

# seeing through it all



Wow! January just whizzed by and suddenly we are waking up to 2009. It is time to clean out the closet and dust off old buzzwords, like “transparency”. Aren’t we sick of it by now? Well the buzzword is starting to evolve and we are no longer thinking “**TRANSPARENCY**”; instead we are seeing words like “**SEE THROUGH**”. It’s a step forward, adding emotion, intention and interaction into the mix.

The world is changing at a rapid pace and with it comes consumers change. We have “Consumer Power”, the balance of ownership of the brand shifting heavily towards the consumer. We have found our voice, our power. We are asking questions and sharing information of our experiences online or with anyone who will listen. As consumers, we are expecting organizations to have the same kind of openness with us or we walk, or click to someone who shares our search for honesty, integrity and transparency.

So guys, it is going to be almost impossible to hide anything from consumers, even if you manage to, consumers are going to know that there is something you are hiding. Just look at the financial world, it’s set for a major “**SEE THROUGH**” operation in 2009.

**SEE THROUGH ANYTHING** - In 2009, expect informed consumers to have even more transparency sites and insight tools at their disposal. Reviews and price comparisons move from the usual suspects (reviews of hotels and restaurants, price transparency for books and electronics) to other sectors till now immune from the **SEE THROUGH** trend. In short: every category, every B2C industry will soon be covered by a price comparison and/or review site.

For example if you are looking for an investment opportunity, **cmypitch.com** is a video site which lets people pitch ideas to attract funding and also provides other services for entrepreneurs, like directories of business opportunities, franchise and even businesses for sale. It’s main promise is to help businesses succeed.

**Avvo.com** “You be the judge. Write a lawyer review” is another great site profiling legal professionals whereby consumers can find Legal Guides, answers and advice, or even the right lawyer all based on consumers ratings.

**Patientslikeme.com** empowers patients to manage their care and share information. The website enables collaboration between patients, doctors, pharmaceutical companies, medical device companies, research organizations and non-profits. It also offers micro-communities so sufferers can share information in their respective support groups. The promise is “patients helping patients live better every day”.

**Glassdoor.com** is a new site that aims to provide a thorough insider’s look at what it’s really like to work at a company, both financially and otherwise (its promise: “see what employees are saying”.) Users begin by anonymously contributing a review and/or salary survey for their current employer or any position they’ve held within the last three years. In exchange, Glassdoor gives them free access to nearly 32,000 reviews and salary reports for more than 7,000 companies representing more than 80 countries around the world. Users are asked to provide both pros and cons along with advice to senior management, as well as rating companies on a range of workplace culture factors, including work/life balance, fairness and respect, and employee morale. Also check out Australian LiveSalary ([www.livesalary.com.au](http://www.livesalary.com.au)).

Seriously, as **SEE THROUGH** invades everything from company pitching to reviews of Salary Survey, is there any doubt that your business will become transparent? And what are you going to do in 2009 to make the most of it?

**IN YOUR FACE** - Paris became host to a public atmospheric pollution meter. This appeared in the form of the Ballon de Paris ([www.ballondeparis.com](http://www.ballondeparis.com)), a large balloon floating above the city. The balloon, made by Aerophile, uses data collected by Airparif ([www.airparif.asso.fr](http://www.airparif.asso.fr)) to inform both Parisians and tourists of the overall air quality based on levels of harmful contaminants. To present this data, the balloon changes colour in real time to indicate highly polluted (red), polluted (orange), substandard (yellow), clean (light green) and very clean (dark green).

Rompicollo, by Italian design studio L'Agenzia per il Disegno e la Funzione, is a chocolate bar that comes with different calorie counts printed on the surface of its variously sized tablets to help the weight-conscious measure their portions. While we're on the subject: from New York to Tokyo, a growing number of restaurants and even coffee shops like Starbucks are now required to post calorie counts for food items and beverages on their menus.



**RIGHT OF REPLY** - We're not done yet: **SEE THROUGH** and the **RIGHT OF REPLY** will be big in the next 12 months. For companies, that is. We may have passed the years in which most brands weren't even aware of the thousands of reviews, rants, and the occasional compliment to and about them, but even switched-on organizations still seem more interested in 'learning' from these complaints than replying to them. Which is surprising, since an honest reply or solution can defuse the most damaging complaint. Expect smart companies to be increasingly able (and demanding) to post their version of the story, preferably next to, or beneath an offensive or even inaccurate posting.

For example, Tripadvisor's 'management response' feature ([www.tripadvisor.com/pages/management\\_response.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/management_response.html)) allows representatives of hotels, restaurants, or attractions to respond to reviews written about their properties.

**MyStarbucksIdea.force.com** is a platform where you can share anything with Starbucks to help shape their future, thereby actively seeking brand engagement through enrolment. The promise is "share, vote, discuss, see".

Given the importance of **RIGHT OF REPLY**, we'll see more companies starting to keep close track of incidents, gathering evidence to defy unfair complaints or half-truths. Remember, though: it's more important than ever to figure out how to get people to tell you first before they post something.



So here's your worst nightmare in 2009: it's not an overload of reviews, it's the opposite. Call it **SUGGESTION SCARCITY**. Not enough comments. Not enough emails. It means your customers are no longer telling you what's wrong, no longer telling you what they want, no longer telling you what they've come up with to improve your offerings. Silence means they no longer care. That they may have moved on. And if they move on, that's it for you and possibly your business.

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