

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Start here

Start here

Use these cards to help you notice the early signs of the future. Go out there, and apply these tips to spot emerging behaviors, cultures, technologies, and more.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Extreme
Users

Extreme Users

Look for people at the edges of behaviors, needs, or preferences — early adopters, subcultures, or those with extreme constraints. They often reveal emerging trends before they reach the mainstream. Their behaviors can serve as signals of what might become more widespread.

- 1 What workarounds have they developed?
- 2 What problems are they solving?
- 3 What desires drive them?

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Look for
Cultural
Shifts

Look for Cultural Shifts

Identify emerging social behaviors that may signal future trends.

- 1 Pay attention to language: Notice new words and phrases, their meanings, and the values they reflect.
- 2 Identify counter-trends: Spot behaviors or aesthetics that challenge the mainstream.
- 3 Seek out marginalized or overlooked perspectives—they often reveal what's next.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Find the
Innovators and
Changemakers

Find the Innovators and Changemakers

Identify individuals or groups driving new behaviors and mindsets, as they often signal shifts before they become mainstream.

- 1 Entrepreneurs and start-ups testing new ideas
- 2 Academics and researchers exploring emerging fields
- 3 Artists and designers reshaping narratives and aesthetics
- 4 Alternative communities and citizen collectives experimenting new ways of living

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Pop your
Bubble

Pop your Bubble

Actively seek out perspectives outside your comfort zone. Visit places you wouldn't normally go, talk to people with different worldviews, and consume media you normally wouldn't.

- 1 Visit weird places or read something weird
- 2 Explore subcultures, fringe movements, or underground spaces
- 3 Engage with an unfamiliar community to experience their behaviors firsthand
- 4 Follow discussions from opposing perspectives

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Hit the
Streets

Hit the Streets

Visit emerging neighborhoods, document new businesses, cultural shifts, and social behaviors. Notice not just individual changes, but the broader context in which they occur. Small, seemingly insignificant differences can reveal larger transformation patterns.

- 1 Spot new signs, objects, or aesthetic changes
- 2 Talk to locals, shop owners, or community members
- 3 Pay attention to background conversations and ambient sounds
- 4 Notice scents, textures, and the overall atmosphere

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Upcoming Areas and Locations

Upcoming Areas and Locations

Seek out spaces where transformation is happening—revitalized industrial zones, artist communities, new co-working hubs, underground gatherings. These areas often reflect shifting economic, cultural, and technological forces. Walk around, take photos, and document emerging themes.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Notice Like
a Traveler

Notice Like a Traveler

When you go abroad your mind is in hyper-noticing mode. Use that to your advantage. Treat your daily environment as if you were visiting a foreign country. This technique helps you look at the world with fresh eyes, and cultivates your ability to detect change.

- 1 What stands out? What feels different or out of place?
- 2 Find something familiar to you but unfamiliar to others, and reflect on its significance.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Scavenger Hunt

Scavenger Hunt

Pick a specific object, pattern, or theme and track its presence across locations.

- 1 Color Walk: Follow a specific color through the city and observe how its meaning shifts in different contexts. What does color tell you about the times we're living?
- 2 Sound Map: Identify and track recurring sounds, from mechanical hums to birdsong, and what they reveal about a place.
- 3 Emotional Landscape: Pay attention to how different environments make you feel and analyze why.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Urban Ruins

Urban Ruins

Document signs of neglect in your city, abandoned infrastructure, or repurposed spaces. Pay attention to old signage, defunct businesses, or other traces of the past. Analyze how these changes in our built environment reflect how societal priorities have changed, and explore what might come next.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Media Deepdive

Media Deepdive

Scan a broad range of media sources to understand the zeitgeist. What do people care about? What topics dominate conversations? What changing values do they reflect? Watch, read, and listen — widely and deeply — to spot emerging narratives and cultural shifts.

- 1 Books and academic journals
- 2 News articles and investigative reports
- 3 Trend forecasting publications, and google trends
- 4 TV shows, documentaries, and films
- 5 Podcasts, blogs, vlogs, TED talks, and crowdfunding platforms
- 6 Data reports, statistics, and public policy discussions

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Inspiring Field Trips

Inspiring Field Trips

Immerse yourself in new domains by attending events outside your field.

- 1 Art exhibitions and cultural festivals
- 2 Meetups and debates on emerging topics
- 3 Trade shows and fairs showcasing what's new
- 4 Conferences in industries unrelated to your own
- 5 Tours to incubators, R&D labs or innovative organizations

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Observe
the Next
Generation

Observe the Next Generation

Young people are early adopters of new behaviors, technologies, and cultural shifts. Pay attention to how they express themselves—through language, fashion, or music.

- 1 Notice how they interact with technology, the media they consume, their favorite brands, and their emerging habits, rituals, or behaviors.
- 2 Ask them why it matters to them.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Follow Futurists on Social Media

Follow Futurists on Social Media

Engage with futurists, trend analysts, and thought leaders who track emerging changes. They often share insights on weak signals, disruptive technologies, and evolving societal values.

- 1 Follow them on TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Reddit, Discord, and other platforms.
- 2 Pay attention to recurring themes, unexpected viewpoints, and debates shaping the future.
- 3 Interact, ask questions, and build your own network of forward-thinkers.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Read Trend Reports

Read Trend Reports

Professional trend forecasters and analysts track emerging shifts daily, synthesize them, and publish reports that reveal broader patterns and implications—helping you anticipate changes in industries, culture, and consumer behavior.

- 1 Look for reports from trend forecasting agencies, consulting firms, innovation labs, or thought leaders in your sector.
- 2 Compare insights from different sources—where do trends overlap? Where do they diverge?
- 3 Subscribe to newsletters, attend webinars, and analyze past reports to understand which trends materialized or how they evolved.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Visit
Research
Labs

Visit Research Labs

Universities, corporate R&D centers, and independent think tanks often experiment with groundbreaking technologies, science and ideas before they reach the mainstream.

- 1 Attend open days, subscribe to their newsletters, and follow their publications to stay informed.
- 2 Seek out labs working on AI, biotech, sustainability, and other transformative fields.
- 3 When possible, engage with researchers—ask about the unexpected findings, limitations, and potential real-world applications of their work.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Ask Mavens

Ask Mavens

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell describes Mavens—people deeply knowledgeable about specific topics, always ahead of the curve. They might be a close friend, a colleague, or someone in your network.

Mavens are everywhere—seek them out and ask what new ideas or things excite them the most. Their answers might surprise you.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Weird Friends

Weird Friends

Befriend someone unusual who can connect you to aspects of the human experience that are unfamiliar to you.

Management guru Tom Peters says, *"If you hang out with weird people, your ideas will instantly become more creative and interesting."* So if everyone around you looks and thinks the same, it's time to expand your circle.

SPOTTING SIGNALS

Teamback
Sharing

Teamback Sharing

Discuss the most surprising weak signals and trends you've spotted so far.

1 We discovered: _____

2 We were surprised to notice: _____

3 We wonder if this means: _____

4 It would be world-changing if: _____