



The Stress-Free Principle: What Should Companies Know?

The first part in our series on the Stress-Free Megatrend explains how companies can better serve today's consumers

Stress management is a major concern of the modern consumer, and companies, ever eager to get into consumers' head, increasingly understand that: Stress free is a megatrend in marketing and a powerful framework that denotes consumers' preference for simplicity, control, balance, reduced accountability and at times guilt-free indulgence. The concept is perhaps trickier than the more straightforward values of convenience and wellness, but the companies that will get it right stand to gain in premium opportunities and consumers' loyalty.

Consumers today are more stressed than ever, or, at least, more aware of it. A 2016 survey of American households by the Hartman Group found that "anxiety and stress" was the most reported health concern among Millennials (born in 1981-2000) and Gen-X (1961-1980), at 35% and 31%, respectively.

Health concerns among American adults

Millenials	Gen- X	Boomers	Mature
35% Anxiety or stress	31% Anxiety or stress	22% Diabetes	22% Diabetes
17% Food allergy / sensitivity	21% Obesity	20% Obesity	20% Digestive disorder or frequent heartburn
17% Obesity	16% Frequent insomnia / sleep disorder	19% Anxiety or stress	28% Obesity

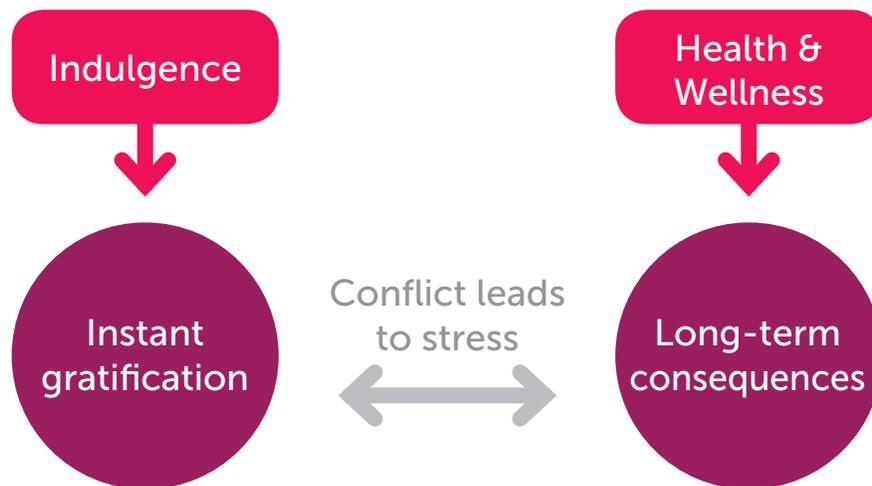
Source: the Hartman Group, 2016

Of course, life has never been altogether without stress, but either stress was perceived as the inevitable price of success, or a factor beyond one's control. That's no longer the case for today's Millennials who see no contradiction between a demanding career and a rich personal life. They want a balanced lifestyle, an expectation that ironically in itself may add stress.

The Stress Free Principle

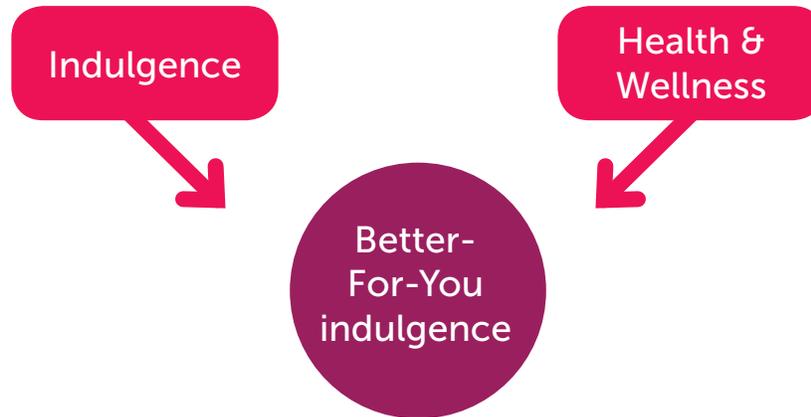
Feelings of strain and pressure may result when one must decide between conflicting interests: health vs. indulgence, cost vs. comfort, professional vs. personal life, control vs. freedom, planning vs. spontaneity, and so on. *The Stress Free Principle*, simply put, is to diminish the conflict, or the appearance thereof, by which stress should abate. That is also why *stress free* is tricky to pin down: it is less about serving an interest or concern like cost or comfort, and more about dispensing with a conflict between interests. Let's see how.

The consumer's conflict between two concerns induces stress



There are mainly two broad strategies to reduce the conflict between the opposing concerns. The first is perhaps the classical stress-free approach: design your product to integrate both concerns. Surely, people love candies, but, people, aware of their diet, care about the health consequences of eating sweets. So, offer a healthy confectionery to dispose of the dilemma.

Strategy I: Reduce conflict through integration



A second powerful strategy builds on a nuanced insight into the Millennial mind. Granted, instant gratification and long-term health are important. Still, your typical Millennial, eschewing a compromise, would like to have both, as authentically as possible. So, in the name of a higher principle - call it "happiness" - he or she will own and legitimize both motivations. Rather than a product that improves life's efficiency, offer them a way of rendering the experience richer and fuller.

Strategy II: Reduce conflict through owning opposing concerns to serve a higher one (happiness)



Example of strategy I:

Chobani Flip integrates conflicting concerns to reduce stress



Strategy I in practice: Chobani Flip



Chobani introduced the new category of Greek yogurt, emphasizing health benefits like protein, and low levels of sugar and fat, that helped the U.S. yogurt market grow. Taking the strategy a step forward, [Chobani Flip](#) is a new line of yogurts that had been a great success since 2016 with its promise of indulgence: “When it’s time for a snack, skip the chips, candy and cookies and reach for something better.”

Example of strategy II:

Amazon's Surprise Me Button encourages you to own both motivations

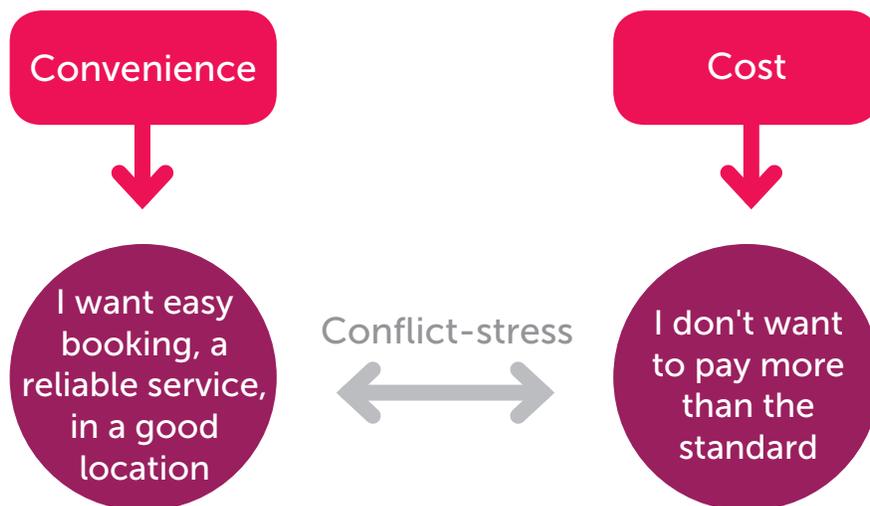


Strategy II in practice: Amazon's Surprise Me Button



With Amazon's *Surprise Me Button* you can order an assortment of sweets. The company brilliantly persuades you to bring temptation home at a hand's reach with the slogan: "You've earned it."

In the tourism and travel industry the consumer faces a conflict between convenience and cost



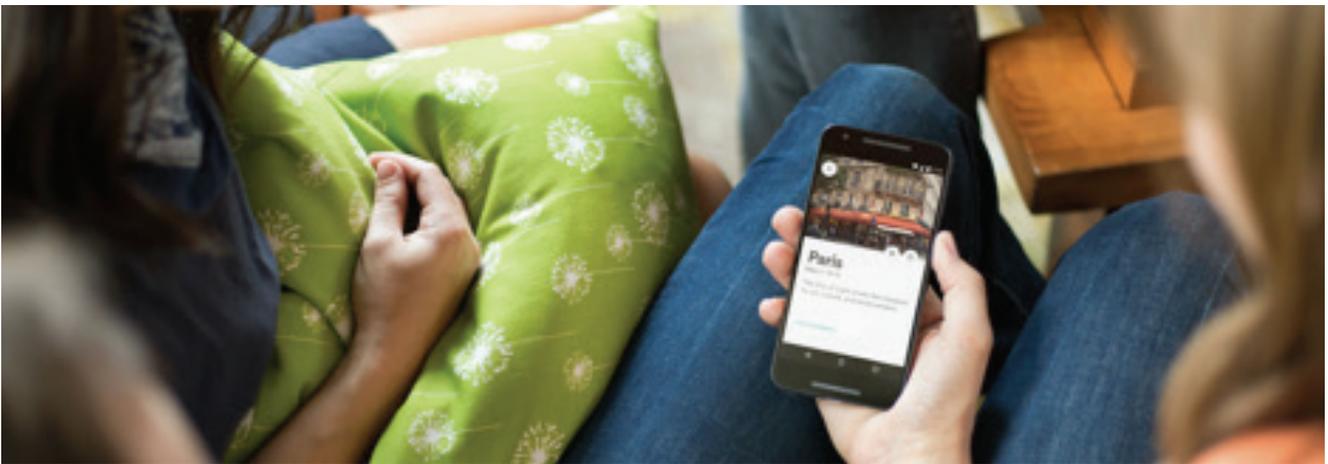
Example of strategy I:

Airbnb integrates conflicting interests to reduce stress

Airbnb made accommodation more convenient with reviews, a great selection of locations, and an appeal to almost any budget through a variety of lodging options ranging from a couch to a house rental.



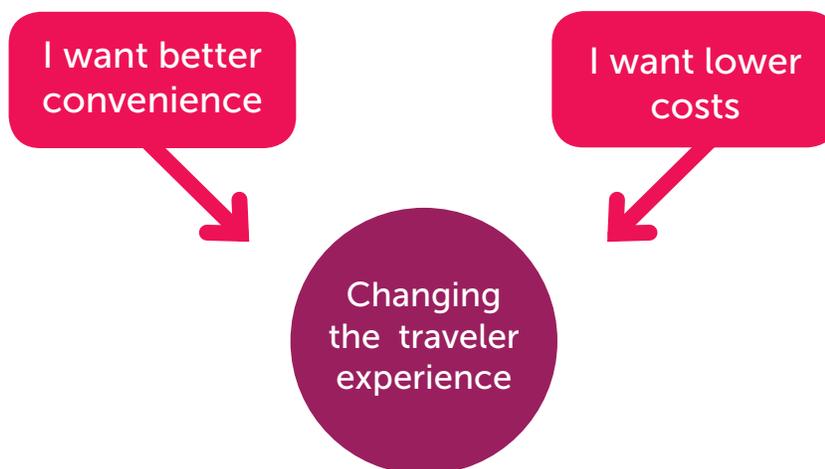
But there's another way of understanding Airbnb's success — with the second stress-free strategy. The company changed the traveler experience and expectations. It helps the traveler "live like a local" in a variety of lodging options ranging from a couch to a room to a palace. The convenience on offer is the sheer selection that could cater to anyone's taste, needs and desires. But the experience is different from that offered by hotels, so price-sensitivity is down. The traveler's framework has expanded, such that hotels are no longer the defining standard but merely a part of a broader category. The effect is nuanced but powerful: Rather than making a choice that embodies a compromise or tradeoff, the consumer now can select what best meets her preferences.



Source: Airbnb website

Example of strategy II:

Airbnb eliminates conflict through owning two interests to make costumers happy

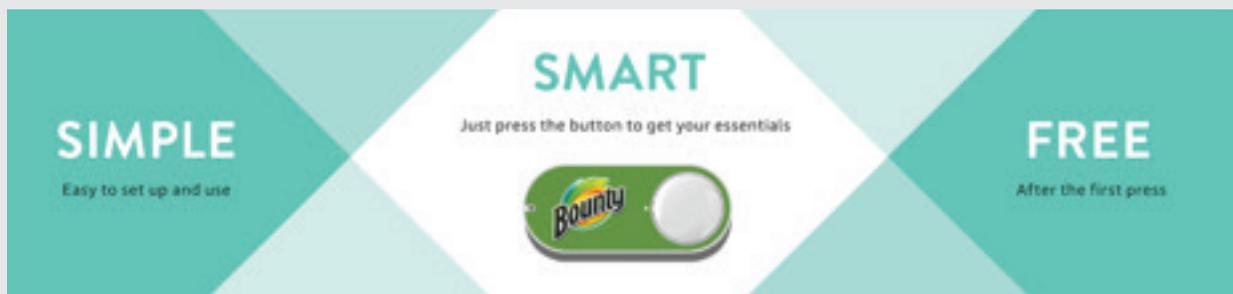


Some of today's best known and loved companies and brands offer stress-free solutions.

Amazon, which strives to be “Earth's most customer-centric company where people can find and discover virtually anything they want to buy online,” is second to none when it comes to serving the stressed consumer. You find the Stress-Free Principle in some of Amazon's hallmarks, from its reliable doorstep delivery to Amazon Prime, all save the consumer the headache of thinking about the costs and logistics of obtaining the products when shopping online. The list continues: Product reviews help familiarize the consumer with sometime obscure brands and offerings and give her a framework to make a judgement call.

Newer offerings also embody a stress-free strategy with nuance and sophistication. In 2015 Amazon launched **Dash Button** that Amazon Prime members place at home to reorder detergents, toilet papers, and other domestic supplies. The next year, **Amazon Dash Replenishment**, an Internet of Things technology, automated the management of inventory of everyday essentials that would now be ordered-in whenever their level at home drops.

Amazon Dash Button



Amazon Alexa



Amazon's Alexa, the successful digital personal assistant, shows how Amazon employs deep learning and The Internet of Things to free the consumer's mind. Setting your alarm, ordering a pizza, and streaming music, and switching the lights on and off, just to give a few examples, are now executed effortlessly.

Amazon's strategy clearly works: according to Slice Intelligence, the company accounted for a majority (53%) of e-commerce growth in 2016.

Technology is a double-edged sword: it improves productivity, but is also stress inducing. To be sure, we can get almost everything on demand, but we, too, are on demand. And no company embodies this duality better than **Apple**. That said, Steve Jobs's legacy may well be understood as an implementation of the Stress-Free Principle on every level. Apple has excelled in making digital technology friendly and stress-free. The technology and interface aside, the company has an extraordinarily compact selection of its main products to help customers narrow down their decisions. That's famously the case with the iPhone models - one or two at every launch - but also with the Mac computers which are offered in fewer, easily distinguishable categories than the mess you'd find in many other brands. The Genius Bar is modelled after the concierge of luxury hotels. Apple incorporates other bits of a stress-free strategy: simplicity, accessibility, fun, and a definition of a lifestyle.

Netflix, which passed the [94 million members](#) mark in 2016, has disrupted the television industry with the promise of on-demand content for a monthly subscription. The Stress-Free Principle operates here on a few levels. First, the idea of entertainment and practically endless content that offers a readily available, cheap and effective form of distraction. Second, personalization through algorithms that mimic one's preferences ease the decision what to watch next. Third, binge-watching has become a central mode of television consumption (not unlike videogames) in an invitation to lose control and indulge. And finally, unlike the jittery cable television watcher whose hand on the clicker ever shifts from one channel to another, the Netflix user is fully in control, unbothered by ads, and untroubled by thinking what she may miss elsewhere: watching television is less stressful.

Uber, Lyft and other ridesharing apps employ the stress-free principle on two levels. First, hailing a taxi is easier - you know when the ride is available and how much you'll pay. Second, "[stress free rides](#)" are meant to dispense with the private car altogether and the inevitable headache of traffic, parking, and driving. The willingness to replace the car with a service is very much generational. In a 2016 Pew Research center poll, 86% of ridesharing users said that such apps saved them time and reduced stress, and just 3% thought that was not true. Another 2016 survey, of MIT, found that 56.3% of consumers aged 25 - 34 considered ridesharing an alternative for driving. Among consumers aged 35 - 44 the rate was lower, at 41.7% and it declined further with age.

The rapidly growing startup **Slack** is perhaps not as well known as the companies above, but it makes strides with the motto of making work "stress free." Its paid platform renders team collaboration easy and clutter-free. In mid 2014 the company reportedly had 140,000 daily active users, and 40,000 paid ones; two years later, the numbers rose sharply to 2.7m and 800,000. Slack's success harbors an important lesson: stress free is a powerful concept that applies also to products that aim at businesses and emphasize productivity. The Stress-Free Principle is as relevant to companies whose costumers are businesses as it is to those focusing on people.

How can companies get the Stress-Free Principle right?

After we saw the big-picture concept, it's time to be more specific. Here are a few pointers how to implement a stress-free strategy.

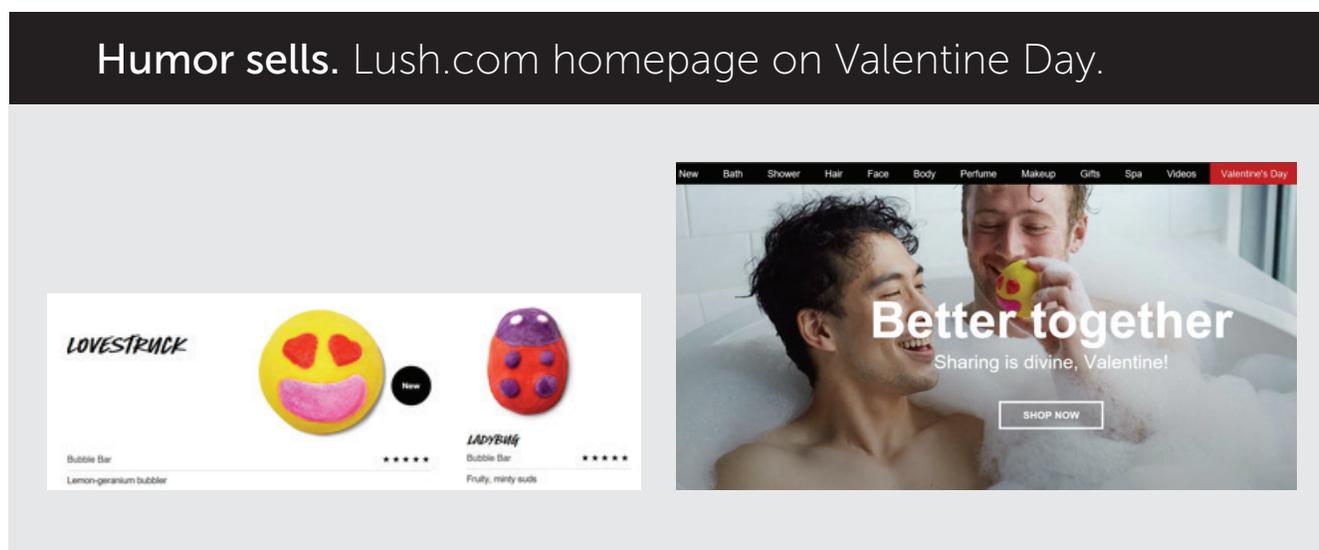
1 Make products fun

Humor, irony, and a sense of surprise will go a long way with consumers. We can break this in three:

- Make your products and services fun
- Make strategy fun
- Make the shopping experience fun

Lush, the cosmetics company, does not seem to compete in price, but rather in a lavish customer experience. The marketing relies on sophisticated and sometimes silly humor as evident in the products, the websites and in-store.

Humor sells. Lush.com homepage on Valentine Day.



2 Offer solutions, not products

The classical example is telecom bundling, where the home's telephone package includes also cable television and internet. But the concept of bundling is wider and can be applied more broadly. If I bought balloons and candies, wouldn't I also need a cake and candles? Indeed, Amazon and Procter & Gamble excel in bundling: they evaluate consumers' preferences from the items they buy. Graze, a subscription-based healthy snack online service, delivers special offers for events, parties and sports games.

PepsiCo's Super Bowl store activation optimizes a consumption opportunity with a comprehensive hosting solution of snacks and beverages.



3 Define a lifestyle

People look for strategies that allow them to keep in control but also to let go. Some of the diets and nutrition plans of the past were meant to hold people accountable - Weight Watchers, Atkins, and others that encouraged mindfulness of calorie and ingredient intake. Those diets are still popular but you also see a trend in the opposite direction- diets that set broad guidelines that make it easy to follow. The Paleo diet, for instance, emphasizes your freedom to choose and even indulge, as long as you keep within the broad guidelines, and frees you from an obsessive calorie-counting.

4 Keep it simple

Against the abundance of information and choice, there are opportunities in going against complexity. Nostalgia, back to nature, minimalism, clean label, farm to fork, and a “what you see is what you get” attitude, are part of the backlash against the never-ending march toward sophistication. Consider the example of CrossFit, the popular fitness program, that substitutes minimally furnished “boxes” for fancy gyms, and simple weights and bars for expensive equipment. It keeps the programming to the likes of pushups and pullups. Its appeal lies in the combination of a back-to-basics approach and the offer of a lifestyle that bundles fitness and wellness.

5 More choice is not always better

More choice is sometimes a headache, so help the customer make easy choices via segmentation, personalization and decluttering. Apple brilliantly offers very few, but clearly distinct models in its several product lines, along with a smart offer of add-ons. The easily overwhelmed consumer can make up her mind without being stressed out. Ikea, which popularized the minimalist Scandinavian style, helps people declutter space. If you do offer a great selection, help the customer make a choice. Levi’s website, which has driven up the clothing company’s sales, is a good example. The selection is broad but it’s easy to narrow down choice through a smart design and smart categories.

6 Free customers of commitments to win their loyalty

Making a commitment demands attention and is a source of stress, so you need to convince customers that they would not be held accountable to their decisions. Companies' no-questions-ask return or cancel policies are based on this rationale, as well as on the realization that most customers wouldn't return the product or cancel the service- sometimes even in the case of regret, simply because of laziness and the mental effort of dealing with the cancellation. Such policies also project maturity, confidence and integrity. Another take is the "Freemium" model of generous samples of free trials to get customers on board by relieving them of obligations. Netflix, for one, keeps enticing prospective and past customers with a month-long free membership. Among food companies you see the likes of Sabra's [Unofficial Meal](#) that reframe the dining experience as noncommittal to meet people's mental accounting. Another development is "meal kits" that provide specific ingredients and instructions: By saving you the trouble of selecting and shopping for ingredients and experimenting with recipes, the meal kits keep the making of quality cooking casual.

Stress free is an important megatrend that will continue to shape strategy and marketing in the future. As lives get more hectic and people are overwhelmed by choice and information, consumers will seek solutions that simplify their lives and clear their minds .

The Schieber Research Stress-Free Matrix

We compared some of the companies and brand mentioned in this report with respect to their stress-free-ness, implementing a methodology we developed. Each category summarizes several indications, each evaluated on a scale of 1 (the least) to 5 (most). The table should provide an illustration of the Stress-Free Principle’s utility and relevance.

We’ll explain our methodology in more depth in a future report. But please contact us if you’d like to learn more about how to apply it to your brands and products.

	Amazon	Uber	Slack	Netflix
Convenience (4 – 20)	17	18	20	20
Time saving	5	4	5	5
Effortless	4	5	5	5
On the go	4	5	5	5
Money saving	4	4	5	5
Fun (3 – 15)	11	6	9	13
Humor/ tone	3	1	5	3
Experiential	4	2	3	5
Indulgent/ luxury	4	3	1	5
Personalization (3 – 15)	11	6	6	11
Segmentation/ lifestyle	3	2	2	3
Bundling	5	2	1	3
Personal preferences	4	2	3	5
Simple and BFY (3 – 15)	10	4	10	6
Natural/ "clean"/ organic/ sustainable	3	1	3	2
Nostalgic/ basic/ "authentic"	3	2	3	3
Local/ "transparent"/ community	4	1	4	1
Total "Stress Free" score (13 – 65)	49	34	45	50

How can we help?

We helped many companies to implement the Stress-Free Principle, and we'd be delighted to help you. Contact us!

Schieber Research helps clients make better strategy, design and marketing decisions through market research and competitive intelligence. Our clients want to know about macro and micro trends that shape their industry; innovation and opportunities for products and marketing; and competitors' strategies, threats and opportunities.

We identify market undercurrents and strategic shifts and discover incipient trends before they become common knowledge to help answer strategic and tactical queries: How markets are likely to evolve a year or five years from now? What do consumers want and what will they demand in the future? What opportunities to pursue?

Clients ask us specific questions, often about marketing strategy, segmentation, digital- and direct-to-consumer strategy, loyalty building, market trends and product development.

Often, our customers want us to monitor their industries and competitors - they care about strategy, marketing, product and channel development, and digital initiatives among other things - and we developed a unique methodology to answer their needs effectively and efficiently.

We also provide competitive intelligence and periodical analysis of trends, innovations and strategies. We make sure our clients are kept well informed and on top of the latest developments in their industries.



CEO **Hamutal Schieber** founded the company in 2009. Our offices are in New York and Tel Aviv.

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This report is the **first** in our series on the Stress-Free Principle. In the following installments we'll continue to explore this important Principle and its applications, and answer questions such as:

How is the Principle manifested in specific industries such as food and beverages?

What other consumer trends are likely to evolve from the Principle?

What will be the impact of those trends on products, services and distribution channels?

How to assess your company's stress-free-ness using the Schieber Research methodology?

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