

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

Vol. 2, No. 10

Starbucks Nation

It's changing what we eat and drink.

It's altering where and when we work and play.

It's shaping how we spend time and money.

But it has an even loftier goal: to help rewrite society's pop culture menu.

Welcome to Starbucks Nation.

"The company that sells 4 million coffee drinks daily in the USA is hot to extend its brand beyond the espresso machine to influence the films we see, CDs we hear and books we read," notes *USA Today*. The idea is that if you love the taste of their coffee, you'll love their taste in pop culture, too. "Call it the Starbuckization of society," says George Ritzer, sociology professor at the University of Maryland.

"It amazes all of us – how we've become part of popular culture," says Chairman Howard Schultz. "Our customers have given us permission to extend the experience."

And extend it they have – and will. Starbucks Entertainment, formed two years ago, has retained the William Morris Agency to help link the brand with films, music and books. Conversations have taken place with musicians such as Mick Jagger, Bono, Prince and Chris Martin about links with CD's. In 2004 Starbucks backed the Ray Charles *Genius Loves Company* CD, and ended up sharing in eight Grammy Awards, personally accounting for 25% of the CD's total sales. In 2005, Starbucks sold 3.5 million CDs of all kinds. Ken Lombard, division president, simply says, "We are in a unique position to transform the way music is discovered and delivered."

Starbucks is also testing a plan to make stores "digital fill-up" stations for entertainment downloads. With Wi-Fi networks already in half their stores, Starbucks could become the place to not only check e-mail, but load an MP3 player.

"Like Oprah Winfrey, Starbucks is emerging as a self-appointed culture guru," writes *USA Today*. And with 7,950 stores in the United States alone, and a long-term goal of 15,000 U.S. stores (and

30,000 globally), its self-appointed status is not to be taken lightly (the seemingly ubiquitous McDonald's only has 13,700).

Particularly when CEO Howard Schultz states his desire to have Starbucks become an "editor" of culture.

His language is arresting. It is one thing to have Starbucks change what we'll pay for coffee, our coffee tastes, what we eat, and how we order. Or sparking conversation through their "The Way I See It" quotes from notable figures on their cups (they tapped Rick Warren for #92). Or to observe how it has altered the real estate market, with "Starbucks nearby" a new selling point in brochures for high-end apartments in New York City. Even the way Starbucks has changed how we meet people, becoming something equivalent to a British pub in terms of social interaction (or as their website calls it, a "third place" between home and work), is somewhat innocuous.

But self-consciously attempting to become an "editor" of culture should awaken everyone, not least of all a Christian. An editor prepares things for publication. They select, annotate, eliminate and revise. Editing is never neutral. It is the basis for the word "editorial," known by all to be the expression, the advancement, of a personal opinion or agenda.

If Starbucks succeeds in shaping what is read, what is listened to, what is watched, and what is downloaded, it will become increasingly important for those seeking to be salt and light to stop in from time to time to get a double latte - and the culture that comes with it.

James Emery White

Sources

"Starbucks Nation: Starbucks aims beyond lattes to extend brand to films, music and books," Bruce Horowitz, *USA Today*, Fri/Sat/Sun, May 19-21, 2006, p. 1A.

www.starbucks.com

Howard Schultz, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time* (1999).

John Simmons, *My Sister's a Barista: How They Made Starbucks a Home Away from Home* (2005).

Bryant Simon, *Consuming Starbucks* (forthcoming).

*New to the Update? While current Updates are only available to subscribers (subscribe for free at www.serious-times.com), 2005 Updates are now archived for your perusal at <http://www.serious-times.com/information.asp?TopicID=45>.