

WHAT'S NEXT: LUXURY TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE TRENDS

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Is a real or implicit celebrity endorsement of a luxury travel product a good thing? Is celebrity fatigue setting in? Most likely it's not that celebs are on their way out – Western society has always had its celebrity icons – but what they have stood for is; namely, over-the-top extravagance and a philosophy of “viva yo” (cheers for me). **Enter a new kind of celebrity, one who allies him or herself with social issues** as in George Clooney (who donated his goody bag, the icon of Oscar excess to charity) and Brangelina, known for bringing third world philanthropic issues to the forefront. Welcome a new Zeitgeist bred by the post boomer generation, Generation Jones, aged 41 to 52. It will behoove marketers to choose their celebrity endorsements carefully.

Trend watchers on both sides of the Atlantic are citing dramatic changes in store down the road with Generation Jones, the largest generation in U.S. history. Where Boomers are about individualism, conspicuous consumption, the next-in-line Generation is about a “**considered but conservative view of culture, values and social attributes**” according to Chris Sanderson of London's the Future Laboratory. A sense of civic and social responsibility will gain new traction, with an interest in “doing good. And it's already happening. Leading travel and hotel companies are going beyond discussions of cause related marketing to a deeper commitment to their communities and the environment. General Tours recently announced their “voluntourism” programs in partnership with Cross-Cultural Solutions, a not-for-profit organization that sponsors volunteer programs. Travelers work on beautification projects, child care, arts and crafts, or teach English. Trips are structured to be completed in a week, so participants can see results before they leave.

Paradoxically, the big difference is the advent of neo-tribalism. **The fracturing of communities** is thriving unlike never before. No longer defined only by geography or socio economic class, communities are of the like-minded. As Watts Wacker, CEO and Futurist of FirstMatter LLC said, “people are becoming desperate to find people like themselves”. Facilities which create and foster a sense of community and bring together like-minded individuals will flourish. Consider the success of Soho House. Its London members-only townhouse offers 4 floors of restaurants, drawing rooms, bars and club space to those in film, media and the arts. After its New York success, it's expanding to a 2nd New York club, Miami and Los Angeles. Witness the success of the Life Time Fitness facility for those focused on exercise, nutrition and education. At 110,000 square feet (larger than a typical Home Depot) it's a cross between a shopping center and resort, what their Senior VP calls, “a defacto community center”. Not only does it house hundreds of state-of-the-art machines, sport courts and rock climbing caverns, indoor/outdoor water parks with waterslides and an incredible child center, but it also boasts its own nutritional products, clothing line and monthly magazine.

This fracturing means a further explosion of niche travel. Many broad categories are already mature. In women's travel, for example, we're seeing the niches of that niche, everything from divas, wine and bachelorettes, to adventure women, senior women and lesbians. The affluent will still have their tribe, but motivations will be less for exclusivity and status and more to mingle with one's own kind .

Reaching these communities is easier than ever before with everything from RSS feeds, SMS, multicasting, and podcasts to the ever greater numbers of online media and blogs (at last count, over 75,000 new ones daily). At the same time, communicators will need to reach these niches with multi-media. And speaking of communities, before I leave the subject, I'm pleased to announce that I've been selected as the moderator of the global online travel and hospitality public relations forum/section of [www.wiwih](http://www.wiwih.com) (Who Is Who In Hospitality). Seven different interest groups all “meet” to discuss best practices, trends, and ask input from colleagues.

Staying connected, technically connecting with other people, will become a metaphor for how people want to live their lives. Travel suppliers who help facilitate this will build guest loyalty and thrive. In a recent issue of *Travel Weekly*, Jim Anhut of InterContinental Hotel group spoke about low tech customer relationship management and encouraging staff to engage with guests and deliver relevant, interactive services. His example: a guest arrives wearing a New York Mets cap. The employee might ask about it and then say, 'Hey the Mets are on TV in the sports bar; I'll buy you the first beer.' Providers of luxury travel products need to have all of the tech facilities but to never lose sight of the importance of "high touch" to quote the prescient Marshall McLuhan years ago or risk debasing the brand. Electronic check-in kiosks, e-concierges, wireless handheld devices for ordering food and beverage? Tread carefully.