

## The Canadian kaleidoscope

BY LIZ TORLÉE

**Our country is no longer just glorious and free, it's diverse, passionate and just a little arrogant**

At this time of year, it behooves us all to reflect a little on our home and native land. Following the "Mais, non!" hissy-fit from France over the EU constitution, some Europeans suggested taking a closer look at our brand of confederacy. Despite regular bouts of indignation from Quebec separatists, Western rightists and Atlantic left-out-ists, we're still hanging in there and Europe wants to know how we do it.

While "beats me" is probably the best answer, four years of in-field and nationwide panel research have provided some interesting clues to our success. With the caution that these are emerging trends rather than widespread movements, here are seven developments that should be on everyone's radar:

**1. From passive tolerance to active inclusion:** Tolerance is often used to describe Canada, but it suggests we put up with people rather than embrace them. This is definitely changing. Increasing immigration and our reliance on it means that ethnicity is now almost beside the point. In advertising, a totally white bread cast is no longer just politically incorrect, but according to many, it makes a product look "weird" and "out of sync." And of course, the push to legalize same-sex marriage, marijuana, discretionary retirement, etc. all reinforce our liberal, larger embrace of humanity.

**2. From nationalism to internationalism:** Canadians are more interested in international affairs. We want to understand Canada's role on the world stage and we care what goes on in places few had heard of a decade ago. This is due partly to 9/11, partly to new Canadians' desire to stay in touch with native countries, and partly to technology that brings the entire globe to our fingertips. But, more interesting, a sharper curiosity is emerging, a growing appetite to explore and discover beyond our own backyards.

**3. From overused hockey heroes to great Canadians everywhere:** Wayne Gretzky and Céline Dion are getting a break. Now we are winning Nobel prizes and Miss Universe contests, rescuing people from the South Pole and causing *Jeopardy* and spelling bee favourites to lose a little sleep. We have drawn world attention in the arts, literature, science, music, technology and wine, to name but a few.

**4. From loons and Mounties to "God's greatest experiment":** When people across the country were asked to describe in pictures and words what Canada meant to them, "peace" and fir trees still featured. But there were also new concepts and fresh vocabulary: "A country of great progress," "Leading edge thinking" and "Canada: the best kept secret." Many of the pictures had people holding hands, some were metaphorical—a sun rising, a ladder that reached through the clouds, a treasure chest spilling over—and all reflected a sense of optimism and possibility.

**5. From America's little brother to the big brother who left home:** The overlooked younger sibling has grown up. He's gone off to discover the world and he's come back with

strong opinions-some of which are very annoying to those who stayed home. Many Americans are having a hard time dealing with this and, although it's not a nice thing to admit, many Canadians are enjoying their discomfort.

**6. From defensive to assertive:** It took 200 years and a lot of new blood but our defensiveness is finally on the wane. A little credit should go to Molson. Clearly, someone with their ear to the ground picked up the more confident vibes, and the famous "Rant" ad helped to raise patriotic sensitivity. My own special moment came in a meeting in Manhattan. I was interrupted in presentation take-off mode by a Gordon Gekko type, leaning way back in his chair: "I gotta warn you, I don't like Canadians." Flinching, ready to apologize for something, I asked why. "They're so damned arrogant," he said. Finally!

**7. From mosaic to kaleidoscope:** The mosaic metaphor-a nation patterned with ethnically-diverse neighbourhoods-no longer does justice to the complex harmony that distinguishes this country. In the new Canada, it is more likely to be issues that connect people, not cultural backgrounds. Those issues-from day care to gay rights; politics to education; feminism to environmentalism-transcend all ethnicities and cause people to continually align and re-align depending on their interests, their values, their needs.

Today, the country is more like a kaleidoscope, shape-shifting and continually transforming-and now bringing greater passion to the whole meaning of glorious and free.

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