



2026 Trends January 2026

By Linda Rink, President, RINK Consulting

It's a new year, and time to look at trends! I've picked some particularly relevant and interesting ones:

First, some highlights of consumer behavior:

From [McKinsey's ConsumerWise report](#):

- 1) **Selective spending.** Consumers – particularly Gen Zers -- are trading down on essential items in order to splurge on discretionary items. *Less, but better.*
- 2) **Alone and online.** The behavior that began during the pandemic is now how a lot of us spend our time. Companies need to “*meet consumers where they are.*”

However, online is only part of the transactional process...

- 3) [Plunkett Research](#) considers **omnichannel retailing** a requirement. “*Consumers now expect to shop seamlessly across channels — browsing online, purchasing in-store, ordering via mobile apps, and returning items wherever it is most convenient.*”
- 4) **Digital wallets and mobile payments** are steadily gaining market share, reducing reliance on cash and physical cards. (also from Plunkett)

Of course, no discussion of trends can ignore AI.

- 5) AI is transitioning from pilot projects to **enterprise-wide implementation.** From [PwC](#): “*Especially ripe areas for agents include demand sensing and forecasting, hyper-personalization, product design, and functions like finance, HR, IT, tax, and internal audit.*”
- 6) **AI Accountability.** From [Forbes](#): “*2026 marks the shift from crafting AI visions and running experiments to accountability for delivering incremental business results.*”

Here are some trend tidbits from the food world:

- 7) **Fiber = the new Wellness hero.** From the [Food Network](#): “*Fiber has been rebranded as a proactive nutrient for holistic wellness. It's gained publicity for its positive impact on gut health and promotion of fullness. And it's an important nutrient for a growing demographic of GLP-1 users.*”
- 8) **Solo meals.** According to [Food and Wine](#). “*The rise of the ‘me-me-me’ economy is fueling growth in solo dining and highly personalized, single-serve meals.*”

The Pantone Color of the Year: [11-4201 Cloud Dancer](#)

- 9) In these contentious times, even the Color of the Year is creating controversy! Critics say that Pantone is copping out by choosing white – which is actually a non-color. Pantone defends Cloud Dancer as “*a symbol of calming influence in a frenetic society rediscovering the value of measured consideration and quiet reflection.*”



For more details, be sure to click on the links provided.

Need help identifying trends in your industry? Contact me at lrink@LindaRink.com