

The Nature of Trends

Steven Shepard

Steve@ShepardComm.com

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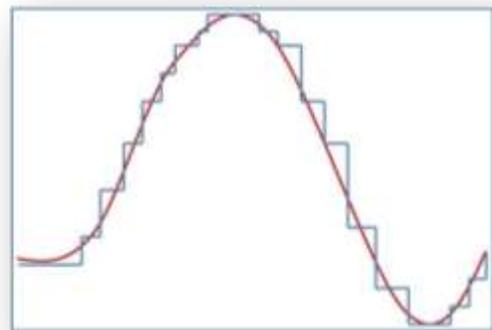
We spend a lot of time talking about the importance of trends but haven't really defined them very well. In the world of technology, commonly-flouted trends include Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), Consumerization of IT, Cloud, Security, Machine-to-Machine Communications, and Globalization, among many others. But the more I think about these, the more I'm inclined to break with conventional wisdom and point out that in fact, these aren't trends at all. They're technologies, or names given to technology impacts, but they're not trends. And this is rather important.



Let's begin this conversation with an analysis of the word. A trend is defined as "A general direction in which something is developing or changing; a general tendency or inclination (*The Free Online Dictionary, 2013*)."

In other words, a single point in time, a single data does not make a trend. A trend is a series of indicators that occur one after the other over a measurable (and indicative) period of time so that some kind of relatively predictable behavior can be discerned from the string of data points. Then and only then can we draw a believable conclusion and then call the behavior a true trend. In the world of digital signaling, especially when we're talking about entertainment media, the series of behavior indicators are crucially important and represent the extent to which the customer is likely to

recommend a service or not. When music or the spoken voice are converted from analog into a digital format, the analog signal is sampled (data points) at an optimal rate to ensure that the digital approximation does its best to match the actual analog wave. Sample too often and the system generates way too much data; sample too little and it sounds - cheap.



So what does this have to do with our trends? A lot, actually. Saying that "BYOD" is a trend is a fallacy. The trend is *the extent to which BYOD is having an impact on a business or a segment of society*. Or the growing cost to IT of managing an increasingly diverse constellation of devices in the workplace. Or the extent to which employees are measurably happier and more productive

because they are allowed to bring their own devices to work (quite likely, by the way). This may sound like a subtle difference, but it isn't. "BYOD" is a noun of sorts, a name given to a perceived phenomenon. A trend, on the other hand, indicates some kind of action, an ongoing evolution, and this makes all the difference. To say that you and your company are tracking the impact of BYOD as it increasingly becomes a reality in the modern workplace is to say that you recognize that change is taking place and that to understand the impact of that change you have to watch it over a period of time. This has great value to a client and indicates your commitment.

So why are trends important? Because to recognize that trends are occurring is to recognize that business is ever evolving. And to recognize that this evolution is ongoing is to recognize that your clients will be forever in a state of having to respond to those changes and adapt their business to them. As an advisor, your job is to help them navigate through the rocky shoals of change while maintaining course at the same time.

And where does storytelling come into play? Storytelling is about leadership (the subject of another post), and by weaving a compelling story into the ongoing thread of change, you have the opportunity to paint a picture for the executive client that shows them what could be, not what is. And that makes all the difference.

Thanks for reading.