



## **A Looking Up Feeling Good Ideas Piece**

### **Understanding the Enoughness Theme**

I first coined the term 'Enoughness' as a result of assessing and contributing to research conducted for a major multinational manufacturer who was seeking to identify emerging and future orientated consumer needs.

The label seemed to fit a select view of certain customer approaches, was not wide spread, was focused in one geographic zone, (though elements could be seen elsewhere in the world) and if it is, as I believe, the 'leading edge' of consumerism, suggests a fundamental rethink in the likely consumption patterns for the world at some point in the future.

The effective research question posed was:  
'What will a future customer look like in this market, and what will their core needs be?'

This research conducted across 2008 and 2009 was conducted by Futurescope in Australia and over 60 countries around the world were subjected to scrutiny. Research involved face to face interviews, on the ground assessments, desktop research and reviews of existing reports that were available in those countries. Enoughness emerged more by accident than design, due to a clash of research findings (and methods) from two different consultancies.

Unbeknown to Futurescope to whom I was consulting, at the time they were asked to undertake the research, the client had already commissioned another organisation to identify consumer trends with a focus on one potentially large market. Futurescope were given a copy of that research towards the end of our assessment of both that marketplace and the other 60+ countries.

What the client's other consultancy research indicated was that India was a great target proposition within a particular customer segment. This recommendation was diametrically opposed to the research assessment I had made of this particular country and its consumer segment.

Our recommendation to the multinational was that the consumer segment being suggested did not in-fact exist as a viable opportunity. We were quite direct - there did not exist a manufacturing opportunity of their core product in that marketplace targeting the consumer segment identified by the other consultancy. The client asked us to justify how we arrived at a conclusion fundamentally different, given both consultancies had access to much of the similar data. We then provided the client with the way in which the Value



Systems filter provides a deeper insight to the raw data interpretations. The use of the Value Systems approach was significant.

The multinational subsequently withdrew its plan for developing a facility in India, a decision subsequently proven correct when looking at the at best 'stuttering' results of many of its competitors who entered the Indian market.

In anticipation of the multinational commissioning us to undertake further research for additional insights in other markets, I began to assess other chunks of the data using the Value Systems lens and extended it by requesting responses from other geographic areas. Whilst the multinational did not request the additional research I'd anticipated (instead asking us to shift attention to two other core markets), I continued to assess other regions, and in doing so identified this interesting, refreshing and potentially threatening view of a new customer attitude.

### **What Enoughness is Not:**

*Enoughness is not Philanthropy*, wherein a well placed individual or organisation hand selects certain causes or persons to be recipients of their generosity.

*Enoughness is not Altruism*, wherein an individual chooses to go without now, so that another may have now.

*Enoughness is not 'satisficing'* as there is a stronger sense of personal choice, rather than any tone of begrudging acceptance given choices available

*Enoughness is not 'anti-materialism'* in the sense that there is a withdrawal from a marketplace in the typical consumer model or a distinct shift against the idea of materialism in any form

*Enoughness is not 'circumstances driven'* in the way that people faced with poor economic circumstances or flexibility are forced to accept less than what they would rather have available. Any suggestion that Enoughness is what exists when people have few economic choices is flawed. The research assessment does NOT support this idea.

It may be that poor economic conditions are more closely aligned to the satisficing concept and that whilst poor economic circumstances might teach/encourage the idea of Enoughness, it is only when such a choice is pro-actively made regardless of economic circumstances, that it is likely that the consumer thinking can be labeled Enoughness.



## **What Enoughness can be:**

Enoughness can be a reflection of a shift towards a *more simple lifestyle* though this is not a pre-requisite. There is no sense that Enoughness requires a move away from advances in technology or access to materialism as a pre-requisite for thinking in this way.

Enoughness can be '*access to*' *thinking* where in having access to but no ownership of a product, may be suitable. However in the small sample sizes available, the vast majority of respondent preferred to own their core product needs. There was insufficient research discussing non core needs, which may be aligned to an 'access to' mentality.

## **What Enoughness is:**

Enoughness represents a conscious decision that rejects the notion of a need to upgrade or improve a current level of material comfort or lifestyle. In simple terms (and what often emerged in response to a question) is 'What I have now is enough'.

To some extent Enoughness may find alignment to the notion of Post-Materialism but I suspect this would do the thinking style a great disservice and would be somewhat misleading. Respondents were clear that they were still in need of material goods and that they saw nothing wrong with shopping or consumerism for those who needed it. Nor was there a sense of replacing spending on goods with spending on services (a commonly ascribed Post Modernist trait.) Instead, they had reached a belief that there was no longer any value in or need to upgrade the type of goods they already possessed.

Responses to a question such as 'In what time frame might you next be looking to upgrade your phone/car/house?' etc were met with a similar straight-forward response: 'The car I have is enough', 'the phone I have is fine', 'the house I own is all that I need'. Indeed in one interview in Sweden the idea of the Swede's approach to divorce was raised. The response was 'we tend not to fight over things - when we realise that we are different people and that we no longer work together as a couple, we know that we have had enough and can make the decision to separate. It is still painful but the right decision for everyone'

When pushed regarding their economic circumstances, most respondents were in an economic position to upgrade most, if not all of their current possessions.

It appears then that there is a degree of high level of functional decision



making within this thinking pattern. That the majority of this thinking was uncovered in looking at responses of people living in the Scandinavias may be co-incidental based on the small sample size. Other Enoughness examples were found elsewhere, though not to the degree of responses from places like Sweden or Denmark.

The functional nature aligns to the idea that certain materialist requirements must be met and that once met, there is no need for a replacement of those items until such point as they may breakdown. The idea is too soon and the research too 'thin' to lay claim to the idea that at point of breakdown, people may shift towards a non-replacement approach.

### **Is Enoughness a Consumer Trend?**

Although I have updated some of my research interviews (latest overseas interviews were in Sweden in September 2011, Pakistan in December 2011, New Zealand in April 2012 and the US in May 2012) at this stage I suspect it can be best described as an interesting idea.

Given the tough economic conditions many in the world currently face, I believe it is more likely we will see (and are seeing) a 'forced simplicity'. For the vast majority, should economic circumstances change, I'd expect a return to consumption patterns though significantly more cautiously than we've seen.

### **Implications from Enoughness**

Allow me to pose a scenario that at some point in the future, Enoughness is a large consumer profile. The question that emerges for businesses is 'what are the implications?'

The biggest challenge would exist for those businesses that rely on high turnover of products with a constant upgrade mentality. Makers of consumer electronics may be particularly impacted where they have relied on high turnover of product from version one to version two to version three etc. The Enoughness model suggests no inclination toward an upgraded version.

Automotive manufacturers may also see access to profit through optional extras plummet as Enoughness thinking may elect to pick the most functional choice and that may or may not require options and add-ons.

Arguably the fashion sector could be the largest impacted if Enoughness



existed I large tracts of a consumer marketplace. Enoughness would likely signal the end of the seasonal driven 'fashion trend'.

Enoughness also poses questions regarding sustainability, energy consumption and resource use. If there is a move away from upgrading, energy and resource use will fall within that consumer segment, perhaps off-setting the rise of consumer purchases in people still yet to meet their full consumer needs.

Such an outcome would benefit some of the sustainability and environmental questions facing the planet, though even with a significant number, I'd suggest that many are lifting from a far lower baseline. In any given future it is unlikely that Enoughness will be a planet saving model.

One other area of interest is in the idea of social happiness. If Enoughness does take hold, one of the perceived areas of social pressure - the need to 'get ahead' or to 'consume to prove my worth'; would dissipate. This ought to be a positive outcome for societies in general.

## **Conclusion**

Enoughness is an apt term for a very small consumer segment's approach to consuming.

As an idea it is new, refreshing and challenging and the data supporting it is limited in scope and depth.

Enoughness is clearly a choice and is not forced upon people by economic circumstances.

Enoughness may or may not be the 'thin edge of the wedge' with regard to (in particular) a 'modern world' approach to consumption. It is clearly functional.

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