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THE COMING CULTURAL RENAISSANCE AND WHAT IT MEANS TO AMERICAN BUSINESS

A rising tide of bright, socially responsible, eco-conscious, culturally curious consumers will revolutionize the way products are bought and sold in the United States. This sea change signals a redefining of the American mass market.

That's the provocative conclusion reached by Patricia Martin in her powerful new book, "RenGen: Renaissance Generation-The Rise of the Cultural Consumer and What It Means to Your Business."

"The average Joe no longer wants to be marketed to like he's below average. If you want to stand out, you must buy into the fact that the cultural consumer possesses the leading mind-set," says Martin, a Chicago-based author and marketing consultant.

Martin, one of the nation's foremost forecasters of cultural trends and social movements, explains the powerful engines that will drive this new generation of American consumer, and alerts both Madison Avenue and Wall Street to its growing influence. Companies ignore this tidal wave of change at their peril.

Among the many trends Martin spotlights in her meticulously researched book:

The rise of ecophobia. Say goodbye to the perfectionist tyranny of Martha Stewart and hello to products that are ugly and imperfect but ecologically correct. The big sellers at home gardening centers in 2007 were potted plants in biodegradable containers. **LESSON:** The RenGen prefers products that are imperfect but authentic over perfect products that pollute.

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The dawn of the brain-fit era. Buffed-up bodies and a focus on physical fitness are being supplanted by new efforts to get our brains in shape. Facilitated by the Internet, the average American now spends more time online searching for information than he or she does driving. More Americans visit museums, aquariums, zoos and historical sites than attend all professional sporting events combined. Yet, more than 95 percent of corporate sponsorship dollars are still being spent on sports ties. **LESSON:** To be effective, companies need to diversify their promotional portfolios to reach consumers through cultural experiences.

The emergence of cultural fusion. If the last century was defined by fission—the segmenting and dividing of people and products—the new century is defined by fusion, in which consumers fuse a dizzying array of disparate choices. “Consumers want to fit in and stand out at the same time. They want to share values with the communities they form but also express their individuality. And they don’t want to be told that if they enjoy hip-hop, they aren’t a target for opera,” says Martin. **LESSON:** The old rules of marketing by age, sex, income and other identifiers no longer work.

Based on a two-year research effort that included interviews with CEO’s, foundation officers and surveys of more than 1,400 marketing executives, RenGen: Renaissance Generation” is deemed “a richly researched and invaluable tool for understanding this important consumer movement,” by Phil Kotler, widely recognized as the “father of modern marketing.”

About the author: Patricia Martin, whose work has been featured in the *Harvard Business Review*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Wall Street Report* and *BrandWeek*, is the president of Chicago-based LitLamp Communications Group. She is one of the nation’s leading authorities on the convergence of art, entertainment, education and business in the marketplace. Her clients include Unisys, Sun Microsystems, MCI, the New York Philharmonic, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Discovery Channel. She is a communications fellow at Learning Point Associates, a nonprofit education research and consulting organization. In 1994, she partnered with Microsoft Corp. to create the blueprint for what is now the Gates Library Foundation.

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