

4A's RESEARCH INSIGHTS

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2015 Consumer Trends

Thanks to Information Specialist Rebecca Samson for providing insights into the top consumer trends of 2015.

Marsha Appel
Senior Vice President
4A's Research Services

Each year, several firms issue reports outlining the trends they anticipate as being big for the months ahead. After reviewing these, some underlying themes begin to emerge. Here's what we have identified as a few major drivers and common threads behind various forecasts:

1. Convenience/immediacy
2. Being better
3. Sharing

We are living in an on-demand, instant gratification world where we can shop from our smartphones anytime, anywhere. We can buy things by tapping a phone screen, and can remotely control our home's thermostat, lighting and smoke alarms from a connected device. As these smart technologies that make our lives easier become more mainstream, we will begin to expect an even greater level of *convenience/immediacy* from brands. The more accustomed consumers get to this increased convenience, they will demand products and services that further simplify their busy lives and maximize their time—all at faster speeds.

While the Internet has added greater levels of convenience to traditional shopping, there is still a lack of immediacy that comes from waiting for orders to be delivered. Brands have responded to this by offering more online/offline shopping combinations and options. More retailers allow consumers to pick up online orders at brick and mortar locations, while traditionally virtual-only sites, such as Birchbox, are beginning to open physical stores.

One common barrier to online clothing shopping is the hassle of returning something that doesn't fit. British online retailer ASOS recently responded to this by testing "[Parcelpods](#)," fitting rooms in hubs like supermarkets, gyms, and transit stations where people can try on their online purchases. Through its partnership with a local delivery service, this program would let people return orders on the spot if they don't work. This is just one creative example of how brands are trying to accommodate consumer desire for convenience. A few other examples:

- Walmart will let consumers order groceries over the phone and pick up at a [drive-thru](#).
- Amazon is expanding its [Sunday delivery](#) service to 15 cities
- Starbucks app allows you to [place your order](#) and pay for it before coming into the store. They have also announced a plan for [delivery service](#) this year.

To answer consumers' desire to purchase things on the go, brands have added kiosks and vending machines for all kinds of product categories, including beauty products. Governments and Internet providers have also added Wi-Fi access in public places, on planes and trains, further allowing constant connectivity. Just as online shopping changed our expectations for convenience and immediacy, we can expect to see the same in other areas. The Mayo Clinic introduced an app that gives unlimited access to [live chat with a nurse](#) for \$50 a month.

Consumers want services that yield high-quality results, without taking the time to actually learn the skills necessary to produce them. SeedSheet's software has wannabe gardeners virtually enter their garden's location and lets them design their plant layout online. A custom [SeedSheet](#) that can just be unrolled onto soil and watered is then sent to them. Similarly, [smart grills](#) promise perfectly cooked food for aspiring chefs who can input what they are cooking and how they'd like it done.

Thanks to our smartphone-enabled, always-on culture, consumers will have no patience for waiting. They spend a lot of time and money with their favorite brands and expect faster options for service from them. If companies cannot eliminate wait times, they must provide a unique and interesting way to fill that time.

- [Panama's Pizza Hut](#) delivery motorcycles are equipped with electric ovens that cook the pizza en route to the destination.
- [Taco Bell's app](#) lets diners place an order and pay for it while on their way to the drive-through and have it waiting for them when they roll up.
- Several hotel chains allow guests in their loyalty programs to check in via their apps and then use phones as [room keys](#), bypassing wait lines at check-in desks.
- A German airport introduced the world's first [robotic parking valet](#) that picks up a passenger's car and places it in a dedicated spot. It syncs up with the airport's flight information so the car is ready and waiting for them when they arrive.

- An [amusement park](#) in Sweden lets people waiting on line for a new roller coaster download a game that they can play with others on the line. Every 15 minutes the highest scoring player gets to skip the line!

As much as our smart devices already allow us to do, soon we will want even more control over our lives through these technologies. A large percentage of people surveyed by Ericsson were interested in things like water sensors that warn of a flood risk, remotely checking refrigerator temperature, and making sure they turned off the coffee machine. People also love the idea of having robots help make their lives easier, wanting them to help with laundry, cooking meals, and driving them places.

The demand for immediate access will spread to other areas like financial services and healthcare. Consumers will expect on-demand help with their questions and issues. They will also want more from the data generated from smart devices that can simplify their lives. Auto insurance companies will [determine insurance rates](#) based on driving speeds and behaviors tracked by in-car telematics. Similarly, [health insurance companies](#) can obtain data from health and fitness trackers like Fitbit and adjust premiums accordingly, based on physical activity.

In addition to demanding convenience, consumers are also interested in ways their smart devices can provide self-improvement, which brings us to our second trend — *Being better*. This includes the desire to help improve society and the planet in addition to wanting to better our own lives, health and well-being. We also have major expectations of brands to do the same.

Consumers are already monitoring their health through wearable technology, as a way to help them meet wellness goals. The large number of apps downloaded indicates a strong interest in the digital tracking of fitness, diet, and medical information. People even think that wearable tech can potentially lead to longer lives, according to Ericsson's survey. They found that regulating stress levels, monitoring sleep patterns, and measuring calorie and ingredient intake—all enabled by wearables and other connected objects—can result in additional years of life. In the future, apps will even have solutions for behavioral conditions (e.g., sleep disorders, stress and anxiety) by offering clinical treatment through software that mimics cognitive behavioral therapy.

- Linked to a phone or tablet, [SmartMat](#) is a yoga mat with sensors that detect a practitioner's position, and gives real-time audio or visual feedback for proper pose alignment.
- The [Olive bracelet](#) monitors stress levels by tracking heartbeat, skin temperature and other external factors, and then suggest stress-managing breathing exercises.

The desire for self-improvement is strong, but it's not always easy. Consumers will embrace brands that somehow reward and incentivize improving behaviors by using their devices.

- Russian bank [Alfa-Bank](#) rewarded its customers for exercising, using connected fitness trackers to track activity. For every step taken, the bank transferred money from an existing account into a savings account with a higher interest rate than usual.
- The [Charity Miles](#) app allows users to keep track of how many miles they've biked, walked or run, while raising money for a charity of their choice at the same time. Through its corporate partners, Charity Miles donates 10 cents for every mile biked and 25 cents per miles walked or run.
- Cloud-based medication adherence app [MediSafe](#) gives patients a reminder to take their meds and then prompts them to record their doses after they are taken. If users don't indicate that they've taken their meds, friends and family members are alerted and can then give a personal reminder.

Going back to the demand for convenience and immediacy, consumers on the hunt for self-improvement in the form of learning a new skill, language, etc. will turn to services that give them 24/7 access to experts that can help them. Apps can connect us to these mentors, who may be professionals, or peers with expertise in an area.

- Home cooks seeking assistance can receive real-time instructions and tips from professional chefs through the [TalktoChef](#) app, through live video chat. Users just type in cuisine, cooking method and are instantly connected to a culinary professional.
- Rise is an app that pairs users with a [nutrition coach](#) who provides a customized eating plan, regular feedback and tips.
- The [truTrainer](#) fitness app connects users to their own personal trainer who encourages them to reach their goals, with personalized advice and encouragement.

We not only expect better from ourselves, but from our brands as well. Many consumers, looking to support their favorite causes, will only purchase brands whose values align with their own. We seek out companies that donate a portion of profits to charity, and support humane treatment of animals. Mintel found that 82% of US diners prefer to choose a restaurant that is known for treating its employees fairly. Consumers will increasingly be drawn to ethical, sustainable products with a purpose that they can be proud to use.

Brands are picking up on this interest and doing business in a way that combines sales and marketing with social good. Made popular by Toms, the buy one, give one to charity model has expanded into other categories, such as eyewear (Warby Parker), and even more companies are getting on the bandwagon. For example, [Munchery](#), a food delivery company, donates a meal for every meal purchased. More brands are also focusing on activism and philanthropy to connect with consumers. Instead of advertising, Toms takes a group of customers each year on a trip to distribute the donated shoes to people in need. These customers and fans of the brand share their videos of the trip online. Patagonia invested \$13 million from tax credits to [build solar panels](#) on 1,000 homes in

Hawaii, where utilities are very expensive. These social initiatives, rather than the products, are the stories that spread via social media, and enhance the brand's image among consumers.

Trendwatching predicts that in the future, big companies and brands will become the driving force for environmental and social good and offset government weaknesses. Going beyond CSR, these companies will leverage their size and resources to address the world's major challenges and effect positive change.

- Volvo partnered with the Swedish Transport Authority to create roads that charge electric vehicles. This [EletriCity](#) project can wirelessly transmit power to the city of Gothenburg's electric bus fleet.
- [Connected Citizens](#) is traffic app Waze's partnership program that exchanges data with governments across the world in order to improve urban traffic conditions.

Brands must move in this direction as consumers demand fairness, transparency and accountability from them. If consumers don't feel that a company is being honest and open, they are willing to protest. Technology has given us the ability to exercise our rights in the form of easy and convenient "clicktivism." (Mintel) We can express our opinions, support, and dislike through online petitions, viral videos and social media. To avoid these "protests," brands that are seen as insincere will have to apologize, admit mistakes and seem more human. In recognition of empowered consumers, some companies will even begin to consult with them on products, policies, and campaigns.

Pressure is also on companies to avoid potential consumer backlash for mishandling the data we are constantly producing, and *sharing* with them—which happens to be our third trend. We are in a sharing society, whether that's sharing data collected from our smart devices with companies and brands, or sharing with each other in the "collaborative economy."

Consumers are willing to provide information about themselves, as long as this results in some kind of benefit for them: discounts, personalized offers, rewards, etc. Banks, supermarkets, and doctors will all start to develop stronger relationships with us, based on a deeper analysis of the data we share with them through our connected devices. It's possible that data analysis software will grow more quickly than data-collecting hardware. Nike+ has already begun to focus its energies on data and apps, instead of the device side of the business. (Mintel) Still, companies have to realize that a privacy trade-off exists and they must respect consumer decisions on what is public and private.

Our personal information is not the only thing we are sharing; cars, homes, workspaces, gardens, bikes, and food are all part of the growing trend of shared resources and access rather than ownership. Euromonitor points out that Coca-Cola's "[Share a Coke](#)" campaign was a big hit because it touched on consumers' widespread interest in sharing. Some drivers of this phenomenon where renting and borrowing trump owning:

- ◇ Consumers get to enjoy the benefits of use without the hassle, commitment, or responsibility that comes with ownership
- ◇ Avoiding being stuck with an outdated product as the pace of innovation happens so quickly
- ◇ Technology (smart devices, social networks and mobile payment systems) enables peer-to-peer sharing of goods, services, transportation, and money faster than ever before
- ◇ Concern for the environment prompts a desire to conserve resources
- ◇ Not only does sharing save money, it also offers people new sources of income (e.g., signing up to be an Uber or Lyft driver, or renting out space on Airbnb)

In this “collaborative economy,” people are getting what they need from each other, instead of from companies, essentially making the crowd its own company. Airbnb, TaskRabbit, Lending Club, eBay and Car2Go all turn consumers into funders, producers, sellers and distributors. Sharing is the new buying. Smart brands notice this movement is happening and get involved with it.

- Patagonia created an [online marketplace](#) through eBay, where customers can buy and sell their used goods. This reinforces its brand positioning of quality and sustainability, and creates a customer community.
- [GE partnered with Quirky](#), a company that designs new products based on ideas submitted by the crowd. They benefit from a new source of innovation and can offer resources and scale that startups don't have.
- [Walgreens uses TaskRabbit](#) to deliver pharmaceuticals and drug store items to people's homes.
- W Hotels gives guests access to office space through the sharing site [Desks Near Me](#).

Here are just a couple of examples of a whole slew of new startups designed to enable more sharing:

- [BorrowMyDoggy](#) is a community of dog lovers in the U.K. and Ireland, who help take care of others' dogs.
- [Leftover Swap](#) is an app that lets home cooks share their leftovers with others by taking a picture of their meal and arranging pick-up or delivery.

We can expect to see more products and services that satisfy the desire for sharing, just as we will for convenience and betterment.

Want more?

[Ericsson—10 Hot Consumer Trends](#)

[Euromonitor International—Top 10 Global Consumer Trends](#)

[Ford—Looking Forward with Ford: 2015 Trends](#)

[Frog—Tech Trends 2015](#)

[Havas Worldwide—10 Trends for 2015](#)

[JWT—The Future 100: Trends & Change to Watch in 2015](#)

[Mintel—Consumer Trends 2015](#)

[Trendwatching.com—Global Trend Briefing: 10 Trends for 2015](#)

[VisionCritical and Crowd Companies—Sharing is the New Buying: How to Win in the Collaborative Economy](#)