

# SIGNAL SPOTTING — A FIELD GUIDE

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# be radical.

## 🔍 Know what to look for...

A signal is an early indicator of a possible future trend or change. The weakest signals can be misleading and difficult to interpret, so focus on weak signals that have a sense of “directionality”—the suggestion that more of something is on the way or moving toward the mainstream. Signals might take the form of a new product announcement, piece of expert analysis, novel behavior or fringe use case, or a quantitative or qualitative indicator that might point to an emerging trend.

## 📍 Know where to look...

Identify and follow thought-leaders and analysts in your areas of interest—and areas adjacent to your areas of interest. Tune your social media or RSS feeds to bring you a steady (but not overwhelming) stream of novel inputs. Subscribe to newsletters or podcasts that offer fresh perspectives and explore new and different questions. Practice active noticing and give your curiosity space to roam to freely while you’re getting a sense of what feels relevant to your scanning process.

## 👥 Scan collaboratively...

You don’t know what you don’t know, and you don’t see what you don’t see. Find partners who are excited (or get your partners excited) to engage in some collaborative scanning and signal spotting. The picture that emerges from tapping the collective intelligence will be much richer, and you’ll locate your blindspots and flawed assumptions much more quickly if you have help in identifying them.

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## ↪ Capture your findings...

Record your signals and trends for reference and review. Depending on your preferences and those of your partners, you might use a bookmarks folder, a Pinterest board, or a set of color-coded note cards, but a simple shared spreadsheet for compiling the signals/trends (on distinct tabs—where related signals might graduate to supporting a fuller trend) inventory will do the trick. Consider incorporating the following fields for a more robust inventory.

Signal sheet sample format:

Signal	Source	Interpretation	STEEP Domain

Trend sheet sample format:

Trend	Supporting Signals	Sources	STEEP Domain	Time Horizon

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## (Re-) Visit your possible futures frequently...

Put your trends and signals into conversation, interaction & (re-) combination to create a view of interrelated possibilities that also exist on a spectrum of likelihood and impact as the emerging future comes into focus. Build a mental habit of mapping out implications (and implications of implications) to anticipate new opportunities and risks. Periodically review your signal and trend inventory to reflect on your spotting practice and refine your inputs and scanning methodology.