

Safe in My Snow Globe

THE MOOD RIGHT NOW

The Grinch won't be stealing Christmas this year, but if you listen closely enough, you might notice a slight faltering in the voices of carolers. While the Consumer Sentiment Index is at its highest point since 2007, our recent study, "Mood of the Nation," has detected a measurable discord in consumer mood driven by an underlying fragility of emotion. People are working vigilantly to construct and protect the holiday they believe should exist, while the cold winds of reality threaten to seep in through windows and put a damp chill on the celebration.

METAPHOR OF THE MONTH[™] THE SNOW GLOBE

As part of Mood of the Nation, we also derive the Metaphor of Month[™], which illustrates the current pervasive feeling born out of the collective unconscious of the American people. This month's metaphor "The Snow Globe" captures our need to create an emotional space for the holidays that is set apart and protected from the struggles of daily life. Everything that consumers want the holidays to be exists inside the snow globe: happy memories, peaceful moments, perfect gifts, reunions with loved ones, great food, and warm, lively parties. The worrisome realities of daily life–personal financial struggles, the fiscal cliff, wars, even the desperate hope of winning the Powerball lottery–threaten our vision of the ideal holiday season and must remain outside the plastic dome. Like a snow globe, our holiday hopes can withstand a little shaking, but too much force from the outside can shatter our illusions of holiday perfection.

THE WHY BEHIND THE HOW MUCH

Mood of the Nation[™] is a pulse check of a nationally representative sample surveyed through Protobrand's online metaphor elicitation tool Meta4 Insight[™]. In conjunction with the standard consumer sentiment indices from the Conference Board and the University of Michigan, Mood of the Nation provides a complete picture of how people feel, providing the 'why' behind the numbers. With Meta4, participants use imagery in an online environment to express themselves, allowing us to extract the underlying emotional and cognitive frameworks they use to make sense of the world around them.





OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS

Our analysis revealed a consistent and earnest determination to make this season what it should be, but people work to achieve this goal in different ways. For some consumers, the river is wide and the "woods dark and deep." For others, a mere dusting off of last year's snow globe is all that is required. Several key meta-types, i.e., meta-phor driven archetypes, represent the bulk of shoppers this holiday:



THE FIGURE SKATERS

These people carefully plan and calculate every dollar they spend on the holidays. Some know that their finances will be tight and began saving as early as January. They take pleasure in balance and the thoughtful allocation of resources. They are able to protect the holidays from emotional stress because they have already ensured that everything from money to dinner plates is where it needs to be.



THE SLEIGH DRIVERS

These task masters possess a steely determination to make the holidays exactly what they want, regardless of what it takes. The harshness of the environment only makes them drive harder. They are energized by the challenge, take pride in accomplishment, and will sacrifice themselves (and their horses) to maintain their ideal holiday. There may be sleigh tracks in more than a few snowmen come the light of day.



THE SNOWMEN

These holiday purists have a fundamental belief that new shiny gifts are not always necessary or good. They make the most of what is around them. Perhaps this has been more rationalization than rule of late, however they seek to enjoy what they can from simple pleasures and the company of loved ones. Some take a self-righteous approach, but others just peacefully accept that this is all they can afford. It is a form of emotional insurance against the stress when money is spent. Harsh realities can melt these shoppers faster than the Summer sun.



THE CAROLERS

These folks feel they have adequate resources to do whatever they want and sense that all they have to do is float around and enjoy the holidays—baking cookies, giving gifts, taking vacations, or maybe just staying home and watching TV. They enjoy their freedoms—financial and otherwise—and don't want to think about things that will upset their peace. Their snow globe is on center of the mantel above a roaring fire, but they may look back every now and then just to be sure it's still there.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RETAILERS AND BRANDS THIS SEASON?

People want help protecting their "Snow Globe." While their ideal holiday season seems more within reach than it has been in a long time, uncertainty about the future and the slow economic recovery make it feel very fragile.



MANAGE THE EXPERIENCE

Long lines, surly customer service, and stock depletions will hit consumers harder emotionally than in the past. It will be viewed as a threat to the world they are creating for themselves, rather than merely bad day shopping. The stakes are higher, and so they may hold a grudge come January.



KEEP THE MOOD

If there was a year that putting out holiday decorations too early wasn't annoying, 2012 is it. Both online and offline, traditional holiday symbolism will work more effectively than ever.



REACT FAST

Perhaps the greatest gift for shoppers this year will be the speed with which problems are corrected. Brands that seem to share an intolerance for any interruption to a perfect holiday will be rewarded with loyalty all year long.



MAKE IT SOCIAL

Like a Christmas stocking, stuff the social media channels with cheer and holiday surprises. Let customers know that you are inside the snow globe already, not beating to get in. Genuine connection is a cornerstone to holiday success this year.



MAKE IT PERSONAL

While we may all be seeking an ideal holiday season, we are all seeking a different ideal. Brands must relate to us as individuals, whether we be Figure Skaters, Sleigh Drivers, Snow Men, or Carolers. After all the buzz of Black Friday and Cyber Monday wears off, what really matters to consumers is that we are able to create a holiday season that contains all the things we value.

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