



REAL TIME

A global shift in values has been underway for more than a decade as we've increasingly focused our attention on a search for truth and meaning. In the wake of war, corporate scandals and economic instability, our need for greater disclosure and transparency has awakened a growing desire for reality and authenticity at every turn, from the information we consume to the visuals we encounter.

BEAUTY REDEFINED

To meet the public's growing demand for realism, more fashion and beauty magazines now regularly feature unconventionally attractive models, public figures and actresses on their covers and within their pages. These shifts are culminating in a greater acceptance and celebration of individuality. The beauty industry is responding by offering personalised beauty products for every skin tone and lifestyle as consumers increasingly see value in those characteristics that make them unique, moving further away from the one-size beauty ideals of the past and toward a more holistic approach to beauty where health and wellness take on greater meaning; where inner beauty is the real beauty.

DARKNESS

While aspirational ideas and goals keep us going, the ongoing crush of less than stellar news, disappointment, global financial problems and conflict create unease giving cause for a more cynical take on the world. Ambivalence has become the expected. Distrust of politicians, corporations and the media, though nothing new, seems more pronounced. It's certainly not any easier to be a leader. Smiles and sunny depictions of life are fine, but right now, a darker sense of reality may be what resonates with society.

INDIVIDUALISM

Individuals take a stand. Our acceptance of mass-culture aesthetics and pre-packaged style continues to erode. Identity is expressed through a personal style derived from heritage, peers, experiences and increasingly one's online persona. The influence of world cultures and emerging nations is only starting to be felt and it's only a matter of time before a true global culture begins to inspire and transform contemporary ideas of the individual.

THE NEW REALITY

As we slowly emerge from the Great Recession, we're adjusting to the realities of the "New Normal," a term that experts have used to describe an era of slow growth and limited optimism. While the global economy shows small signs of recovery, consumer behaviour remains entrenched in a recession-era mindset that outwardly rejects the hyper-capitalist culture of the past. Some argue that our behaviours and psyches – particularly those of younger generations – have been permanently altered to more closely resemble those of our elder citizens, who also endured tough economic times early in life.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

In order to communicate effectively in today's visual landscape, it's important to embrace a more realistic approach to imagery, moving away from the static, over-idealised stereotypes that have become common in stock photography. Candid imagery featuring real people with "real feel" styling has been an emerging customer request that will only continue to grow in popularity as consumers demand increased transparency and authenticity from marketers. Regardless of style, imagery must work to convey the top concepts and values that matter most to those who are adjusting to the realities of post-recession life; those who are feeling ambivalent about the future while finding beauty in the mundane and joy in the everyday.

GETTING REAL

Our need for reality and authenticity has coincided with a cultural shift away from sheer optimism and unrealistic aspirations as we adjust to the changing world around us. The result is a growing appreciation for visuals that accurately reflect our lives and the everyday moments and people that surround us – the ups and downs, the beautiful and the imperfect. More than ever, there is a need for customised communication strategies that connect with viewers on an emotional level while speaking to individuals who, by definition, are of unique cultures and backgrounds. To reach these consumers, customers are moving away from the one-size-fits-all marketing approaches of the past in favour of visual communications that can effectively speak to the realities of the individual experience.