



WONDERING WHAT TRENDS TO EXPECT IN 2024? WHY NOT ASK HER YOURSELF ... WE DID!

An interview with 2024...

She sat patiently in the outer office, not sure what to expect. The papers in her hand seemed small and sparse but it would have to do. The door opposite the magazine rack opened abruptly and a man motioned her to follow. She followed him to a smaller room and waited for him to sit before she took her place across from him. She knew the president of the company wanted to meet with her on her first day, but this guy didn't seem very approachable.

"What shall I call you?" he asked, extending his hand as a greeting.

"2024," she said, shaking his hand firmly.

"Well, you are right on time," he said, taking the papers she was clutching and placing them to one side.

"Yes, well 2023 had a rough go of it, and I thought it best to get an early start," she explained.

He leaned back in his chair, lips pursed, "The trend's game is a hard one to play," he said. "But you came highly recommended so I would like to hear what we should be expecting in the new year."

She edged forward in her seat, "Of course, where would you like me to begin?"

"Well, trends must start somewhere, after all they are not born in a vacuum. Are you able to track each trend's origin? For instance, what consumer behavior do you anticipate?" he leaned back in his chair, resting his chin on one hand.

How cautiousness (not panic) triggers menu trends

"For consumers, you must understand the drivers before you can predict behavior. The economy, food prices, housing market, interest rates and job security fears are causing them to be cautious. Not panicked though — so they are still spending — which continues to keep us out of a recession. Their fear threshold was raised much higher due to Covid-19. Events that would have panicked them before the pandemic don't seem as insurmountable now because of what they lived through. Cautious behavior then materializes in how every trend in 2024 unfolds," she watched as he straightened up and folded his hands on the desk. "But consumers are not ready to put their head in the sand and are still looking for new experiences, psychological rewards, mental and physical escapes."

He looked over his glasses at her and said, "Give me an example, let's say snacking. What do you see in store for snacking?"

She leaned forward to mirror his posture, "Snacking is being affected by two different drivers which result in very different behaviors, so you must be aware of who your target audience is. The first driver resulting in cautious behavior is causing them to pull back on spending and turn to snacks to replace meals. In that case, they will seek healthier snacks or small meals to save money. However, if they are having serious financial issues, then they will choose less healthy items simply because they can't afford healthier choices. The other driver is stress. If a consumer's level of stress rises, then they snack more as a coping behavior. But they will snack on less healthy items — sweet / salty items — to self sooth. Flavor-wise they don't want comfort, they want extremes — citrus, chilies."

"I see, what about health trends then?" he asked next.



Obesity and weight loss affect snacking

"Well, although cognitive function is the leading health trend because it covers sleeping, stress, anxiety and depression, behavioral research will be focused on obesity. The weight loss drugs in the news lately don't magically correct poor eating and exercise habits. The industry is worried about losing money, but snacking should increase. If a consumer taking these drugs isn't hungry enough to eat a full meal, they will choose a snack instead. But don't expect them to want healthy snacks. If an unhealthy relationship with food caused them to gain weight, that isn't going to change," she relaxed back into her chair.

Nostalgia has its place

"We keep hearing the term nostalgia. Thoughts?" he asked, now mirroring her more relaxed stance.

Without hesitating she said, "Nostalgia ties items to a time and place in history. But in 2024 you will see it manifest as a throwback to more wholesome times vs. the "Mad Man" trend we saw years back or the roaring '20s. Foods and beverages will surface from small towns in the Midwest and Deep South. Think — pimento cheese, Alabama white sauce, Michigan bumpy cake, etc. Cocktails moving into the spotlight include the Negroni, Old Fashioned, and anything "-Tini" — chocolate-tini, apple-tini and on," she reached for the bottled water in front of her and continued as she twisted off the cap. "If stressors continue, we may see a shift from no- low alcohol back to higher alcohol consumption. Either way, cocktails and mock-tails will see more add-ins and innovative preps. Expect smoke, brine, hot peppers, honey, infused ice — think escape, reward, surprise."

"Tell me more about how this translates to other flavor trends," he queried.

Flavor combos are here to stay

"Sweet combinations will stay, like swalty, swokey, and swicy. Sweet flavors have self-soothing and rewarding characteristics. And I think Apple Pie spice is a good candidate to challenge Pumpkin Pie spice at the end of the year. In 2023, Pumpkin Pie Spice faced a backlash, setting the stage for a rebellion against the once unstoppable trend in 2024," she added.

"Are you seeing any trends that have peaked and are on their way out or will re-invent itself?" he held her gaze.

Avocado toast and Girl Dinner are on their way out

"Well, avocado toast has certainly stepped out of the spotlight. And Barbie anything will fade, she doesn't have enough allies to stick around. Also, charcuterie boards will stay strong but the sub-trend of "girl boards" will grow up to become Goddess boards. Other groups will claim boards as their own too, like Bro-boards for game night. You get the idea," she smiled.

He returned her smile "I like your attitude kid, I will make sure you get all the support you need."

She rose and offered her hand in thanks, "I appreciate that, I am looking forward to watching my year unfold."

She strolled back through the outer office and toward her future.

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