vintage. FX's "Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. & Carolyn Bessette" (2026) became the network's most-watched limited series ever on Hulu and Disney+: over 65 million hours streamed, with the finale drawing 90% more viewers than the premiere ([Variety](#)).

The effect spilled over into fashion: U.S. Google searches for "Calvin Klein 90s" jumped 850% in the show's first week ([Glossy](#)), and demand for the brand on Lyst rose 43% week-on-week after the finale ([Lyst / Style Analytics](#)). **What the numbers show is nostalgia.** For Gen Z, it's nostalgia for a world they never lived in — **a booming economy, iconic pop culture, a life untouched by smartphones.**



LOVE STORY, FX, 2026 · PHOTO: FX | CALVIN KLEIN SPRING 2027 · PHOTO: COURTESY OF CALVIN KLEIN



PART I

How spotting the body-positivity trend early doubled Dove's sales

Dove launched its Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004 — about a decade before body positivity went mainstream . Soap sales grew from \$2 billion to \$4 billion (Ad Age), and a single spot, "Evolution," made on a \$50,000 budget, earned more than \$150 million in free media exposure (Ogilvy).

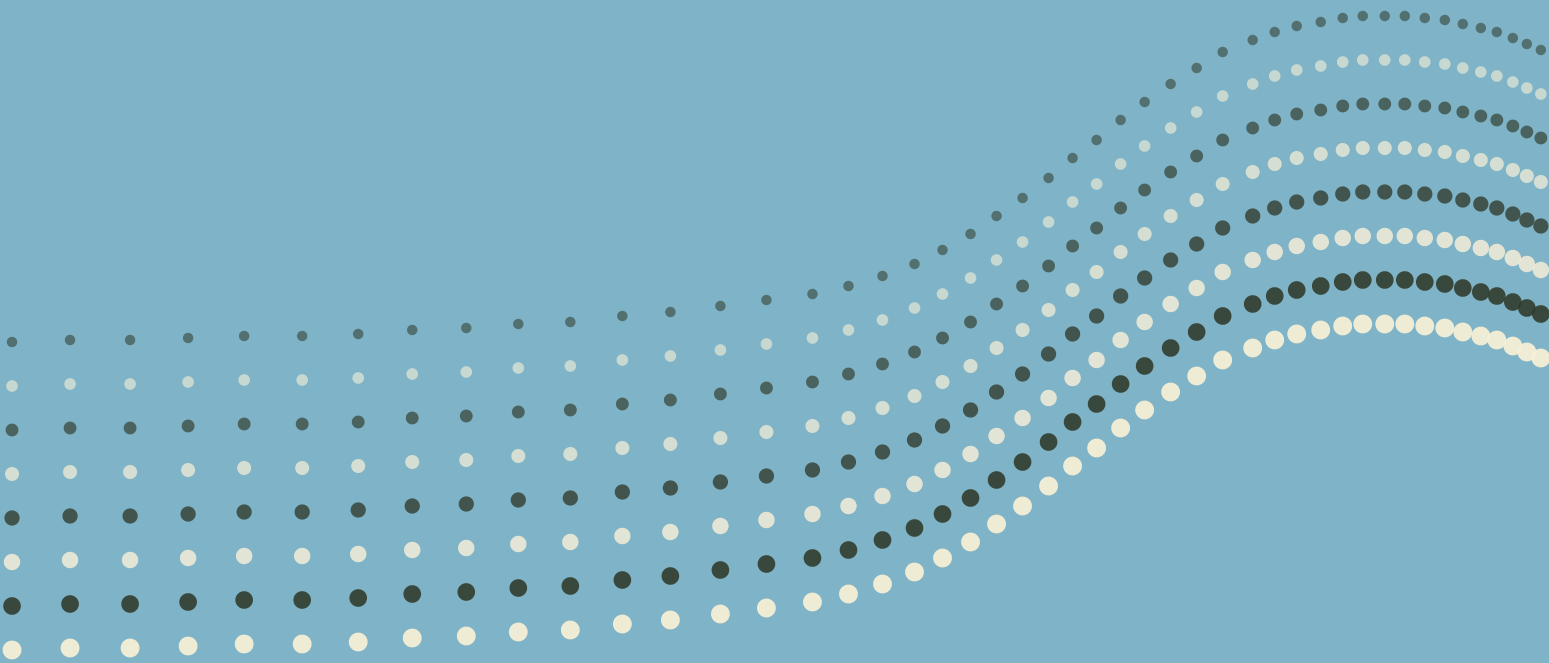


DOVE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BEAUTY, 2004 · "EVOLUTION", 2006 · IMAGES: DOVE / OGILVY & MATHER



PART II

How to spot trends and put them to work



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- 5 Trend and trend signal
- 6 Three levels of working with the future
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- 8 Where to start



The framework of the future: lifestyle trends

Most people start working with trends from technology trends, or what's trending in their own industry. That's the wrong way round. The starting point should always be changes in how people live. Here's why:

- a) Lifestyle trends last far longer. They are the framework that the more fluid, fast-moving technology and industry trends hang on. With a good understanding of the lifestyle-trend landscape, we can make long-range and reasonably accurate forecasts — including about how technology will move. And the reverse is true: if we track only technology, our picture of the future will be blurred and imprecise.
- b) To hit the future more precisely, you first of all need a good grasp of the global, civilizational trends in how people's lives are changing — across the widest range of areas. Take globalization: it ran from the '90s to roughly 2008, then flipped into regionalization, which is still going.

Putting lifestyle first is also backed by a management classic. Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, put it this way:

PETER F. DRUCKER, MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, 1999, PP. 29-30

"Management... will increasingly have to be based on the assumption that neither technology nor end-use is a foundation for management policy. They are limitations. The foundations have to be customer values and customer decisions on the distribution of their disposable income. It is with those that management policy and management strategy increasingly will have to start."



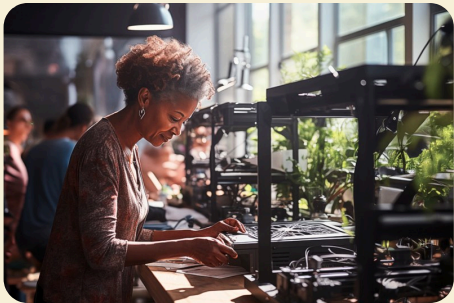
Where to start

Whatever your product or industry, focus on the themes that give you an overall picture of lifestyle trends:

- the Future of Energy
- the Future of Settlement
- the Future of Cities
- the Future of Home
- the Future of Food
- the Future of Work
- the Future of Health
- the Future of Autonomy
- the Future of Artificial Intelligence
- the Future of the Human

Examples of working with lifestyle trends

IKEA builds its Home of the Future around people rather than furniture: The future scenarios are not simply observations from a crystal ball. They are grounded in what IKEA defines as **eight core needs for a better life at home** — control, comfort, security, nurturing, belonging, enjoyment, accomplishment, and aspirations — identified through extensive global research involving over 250,000 participants in the past ten years.



LIFE AT HOME REPORT 2023, HOME SCENARIOS FOR 2030 · IMAGES: COURTESY OF IKEA

What **Elon Musk** makes isn't products but a whole way of living. His product lineup is **the shift from fragmented customer experience (Customer X) to holistic human experience (Human X, HX)**. The lifestyle trend underneath: people want one place for their whole life, not twenty apps. More on this in ["Why read this guide"](#) above.



Trend and trend signal

Let’s get the terms straight.

A trend is a growing demand in society for a solution to a particular human task — a universal need people are trying to meet, such as safety, autonomy or belonging. Trends can be identified by analyzing trend signals. A trend signal is a specific fact or news item that may point to a trend being born. One of the hard parts is understanding what driver sits behind a given signal, because that’s exactly what lets you group signals into a promising trend.



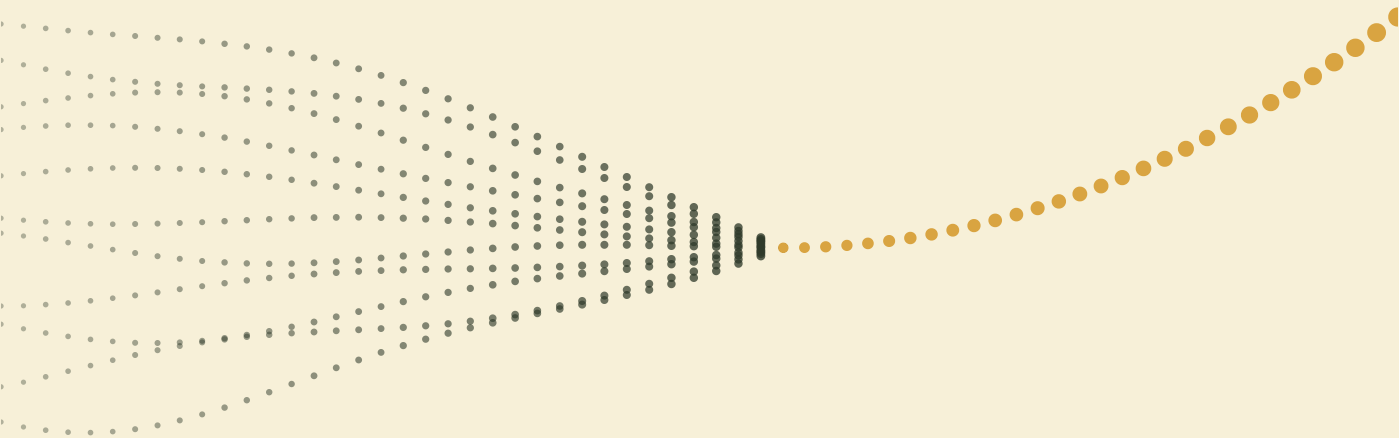
Three levels of working with the future

The core method in any creative work — the future included — is a constant back-and-forth between top-down and bottom-up. You can start at any level.

Broadly speaking, the future is handled on three levels:

- 1 **The industry level.** Most of the creative economy operates here. It is the entry level of trendwatching, which lets you work with trend reports, track specialist sources and journals, and **assess how your own industry is developing.** Horizon of understanding: 1–3 years.
- 2 **The forecasting level.** Only 10–15% work here — mostly futures research professionals, for whom this is a full-time job, 24/7/365. **Here you work with the global context:** you know how scanning and forecasting are done, you navigate the trend hierarchy with ease, you command a wide set of trend signals pulling in different directions, and you can define a trend on your own and bring it down to a particular industry. Horizon of understanding: 5–10 years.
- 3 **The conceptual level.** Around 1–2% work here. **It's the interdisciplinary ability to work with the variants and principles of the future.** The capacity to forecast the dynamics of universals — the trajectories of civilization, society, culture, and only then, as a consequence, of the economy and business... Horizon of understanding: 25+ years.

Each level includes the one before it.



PART II · SECTION 4

Variants of the future

The future always comes in the plural. The task is to model several possible futures from the information you have — and then keep tracking trend signals to see which of those futures we’re actually moving toward.

Professionals — trend agencies, trendwatching teams inside global corporations — build these maps in different ways. TrendOne, a Hamburg trend agency with 200+ corporate clients and two decades of foresight work, works bottom-up from industries: the innovations and micro-trends it observes get grouped into macro-trends, and those into thematic mega-trends — 18 mega-trends and 150 macro-trends in the 2026 version.

The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (CIFS) works with scenarios through the Futures Triangle (the push of the present, the pull of the future, the weight of the past), an Enablers & Blockers analysis for each trend, the Three Horizons (a dominant form is gradually displaced by a new one), and scenario development. The emphasis is on challenging assumptions, not on prediction (CIFS Toolkit).

My teacher starts not from a thematic industry, but from a trend signal matched to an archetypal human task. Whichever method you pick, the hard part is the same — and CIFS has a word for it. Its 2025 toolkit introduced the term reperception — a rewiring of the mind, letting go of your habitual way of thinking in order to see new images of the future.



Where to start

Go from wide to narrow, in three steps:

- 1 **Lifestyle trends.** Map how people’s way of living is shifting in your chosen future domain — health, food, home, retail.
- 2 **The visionary shift in your industry:** find how the big players — from Big Tech, FMCG and DeepTech to startups and non-profits — are breaking familiar patterns and showing where the world is heading.
- 3 **Benchmark by trend signals.** Gather signals from your industry: who’s already rebuilding around this lifestyle? Pay particular attention to the global leaders in your space and how they’re plugging into this lifestyle trend — often by stepping outside what they do today.

Also important

- Gather every one of the four signal types, failures included: cases where the signal was real but the project behind it was closed.
- Ask every signal the human-task question: what driver sits behind it?
- Train your eye. It’s essential to step outside your usual way of seeing and understanding, and to practice hunting for trend signals outside your own industry.

One more thing — because most of my readers also run social channels. Hype and trends are different animals: hype is for content, lifestyle trends are for strategy.

For short-term work — posts, campaigns, social:

- First question: is this news hook already worn out, or can we still jump on the last carriage? If it’s fresh, we react fast and get a post out. Either we shoot the trend itself, or we riff on it.
- Keep an eye on the brands people talk about and whose content gets reposted.
- Analyze your competitors’ audience and your own. Qualitative and quantitative audience analysis tells you what your followers are actually watching.
- Don’t stick like gum to every news hook and trend. We don’t turn a trend into our niche — we find trends inside our niche.
- Dig into the context, then translate it into your own business goals.



Let's look beyond the horizon
together.

Email me

olya@olyalakt.com

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