

ANGLAIS

TOO MUCH STUFF

Watch out for a new brand of consumer in 2002: the middle-aged person of wealth who, finding himself surrounded by too much stuff acquired over the years, decides to simplify life. Out will go luxury purchases, conspicuous consumption and a trophy culture. Tomorrow's trend-setting consumer will buy more ephemeral, less cluttering stuff: fleeting, but expensive, experiences, not heavy goods for the home.

The economic boom of the 1990s fuelled consumption and democratised access to luxury goods. Millions played the lotteries or aspired to what they viewed on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous". As the wealthy grew richer, pressure increased on those below to trade up. And, as they traded up, pressure increased in turn on the wealthy to buy even more – the second home, the big TV screen and the latest sport-utility vehicle. Enter the big houses that measured success in thousands of square feet of floor space, topped by the 40,000-square foot, \$50m palace that Bill Gates has built outside Seattle. In 2000, 30% of new homes exceeded 2,400 square feet in floor space compared with 18% in 1986. Ironically, these mansions, owned by business people on the road half the time, grew in number as the size of the average American household declined.

These huge houses had to be filled with more stuff, good news for the home-appliance and home-furnishing industries. Even grocery manufacturers benefited. Larger homes with bigger refrigerators can absorb more inventory. Flat birth rates in developed economies have put pressure on durable consumer-goods companies desperate for top-line growth. Product quality improvements mean these goods break down less often. So durable goods sales depend on two things: the launch of new, higher-priced, higher-featured, often customised products that persuade consumers to trade in their existing appliances before they break down, as well as household penetration of products such as fax-machines and printers previously used only by businesses.

As the world's economy slumps, a new segment is emerging in the consumer marketplace. I call this group the Shedders. They have four characteristics. First, they perceive that they have more stuff than they need. Sure, they may collect something specific like porcelain figurines as a hobby, but they are the opposite of the pack rats who fill their attics and basements with "you-never-know-when-you-might-need-it" stuff.

Second, they want to collect experiences, not possessions. And they give experiences rather than goods as gifts to friends and relatives. Experiences may seem ephemeral. They cannot be inventoried except in the form of "Kodak" moments; but they do not tie you down, require no maintenance and permit variety-seeking instincts to be quickly satisfied. Dining out, foreign travel, learning a new sport – are all on the rise.

Third, their stuff embarrasses them. Their Range Rovers no longer tell the world that they are sophisticated town and country socialites. There are simply too many of them on the road to offer much social status. Worse, they now signal the irresponsible selection of a gas-guzzler.

Fourth, Shedders have wealth that is so assured that it no longer requires conspicuous display. They lease their cars, rent other people's holiday homes and would happily outsource other aspects of their lifestyles. The Shedders reject the marketer's continual pressure to spend more money on possessions rather than on education, health care and other social goods.

Shedders are the consumers who are trading in their sport-utility vehicles. They are the

empty-nester baby-boomers who are tiring of heating unused spaces in cavernous mansions, now preferring smaller houses with architectural character and intimate spaces, more charm and less maintenance. Their families are scattered, unable to share conveniently the family holiday home and often unwilling to inherit the burden of something they will never use. They do not put their wealth into goods but into mutual funds, and the wealthiest are now setting up small family foundations.

The new economy has made it even easier for Shedders to get rid of their stuff. The high-tech equivalent of the yard sale, electronic auction sites, bring Shedders and those who are yet to catch the Shedding habit together.

This emerging segment – the Shedders – presents a challenge to marketers. These are well-off people who value quality over quantity and do not buy proportionately more goods as their net worth increases. More so than perhaps the protesters on the streets of Seattle and Genoa, the Shedders will dampen expected demand growth in developed economies and require consumer goods multinationals to focus their efforts on emerging markets where stuff is king.

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“The world in 2002”, *The Economist*

I. COMPREHENSION

En vous référant au texte, choisissez la réponse qui vous paraît la plus adéquate.

1.

- (A) Tomorrow's consumer will buy more expensive household goods.
- (B) Tomorrow's consumer will be more interested in buying experience than in getting equipment.
- (C) Tomorrow's consumer will want to be conspicuously surrounded by luxury goods.
- (D) Tomorrow's consumer will try to simplify life by surrounding himself with expensive household equipment.

2.

- (A) During the 90s, the size of the average American house decreased.
- (B) During the 90s, the Americans tended to have larger houses built.
- (C) During the 90s, huge houses built by business people who wanted to accommodate large households grew in number.
- (D) During the 90s, 30% of the houses built were situated along the roads.

3.

- (A) In developed countries, the production of durable consumer goods has been stimulated by an increase in birth rate.
- (B) In developed countries, a decrease in birth rates has urged manufacturers to launch new kinds of products that break down more easily and have to be replaced more often.
- (C) In developed countries, low birth rates have led durable consumer goods companies to manufacture products with new characteristics and to persuade consumers to change their appliances more often.
- (D) Durable goods sales in developed countries will in the future depend on quality improvement.

4. The first characteristic of the Sheddens is that

- (A) they do not have any hobbies.
- (B) they are fond of collecting porcelain figurines.
- (C) they like to pack their houses with objects that might turn out to be useful.
- (D) they do not like to burden themselves with useless objects.

5. The Sheddens

- (A) like to offer their friends and relatives durable not ephemeral goods.
- (B) like to inventory their possessions and take photographs of them.
- (C) like to offer objects that do not require any maintenance.
- (D) would rather offer a trip as a gift than a camera.

6. The Sheddens

- (A) find that Range Rovers consume too much petrol.
- (B) find that Range Rovers are symbols of wealth and social status.
- (C) find their Range Rovers embarrassing as the road traffic is too heavy.
- (D) find that their Range Rovers give hints of leftist political ideas.

7.

- (A) The Sheddens feel sorry about the emptiness of their lives.
- (B) The Sheddens generally have no children to inherit their wealth.
- (C) The Sheddens have children who do not feel like taking care of the family properties.
- (D) The wealthier the Sheddens, the smaller their families.

8. The Sheddens

- (A) will help balance the world's consumer goods economy.
- (B) buy as many consumer goods as they can afford.
- (C) will help boost demand for consumer goods in developed economies.
- (D) consume more than those who protest against globalization on the streets of Seattle and Genoa.

II. LEXIQUE

*Les questions 9 à 18 sont en rapport avec les mots et les expressions soulignés dans le texte.
Choisissez la réponse qui, en fonction du contexte, vous paraît la plus appropriée.*

9. "conspicuous" means:

- (A) shady
- (B) excessive
- (C) growing
- (D) showy

10. "fleeting" means:

- (A) light-weight
- (B) ephemeral
- (C) striking
- (D) strange

11. "customised" means:

- (A) personalised
- (B) smuggled
- (C) stolen
- (D) usual

12. "trade in" means:

- (A) sell
- (B) smuggle
- (C) purchase
- (D) exchange

13. "appliances" means:

- (A) applications
- (B) devices
- (C) commercial vehicles
- (D) furniture

14. "slumps" means:

- (A) bangs
- (B) poor areas
- (C) falls
- (D) increases

15. "socialites" means:

- (A) socially prominent people
- (B) friendly people
- (C) left-wing people
- (D) mundane people

16. "gas-guzzler" means:

- (A) filling-station
- (B) stove
- (C) gas-heating system
- (D) fuel-consuming vehicle

17. "empty-nester" means:

- (A) homeless
- (B) who have little furniture
- (C) whose children have left home
- (D) childless

18. "well-off" means:

- (A) wealthy
- (B) healthy
- (C) foreign
- (D) hard to please

III. GRAMMAIRE

Parmi les quatre solutions proposées, choisissez, pour chacun des énoncés lacunaires suivants, celle qui vous paraît les compléter correctement.

19. larg-.... the house, furniture they have to buy.
 (A) The largest / the most
 (B) The larger / the more
 (C) Larger / more
 (D) The largest / the more
20. the years, they gathered a precious collection of books.
 (A) Along
 (B) For
 (C) Over
 (D) During
21. they die tomorrow, they not leave any property to their children.
 (A) Shall / will
 (B) Would / could
 (C) Might / could
 (D) Should / would
22. Do you object demonstrat-....?
 (A) to their demonstrating?
 (B) to them demonstrating?
 (C) if they demonstrated?
 (D) that they demonstrate?
23. They are rich their ancestors were.
 (A) least / than
 (B) not so / than
 (C) not as / as
 (D) not as / that
24. In the last two decades, access to luxury goods democratised.
 (A) were
 (B) could
 (C) will have
 (D) was
25. He has just bought a huge mansion he is on the road half the time.
 (A) in spite
 (B) although
 (C) despite
 (D) whereas
26. They want to get rid of all their useless stuff, is characteristic of this new brand of consumers.
 (A) this
 (B) what
 (C) which
 (D) that
27. What they fancy is thrilling experiences.
 (A) most
 (B) the most
 (C) the more
 (D) more
28. Two weeks ago, they got rid of their sport-utility car.
 (A) have
 (B) Ø
 (C) had
 (D) could
29. They do not seem to have made progress recently in this high-tech marketing segment.
 (A) few
 (B) a little
 (C) much
 (D) many
30. There are now two emerging trends present a challenge to marketers.
 (A) which both
 (B) both of them
 (C) of which both
 (D) both of whom

31. When the product launch-...., we
reliev-.... .
(A) will be launched / will be relieved
(B) is launched / are relieved
(C) is launched / will be relieved
(D) will be launched / are relieved
32. I suggest that the family rent-.... a
holiday home in Italy.
(A) would rent
(B) rented
(C) should have rented
(D) rent
33. a few years, they focus-.... their
efforts on quality rather than quantity.
(A) For / are focusing
(B) During / had been focusing
(C) For / have been focusing
(D) Since / are focusing
34. They leas-.... their cars for years when
they suddenly decide-.... to buy one.
(A) were leasing / had decided
(B) had been leasing / decided
(C) are leasing / decide
(D) have been leasing / decided
35. As they were renting a smaller house, they
.... sell most of their furniture.
(A) had to
(B) would have to
(C) should have to
(D) must
36. people before are buying luxury
goods.
(A) Much more / than
(B) Many more / as
(C) Many more / than
(D) Much more / that
37. People are no longer used collect-....
cluttering stuff.
(A) to collecting
(B) to collect
(C) collecting
(D) collect
38. When I a pay rise, I trade in my
computer.
(A) am getting / will
(B) will get / Ø
(C) get / will
(D) will get / will
39. trend among the Sheddars is to collect
experiments.
(A) The latter
(B) Last
(C) The latest
(D) Latest

Fin de l'énoncé