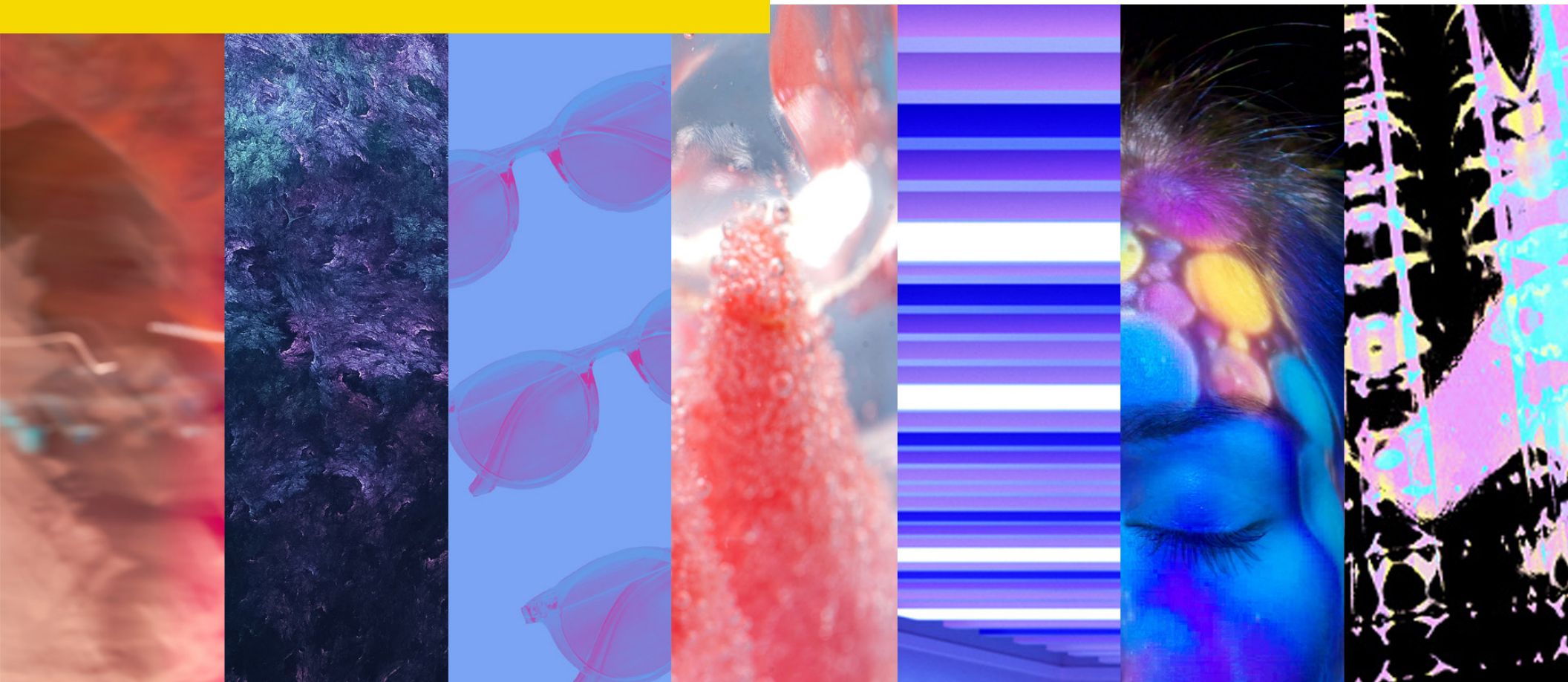




UPSHOT TREND REPORT

Cultural IQ: Seven Trends to Act On This Year





ABOUT THIS REPORT

A collective desire to move beyond the liminal state of the past year is underpinned by collective hope to feel better and find joy in what's over the horizon.

Hello, 2022!

A new year of new possibilities and new ways for brands to connect, resonate and contribute to the greater good.

2021: when life returned to nor ... nope, just kidding. Last year was all about embracing the hybrid and constantly adjusting and adapting — even more so than we had to in 2020. Yet we also saw the remarkable and historic rollout of a global vaccination effort that has shifted the trajectory of our recovery. Thank you, science!

As we look forward this new year, we are both hopeful and far better prepared for what's ahead. We're adapting to new norms, rejecting what no longer works for us (e.g., the Great Resignation!), reevaluating our priorities and reimagining interconnected systems for a post-pandemic world. A collective desire to move beyond the liminal state of the past year is underpinned by collective hope to feel better and find joy in what's over the horizon.

With this spirit of uncompromising optimism and determination, as well as new consumer demands and elevated expectations, we're highlighting seven trends for brands to act on in 2022. It's not an exhaustive list of the shifts we're always tracking across the culture and marketplace, but instead it's a peek at some of the top trends that brands need to have on their radar to up their cultural IQ during this time of rapid change.



EXPLORE THE SEVEN TRENDS

1. Gen Z & Marketing at Meme Speed

With apologies to “geriatric Millennials,” it’s now members of Gen Z who are turning most marketers’ heads with their hyper-speed cultural momentum and mercurial demands of brands.

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5. Retail Rewired

Is the metaverse the new mall? With shopping an ambient, anywhere, always-on activity, retail is exploring new hybrid formats in worlds both real and born of a digital imagination.

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2. Nurturing Nature

The new order of the day is regeneration, not mitigation. Brands’ sustainability efforts are increasingly focused on restorative strategies that seek to undo the damage done by our modern society.

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6. Everywhere Wellness

Better together is the evolution of self-care. With most every brand now in the business of care, the expectation is to contribute to the pursuit of a healthier and happier life across your entire consumer experience.

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3. Nonstop Nostalgia

Everything old is new again, or almost. As brands mine their archives for yesteryear’s hits, the smart ones are doing so with a modern mindset.

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7. Fast-Forward Future

Today’s imperative is increasingly tomorrow. Future-ready brands will apply foresight strategies to determine how they can be better ancestors to subsequent generations.

PAGE 16

4. Exuberant Edibles

Say farewell to all that faux farm to table. Modern food and beverage brands are getting bolder, brasher and even weirder to appeal to shoppers signaling their IYKYK good taste.

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Gen Z & Marketing at Meme Speed





GEN Z & MARKETING AT MEME SPEED

Outside of many pandemic-specific pivots demanded of brands over the past two years, keeping up with (and understanding) the expectations of Gen Z has been one of the most whiplash-inducing.

Sure, every youth cohort for the last hundred years has befuddled its elders, but Gen Z's unique digital fluency, ever-shifting aesthetics and often contradictory expectations are keeping marketers glued to today's hyperspeed, algorithmically driven hype cycle. However, as Gen Z succeeds Millennials as the youth generation in many marketers' sights, brands will be challenged to assess which Gen Z obsession du jour is worth their attention or action.

The biggest Gen Z creator influencers are now asserting their power and demanding more of brands and social platforms, sometimes circumventing both altogether in order to [monetize](#) their own personal brands and/or launch their own [brands](#). This rise in creator influencers' power supports today's discussions about Web3 as a creator economy evolution of the web. And smart brands will do well to cultivate their understanding of that power shift.

To resonate with Gen Z, brands will need to recognize their tendency to traffic in absurdism (see [Birds Aren't Real](#)), speak in an ever-shifting emoji-laden language (often tinged with more than a little gallows humor) and turn just about any cultural event into a meme. And though these behaviors may indicate a tendency towards cynicism, they still demand a greater commitment to activism, inclusion and tangible progress.



We expect more brands in every category to recognize the disruptive and innovation-accelerating influence of Gen Z. As a result, marketing will move faster, focus more on cultural fluency and address societal challenges with tangible measures.

An aerial photograph of a dense forest, showing a mix of green and brownish-purple foliage. The trees are densely packed, and the overall scene is captured from a high angle. In the bottom right corner, there is a large, stylized pink number '2' that partially overlaps the forest image.

Nurturing Nature



NURTURING NATURE

We first wrote about the rising interest in the health benefits of exposure to the natural world way back in a 2017 trend report. From the popularity of biophilic design in commercial environments to Americans embracing shinrin-yoku (the Japanese practice of forest bathing for health), we predicted a focus on Mother Nature as the ultimate healer.

Since then, the pandemic has spurred an outdoors revolution. Walkers became hikers and “van life” was no longer just for influencers in search of sponsors. Millions of campers, many of them novices, pitched their tents and stressed capacity at our country’s national parks. Fresh air was reprieve and balm, and [green exercise](#) emerged as the new HIIT workout.

This year promises a continued obsession with and appreciation for nature’s restorative benefits for health and well-being (see the new app [NatureDose](#) and emerging florapy trend). However, we also expect more Americans to recognize the need to respond in kind with a focus on restoring and regenerating nature itself, creating new opportunities for brands to speak to consumers’ growing desire to act on the climate crisis’s effects on the environment.

We’ll see more rewilding brand initiatives like P&G’s [Native](#), a focus on tangible conservation efforts like Pacifico’s [Pac Preserves](#) commitment, brands like supplement maker Mega Food promoting sustainable agricultural practices, others supporting the emergence of micro-forests in urban environments like the [one](#) supported by Louis Vuitton in



Source: Pacifico

London’s Chelsea neighborhood and an intense spotlight on slowing our planet’s [biodiversity](#) crisis.

In 2022, it’s time to consider how your brand can be an ally to Mother Nature.



Nonstop Nostalgia

3



NONSTOP NOSTALGIA

Brands have long trafficked in nostalgia, tapping into its soothing and unifying power to appeal to people, especially during turbulent times. So it's not surprising given our relentlessly roiling age that 2021 was awash in a slew of rebrands and campaigns harkening back to a simpler yesteryear. [Skittles](#), [GEICO](#), Planters and a slew of other brands successfully resurrected mascots, classic tunes, retro products and more to connect with throwback-thirsty consumers. For Millennials, reveling in the Nineties was a welcome escape from the stressors that both the demands of adulthood and the unique anxiety of the pandemic brought in recent years.

However, it turns out that it's our youngest that are most nostalgic for a time literally before their time. Between the ages of 13 and 26, Gen Z isn't necessarily reliving their misspent youth of the Nineties and Aughts but instead crushing hard on the eras' fashions, music and pop culture. From [Y2K](#) everything to a newfound [appreciation](#) of old-school, posh hotel bars, Gen Z is obsessed with just about any era but the present.

Given Gen Z's, as well as older generations', appetite for nostalgia during a time of continued uncertainty and the supersonic acceleration of today's nostalgic hype cycles (thank you, TikTok), we expect cultural rewinds to persist this year. Aesthetically, looking to the past is often a safer choice for brands opting to redesign their identities and will influence many rebrands this year.



Source: Milk Bar

But lest brands think they can just mine their product and design archives, they should consider tapping into a longer-lasting form of nostalgia that improves upon the past. Modern nostalgia, perfected by brands like [Milk Bar](#) and [Magic Spoon](#), balances the appeal of the past with a need to resonate with a modern mindset and modern expectations of betterment, convenience and digital fluency. It's a past filtered for today and tomorrow.



Exuberant Edibles

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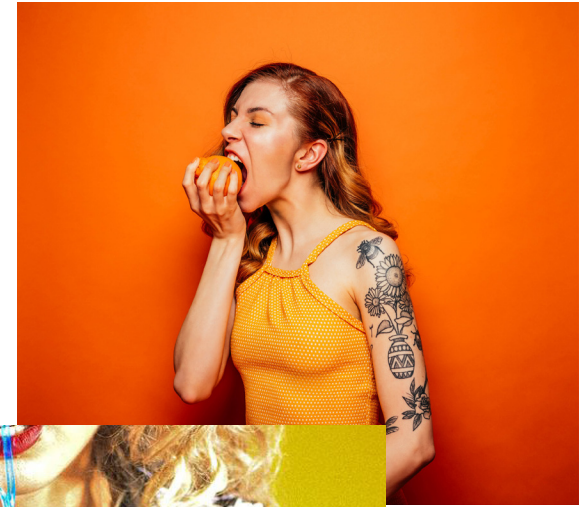
EXUBERANT EDIBLES

Unless you're the sort to evangelize the benefits of "food as fuel" future foods like [Soylent](#) and [Huel](#), you're likely delighting in the endless variety of today's modern American food culture. From Kroger to Erewhon and countless DTC options, food purveyors are filling our pantries with choices instead of compromise.

Today's food and beverage brands are feeding consumers' "want it all" appetite with guilt-free indulgence, function plus flavor, multisensory experiences and global food experiences both authentic and remixed. New lifestyle-friendly forms and stylish packaging also slip conveniently into our lives and signal to the world that you have good taste. The pandemic's dampening of innovation proved short lived as new and buzzy choices will abound this year and beyond.

Expect to see more emerging food and bev brands, as well as legacy brands looking to reinvent themselves, take a much bolder approach this year. With so many brands, new school and old school, vying to fill our pantries, canvas totes and social feeds, the mandate is to abandon yesterday's tired tropes of faux farmhouses and find what's unique and exciting for a discerning shopper who revels in choice, wants to flaunt their discriminating palate and expects all their senses to be fed.

Stylish food and bev can be just as cool as the latest "it bag."



Source: Ruby Hibiscus

Increasingly, food and beverage brands will be looking to create multisensory experiences for consumers. More would be wise to look to Grammy-nominated performer Khalid's recent introduction of an exclusive smoothie meant to create the taste experience of his latest single. Available briefly via Postmates and Erewhon (the hot LA-retailer for those not feeling the love for Whole Foods these days), the smoothie was described as an "[edible song](#)." Color us intrigued!

And buen provecho!



Retail Rewired





RETAIL REWIRED

Since the Great Recession, the retail industry has been roiled by a record number of bankruptcies and store closings, a situation only further aggravated by the pandemic's onset in 2020.

Now, two years later, we're seeing a shift to smarter, nimbler retailing accelerated by the need to right-size inventories, rebalance rents and pivot to the needs of a shopper demanding everywhere shopability. In 2022, retailers are emerging from a chaotic decade rewired for more new forms of commerce (e.g, social, metaverse-driven and livestreamed) and new expectations of physical, digital and phygital store experiences.

This year, we expect even more experimentation and innovation. In-store, look for an emphasis on tactility, discovery, relaxation and sometimes just outright fun (including so many collabs and drops!). Pent-up demand for the unique joys of IRL shopping will prompt a focus on delivering happiness, so brands will do well to consider what unlocks that emotion for their shoppers and fans.

In the digital realm, brands will continue to refine their strategies in the metaverse, arguably this year's most hyped trend. Direct-to-avatar (D2A) efforts will proliferate. Brands will follow the lead of Nike with its recent launch of [Nikeland](#) in Roblox and its acquisition of non-fungible token (NFT) experts RTFKT experiment. They'll be looking for new ways to enhance avatar experiences in these immersive, still primarily gaming-focused environments.



Meta-commerce offerings such as skins, NFTs and other exclusively digital goods will also influence how brands structure new loyalty initiatives (look for lots of loyalty-focused brand NFTs this year). Finally, expect to see the metaverse integrated into retail events, including pop-ups and entertainment sponsorships blurring the lines between retail, digital and experiential initiatives.



Everywhere Wellness





EVERYWHERE WELLNESS

For several years now, we've seen the pursuit of well-being emerge as a primary driver across the entire marketplace. Food and beverages, healthcare, beauty, home, travel, retail, entertainment and even financial-services brands now speak to an “everywhere wellness” mindset that motivates consumers.

Today, consumers are assessing brands with a critical eye for their support of well-being. Does the brand contribute to personal aspirations around diet, energy, fitness, aging and emotional wellness? Whether it's choosing a probiotic, cannabis-infused beverage that promotes gut health and calm or taking a content break with one of TikTok's many “[comfort creators](#),” consumers are making health-centered choices throughout their days as they seek a healthier, happier life.

This year, we expect our growing prioritization of mental wellness to shift to our work lives.

With worker burnout at crisis levels, employers already stressed to attract and retain talent will need to innovate their ways of working to support the emotional health of their teams. And whether they do so or not will affect their brands as consumers increasingly judge brands on how they support their workforce and other internal qualities.

We also see this focus on emotional well-being influencing ideas about self-care. We're underlining the “care” in this almost cliché phrase. After so much trauma and tension, look for a greater emphasis on how brands are caring for their customers and communities with compassion and human-centered experiences.



Shifting to a brand culture of care supports consumers' wellness aspirations while also speaking to the need to broaden “self-care” from an individual pursuit to one that recognizes the need to care for others. Consider how your brand delivers holistic care that addresses both personal and community needs as people pursue health and happiness in a time of renewal.



Fast-Forward Future



FAST-FORWARD FUTURE

Here's some extra credit for our fellow cultural IQ nerds: This year, we're including a trend we're following beyond the marketing world. As we compile these annual observations, we often travel down a variety of rabbit holes in pursuit of ideas emerging on the fringes, and Fast-Forward Future is one that smart brands will take note of.

Facing the long-term effects of climate change and other similarly daunting societal challenges, more institutions around the world are experimenting with, or even implementing, programs, legislation and policies meant to consider the repercussions of decisions made today for future generations.

For example, New Zealand, a country that often uses foresight to shape broad policies, recently announced it would ban all cigarette sales for future generations in order to eventually become a completely smoke-free society. Under the new law, expected to be enacted this year, anyone born after 2008 will not be able to buy cigarettes or tobacco products. With a similar focus on the future, towns in Japan have been experimenting with asking current citizens to represent the citizens of 2060 when considering policy proposals. These people proved far more radical in their support of healthcare and climate-related policies. Similar approaches are taking hold across the globe as a desire to be a better ancestor in the future informs our thinking and our actions today.

As brands move into a post-purpose marketing future, this focus on a deliberate consideration of future generations presents an opportunity to think differently about innovation, growth and responsibility. This year, as your brand plans for the next 12 months, how will those plans affect future generations on a planet that needs all of us to be [better ancestors](#)?

Can you fast-forward your mindset towards a better future?



LOOKING FORWARD

“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

— Alan Kay

At Upshot, we believe that today’s most daring, imaginative and of-the-moment brands are built on a solid understanding of ever-evolving consumer expectations in our dynamic culture and marketplace. Thank you for your time and attention to our annual roundup of some of the current and emerging trends that will help savvy brands invent the future today.

Of course, we’d love to begin a conversation about the specific implications of these trends for your brand. Don’t hesitate to contact us with your thoughts, questions and predictions about 2022 and beyond.



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