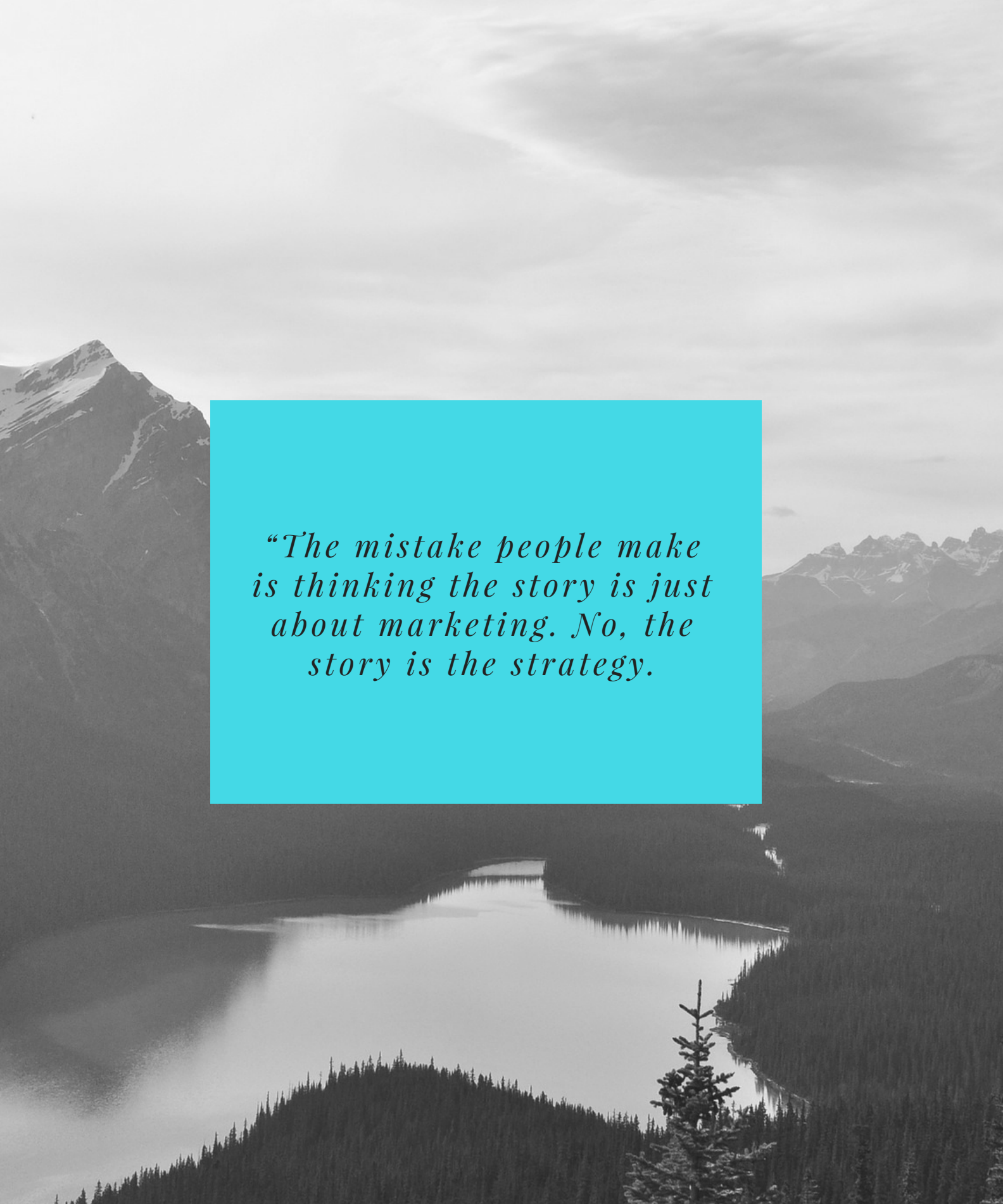


WODEN

ANNUAL

2017



A black and white photograph of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, a calm lake reflects the sky and the surrounding mountains. The lake is bordered by dense evergreen forests. In the background, rugged mountains with patches of snow rise against a cloudy sky. A bright teal rectangular box is centered over the middle of the image, containing a quote in a black serif font.

*“The mistake people make
is thinking the story is just
about marketing. No, the
story is the strategy.”*

*If you make your story
better you make the
strategy better.”*

-Ben Horowitz



WODEN ANNUAL MASTHEAD

PARTNERS

Edward Lynes & Dan McDonough, Jr.

CREATIVE TEAM

Kelly Sarabyn, Erin J. Mullikin, Zach Kliger, Hannah Landers, Katie Faigen, Lindsay Cottman



1520 Locust Street | Fifth Floor | Philadelphia, PA 19102
1.844.469.6336
www.wodenworks.com

WODEN ANNUAL

2017

ZACH KLIGER	9	VILLAINS IN THE VALLEY <i>How America's Innovators Have Lost Their Way</i>
ED LYNES	13	ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS <i>How TD Bank Ruined the Best Banking Brand in America</i>
DAN MCDONOUGH, JR.	17	HOW DATA FAILS TO DELIVER
KELLY SARABYN	21	BUSINESSES DON'T BUY THINGS. PEOPLE DO. <i>The Only Way to Succeed in this New Age of B2B Selling: Stories</i>
KELLY SARABYN	25	STORY CAN INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN EXECUTIVES
ERIN J. MULLIKIN	31	SELLING IMMORTALITY: HOW ELYSIUM BRANDS ITS IMPOSSIBLE PROMISE
ED LYNES	35	HUMBLE BEGINNINGS MAKE A GREAT STORY: YOUR BRAND AND ITS CREATION MYTH
MARY MCCOOL	38	THE RIGHT KIND OF WRONG: SZECHUAN SAUCE AND THE HERO'S JOURNEY
NGOZI ASSATA	42	THE SECRET TO MILLENNIAL RELATIONSHIPS: THEY'RE PEOPLE
ED LYNES	45	SWEATING SALES? STORYTELLING ISN'T THE ANSWER.
ZACH KLIGER	47	MAKE THEM EARN IT: NOW IS THE TIME TO MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR CUSTOMERS
KELLY SARABYN	51	BIRCHBOX, AND WHY EVEN THE BEST PRODUCTS STILL FAIL
KATE FAIGEN	54	WHO'S ON YOUR CREATIVE TEAM?
KELLY SARABYN	57	BRIEFLY NOTED

Cover design and cartoons by Terry LaBan.



THE POWER OF STORIES

Stories are powerful. Whether it was Abraham Lincoln saying so much with so few words to initiate a nation's healing in 1863, or Martin Luther King, Jr. telling the world about his simple and powerful dream 100 years later, great stories are the fabric of our humanity. So at a time when the phrase "fake news" has become a weapon to throttle political positions of all flavors, we at Woden want to help our clients, prospects, and partners — our friends — take a collective deep breath and pause to consider what we want to accomplish with our stories.

We believe stories can be powerful tools that should be harnessed for noble purposes to elevate humanity. It's in the Woden DNA to help good organizations leverage their stories to achieve greatness. For our first Woden Annual, we set out to capture a moment in time — sharing some of the stories we've written to help fill the canon of those who believe in the power of great narratives. We've also invited our clients from 2017, the Woden Alumni, to share their message with those of you who have taken the time to thumb through these pages.

The passing of 2017 marked an exciting time for Woden. We were given the opportunity to help nearly 40 organizations shape their narrative, and then we built a blueprint for them to leverage it in all they do today and for the future. The words our friends shared with us in 2017 about the StoryGuide process helped crystallize our purpose; so often, "transformative" was the word used to best describe how the discovery process of the StoryGuide worked for our friends. And in that regard — truly understanding how powerful an impact we at Woden were having on the businesses and causes of our clients — 2017 was just as transformative for us!

Please enjoy what we've put together in the 2017 Woden Annual, our first ever. But, more importantly, please let it inspire your own discovery and how it informs your own narrative. In each of the articles we have offered for you, there are lessons and reflections. We hope our words can help spark the same transformation our friends and we have enjoyed and embraced in 2017. We hope it can help elevate your organization, and thus humanity as a whole.

// WHO ARE YOU //

// STORY.WODENWORKS //





Free &
Unlimited



Bots, API &
Webhooks



Private &
Public Groups



Direct
Messages



Voice &
Video Calls



Control your
own data



Built-in
Livechat



Plugins &
Extensions



File
Sharing



Voice
Messages



ROCKET.CHAT

Open Source Communication



Try it now at open.rocket.chat



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

VILLAINS IN THE VALLEY

How America's Innovators Have Lost Their Way

BY ZACH KLIGER

Silicon Valley startup Bodega believed they could reinvent the traditional corner store as a glorified vending machine — and they were very, very wrong. As soon as the idea got out into the wild, it faced a blistering social media firestorm. It turns out America doesn't want its neighborhood bodegas replaced by a technified snack box.

Bodega in Silicon Valley failed to realize that for many people, neighborhood bodegas are more than an accessible receptacle of non-perishable goods. They are comfort and tradition and community. You can go to one and get something warm to eat, or have a friendly conversation. These essential ingredients of what make bodegas special were stripped away by a company that dared to take that name for their own. Bodega's team fundamentally missed the point, and now they're paying the price for it.

The story of Silicon Valley is no longer about intrepid, radical innovators — underdogs who challenged the establishment and changed the world against all odds. Slowly but surely, Silicon Valley has become the establishment, so bloated and myopic and out of touch with the rest of the

world that it has lost perspective. And along the way, people have stopped believing in Silicon Valley's potential to improve their lives.

In a world beset by significant challenges, the Valley gives America yet another delivery company for urbanites; no wonder people are rolling their eyes, rather than being awed by the next big step forward. The days where Silicon Valley, America's hotbed of innovation, was seen as something to be proud of and excited by are gone. Each new scandal or PR breakdown leads consumers to treat startups more like jokes than as the heroic tech pioneers of yore.

Has the well of innovation run so dry that our brightest innovators cash in on absurdity over utility?

No. But in their hubris, Silicon Valley has begun to see themselves as the hero of America's story, when in reality, they are quickly becoming the villain. Even at Apple, the standard for how California's geniuses can transform everyday life, the charm is gone. The tiny, iterative tiptoes forward help the bottom line, but they frustrate more than they excite. When customers have to hack new products just so that they're a bit more like an older, superior

version, it's worth asking who the hero of the brand story really is.

While the innovative potential seems to have died away, arrogance has simultaneously ballooned out of control. Many of the meltdowns in recent months can be chalked up to an overwhelming egotism that has become the trend and the expectation. When a brand sees itself as superior to its customers, it can easily backfire — and it's backfiring on Silicon Valley right now.

Now, we define Silicon Valley success not by a product's capacity to improve people's lives, but by its ability to rake in dollars. We define innovation according to how sexy and audacious an idea is, and whether or not a founder can generate a rabid cult of personality. This may be good for securing a unicorn valuation or for the short-term bottom line, but it is inarguable that long-term value is driven by customers' affection.

The point here is not to remonstrate tech companies for their unchecked pride. Neither is the purpose to signal the death knell of innovation and opportunity.

But if Silicon Valley is going to keep tapping its innovative



potential, the story must change. It's time for a dose of humility, a step back, and a mentality that elevates the customers and puts their needs first.

That kind of shift in the narrative goes deeper than a superficial refashioning of image. Bodega didn't merit such a negative reaction because of bad marketing. That may have played a part, but the product itself was fundamentally flawed to begin with. When you set out to build a product it's going to tell a story.

Bodega's snack boxes implied people don't need the genuine article anymore. That a fancy vending machine is just as good — or better — than a family business. That what's valuable about a

bodega is only the things it sells, and that the human connection doesn't matter anymore. Tech-driven convenience alone is a story no one wants to hear anymore.

Compare Bodega with Airbnb or Lyft, two companies with the same roots in using technology for convenience. Their disruption felt authentic: allowing convenience for consumers, while empowering others (drivers or homeowners) to unlock the value of their own skills and assets. Their billion-dollar valuations are based on more than just technology: they recognize the hero of their story.

Silicon Valley may no longer be capable of credibly telling an underdog story. Still, that doesn't mean that it's beyond redemption. There's still a hero

to their narratives—it just isn't them. Startups like Bodega must cede the role of the hero back to their customers. Not just in their marketing, but in the way that they build products.

It's true that there may never be heroes in Silicon Valley again, but there can still be mentors, sages, and exemplars — guides and pathfinders that equip the true hero, the customer, with the tools they need to achieve their dreams. Now, that is a story worth telling, and it's one that we all want to hear. **W**

JOB READY. NOT TEST READY.

We don't need to know how people test. We need to know *what people can do* to fulfill our missions, grow our businesses, and adapt to change.



Discover more at authess.com



Connecting drivers to fleet objectives in an era of driver scarcity is a challenge when the driver you hire today may not be with you next quarter. One way to improve your odds is to connect your driver to your fleet objectives. Fuel efficiency compensation is a way to give your drivers control, engage them in your business, and allow your drivers to earn more based on their driving performance. True Fuel® gives you the tools to do that simply, precisely and affordably.

WWW.VNOMICSCORP.COM | 585-377-9700



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

How TD Bank Ruined the Best Banking Brand in America

BY ED LYNES

In 1957, Better Living, an appliance store in Wisconsin, advertised itself as offering the “world’s lowest prices.” Consumers disagreed and sued; the defense rested on the idea that said claim was merely puffery. The Federal Trade Commission agreed, and the practice of puffing was affirmed: “exaggerations reasonably to be expected of a seller as to the degree of quality of his product, the truth or falsity of which cannot be precisely determined.” You can thank this concept for the claims that every brand of detergent makes your clothes the cleanest, all toothpastes make your teeth the whitest, and that every other type of consumer good tends to label themselves as “the best.”

It also explains why TD Bank still inexplicably bills itself as “America’s Most Convenient Bank.”

Retail banking is not known for its high levels of consumer satisfaction, nor for the creative messages that underpin each brand’s story. Yet, the (de) evolution of the TD brand stands out among its peers for the way it has peddled a message while simultaneously hollowing all

meaning of said message from its organization. It’s a cautionary tale for brands: a reminder that what you do matters even more than what you say.

If TD Bank were truly “America’s Most Convenient Bank,” it would likely be among the most beloved as well. Instead, consumers rank it as middle of the pack, well below average for customer loyalty in the industry. Understanding the failure of TD Bank as a brand illuminates the importance of a brand’s promise — and the need to keep that promise at all costs.

Understanding why “America’s Most Convenient Bank” is so disingenuous a journey all the way to 1973, and the story of a different bank, one branded in red, not green: the former Commerce Bank. Commerce was founded in southern New Jersey by Vernon Hill, a restaurant franchisee who believed banking ought to mimic the approach of the fast food industry: long hours, constant availability, and customer-oriented.

Those who banked with Commerce came to expect no fees for basic services, long hours 365

days per year, and a unique branch experience highlighted by large, well-staffed “stores” (as Commerce called them) that invited depositors. This framework allowed Commerce to market itself as the (original) most convenient bank — because it wasn’t a bank, just a retail operation masquerading as one.

The customer service culture at Commerce was how this promise was delivered. “Wow!” was the feeling all Commerce bankers were expected to deliver to customers. No expense was spared to deliver this promise, from free gifts at branches to lavish holiday parties and “Wow!” awards to the Hill Cup awarded to the store with the best service.

When TD Bank purchased Commerce in 2007, it was billed as more than just an expansion. It was a way for TD to import the culture of Commerce into its own, larger enterprise. TD claimed that nothing would change, assumed the mantle of “most convenient,” and charged forward.

A decade later, only the veneer of Vernon remains. Branch hours have been cut back significantly. Fees are so egregious they’ve

sparked a class action lawsuit. The in-branch experience — sparsely staffed teller lines, long waits, and no greeters — mimic the “normal” banking experience. Customers are asked to use the low-rated (1.5 stars!) mobile phone app for customer service instead of talking to a person. And the beloved Commerce-inspired Penny Arcade has met its end after defrauding millions.

TD bought into the marketing element of Commerce’s story, but failed to understand that a brand story goes far beyond a slogan. At Commerce, there was a Dr. Wow who oversaw all company culture and brand experience. TD couldn’t even keep Regis on board.



Brand story is a compact between the company and the customer. It’s a promise that speaks to why the brand exists, and offers the customer a broader indication of what to expect in their relationship. This context is where many brands can slip from puffery to borderline deception.

Comparison of longest average store hours in the regions (MSAs) in which TD Bank operates compared to major banks. Major banks include our top 20 national competitors by MSA, our top five

competitors in store share by MSA and any bank with greater or equal store share than TD Bank in the MSA. Major banks do not include banks that operate in retail stores such as grocery stores, or banks that do not fall in an MSA.

That is the fine print at the bottom of the TD Bank website. A good rule of thumb: if your brand promise requires a disclaimer in the footer of your website, it’s probably lacking in authenticity. Promises shouldn’t require qualification; they stand for themselves. And if the brand story is going to communicate an organization’s promise, it must be equally clear, unambiguous and genuine.

Great brand narratives are customer-centric. The Hero’s Journey narrative arc is widely used in business storytelling for this reason: it places the audience at the center of the story, and empowers them to move it forward. A Mentor, the role played by brands in this format, doesn’t qualify their support in fine print. They do everything they can to enable the hero’s success and support the completion of their journey.

There’s risk in telling a story and committing to it. But there’s far more risk in telling a story and failing to deliver.

Anyone in business has, at some point or another, been reminded to “under promise and over deliver.” TD’s failure is not that it is worse than its competitors — it is not. But Bank of America does not make lofty promises to its customers; it is simply America’s biggest bank, and the place to go if you want services nationwide. Even Wells Fargo, after defrauding more than two million customers with fake accounts, has equally

high favorability as its peers. Consumers expect large banks to be terrible, and don’t punish them for it when they meet those low expectations.

Yet the 2016 JD Power rankings for banks in the mid-Atlantic (the territory acquired from Commerce) placed TD Bank behind Bank of America, PNC Bank, Wells Fargo, Citizens Bank, and M&T Bank. In fact, with a score of 807, it was even below the average of 816.

Of course, those low expectations are precisely why Commerce succeeded, and why TD valued them. The bank not only promised something different, but it delivered on it. TD Bank has continued to tell this brand story in its marketing, while living a completely different one internally. In setting an expectation that it does not deliver on, TD Bank will continue to disappoint.

This is not uncommon, as many brands see messaging as purely the domain of marketing. This is a mistake: brand story is not an ad campaign, it’s an embodiment of the company strategy. Brands that want to truly convert their customers into evangelists must look at the brand story as something to be embraced uniformly across the entire organization.

Building a brand is tough. It requires the thought to craft a compelling story, tell it to your audience in a consistent way, and maniacally safeguard its execution in product, sales and customer service. It’s maddening when brands that have done this well erode something so valuable. When a brand lives its story, it



builds trust with its customers. But like all trust, it takes a lifetime to build and only a moment to break.

These issues are only magnified in retail banking. A study on the branding of large banks noted that they are largely equivalent in terms of product offerings, benefits, and even messaging to their customers. Those that speak differently do attract attention, although in the case of TD: “TD Bank does look different, however, but it’s messaging around ease-of-use and convenience doesn’t resonate.”

When TD Bank bought Commerce Bank, its leadership should have made a decision: to either purchase the deposits and continue business

as usual, or fully embrace the Commerce brand and enforce it. They did neither, and the result is a brand with a meaningless story that is progressively undermined by each trip to a branch and every request to customer service. Brands must go “all-in” on story, or they ought to dispense with it altogether.

Over the past decade, the former customers of Commerce Bank have come to accept TD as the new normal. Most are probably still depositors at TD, as the competitive options are not much different. And certainly, for TD, all of their changes must have made sense in the short-term: trimming hours, reducing staff and raising fees have been healthy for the bottom line.

But Commerce Bank would argue that they had fans, not customers. By continuing a brand promise and hollowing out all the things that made it real, TD Bank has destroyed their brand.

In fact, Vernon Hill has returned as the chairman of Republic Bank in greater Philadelphia. A bank — surprise! — offering no fees, long hours, and great service. Its entire success is predicated on TD’s erosion of 40 years of Commerce brand equity. And the slogan used to contrast against the lime-green Toronto Dominion? The power of red is back! **W**



CUREMATCH®

The Pulse
of **Precision Medicine**

**BRINGING DATA-DRIVEN PERSONALIZED
SOLUTIONS TO CANCER CARE.**

Because no two patients are alike,
no two cancers are alike.

This very personal illness requires
personalized treatment.

for more information | **WWW.CUREMATCH.COM**



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

HOW DATA FAILS TO DELIVER

BY DAN MCDONOUGH, JR.

It takes real integrity as a journalist to issue a correction. Washington Post reporter Chris Ingraham showed that exact brand of integrity when he reversed his position on naming Red Lake County, Minnesota, “the absolute worst place to live in America.”

Ingraham’s mistake, of course, was innocent enough. His assessment was based entirely on data — and very reliable data, at that. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s natural amenities scale, which combines six measurements of climate, topography, and water area that “reflect environmental qualities most people prefer,” was the data set upon which Ingraham relied. He used this data to stack-rank every county in the continental U.S., and Red Lake was at the bottom.

Aside from a stack of hate mail that came in pretty quickly, Ingraham got something else in the days after his initial assessment ran in the Post: He received an invitation to visit Red Lake County. What a visit it turned out to be! It wasn’t long before Ingraham was back peddling on his data-supported pronouncement

for Red Lake County. “That’s what the spreadsheet said,” he explained regarding his slander against an entire county. After visiting, he recognized that the data didn’t tell the whole story.

The data didn’t factor in the people, a key ingredient. And a hyper-focus on data and analytics can have a crippling effect in business, too, sometimes leading one to make the wrong assessment.

Simply relying on data sets will leave you blind to the important elements of human emotion. Also, data typically doesn’t help with true innovation. “It’s really hard to design products by focus groups,” Steve Jobs famously said in 1998. “A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them.” In the late 19th century, if the current marketing analytics complex were at hand, all the data would have indicated that consumers wanted faster horses.

Henry Ford had a different idea. Michael Schrage, an author and research fellow at MIT, framed the situation well in a *Harvard Business Review* post many years ago:

Marketers worldwide grew up with John Wanamaker’s famous

marketing aphorism, “Half of my advertising is wasted; I just don’t know which half.” That pithy quote is now a misleading anachronism; we can know which half. Digital media and tracking technologies, along with dramatically improved analytics, now mean that serious marketers — if they really care to know — can have an excellent idea of just how effective (or wasteful) their advertising really is. Ignorance is now a choice, not an excuse.

At the same time, incredibly bright data scientists, such as Schrage, can quickly pivot to rendering the front-end creative process useless, with a deadly focus on data. It’s the type of mistake that Ingraham made in his reporting in the Post. The best approach is using the art of creativity to produce messaging, and the science of measurement to analyze. Then rinse and repeat. Or, as Schrage says, “New media should inspire new metrics. New metrics should create new accountability. New accountability should provoke and promote new kinds of creativity.”



As Ed Lynes has said, messaging continues to befuddle even those organizations with the largest resources. And that's important, because it doesn't matter if you're in front of the right people if you're not telling the story they want to hear. A marginal investment in message can pay more dividends than the most advanced data operation in the world.

Yet so many marketers and start-up leaders focus so heavily on the tools, the metrics, the A/B testing, and the automation, that the substance of the message —

which should come first in the process of developing any go-to-market plan — is often relegated to an afterthought. I wrote in more detail last October about how the exclusive focus on tactics often creates a void in strategy and messaging, even though strategy and messaging are what help build an organization's connection to its prospects.

The lesson to Ingraham, and to all of us in business, is that analytics should be used primarily to measure, not primarily to create. That still involves the art of brainstorming and creativity.

That's what gives us something to measure.

"What they've got to say, it's bullshit," Red Lake County Commissioner Charles Simpson told Citipages after the original article about the county ran in the Post. That's a more poetic way to say, "don't always blindly trust the data."

And how did Ingraham correct his mistake after experiencing Red Lake's real, human story? Well, he picked up his family and moved there! **W**



GROWER'S SECRET

GOOD FOR YOUR BUSINESS
GOOD FOR THE EARTH

20 Years of Innovation

Grower's Secret is committed to responsible innovation in agriculture, empowering farmers to achieve maximum results with minimal risk.

Working together, we'll grow your business.

www.growerssecret.com



CONNECTING OUR MILITARY COMMUNITY.



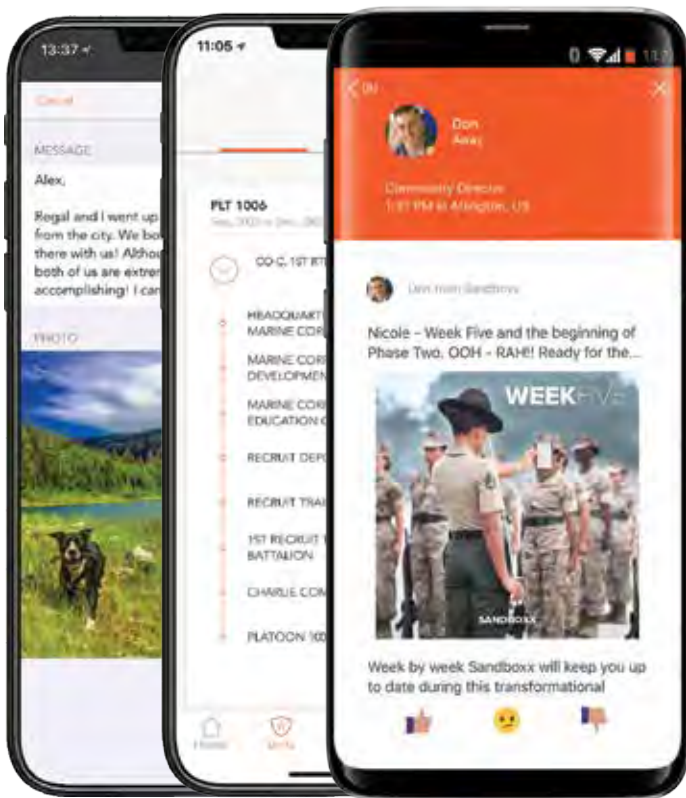
The United States Armed Forces is dedicated to protecting Americans' rights and freedoms, and its success depends on the men and women serving in its five branches. These courageous men and women do more than fight enemies, they live in separation from the people they are serving. Family and friends are left behind, apprehensive and uneasy about the unknown.

A service member must learn the military's distinct norms and laws, and they must be willing to move across the country, fly to a warzone on another continent, or embark on a remote training exercise — all at a moment's notice. From the first day of boot camp to a decorated warfighter returning to the civilian world, service members undergo one complicated transition after another, without continuity or transparency.

SANDBOXX gives service members the most powerful way to confidently navigate these transitions: connection. Linking service members to their loved ones, to each other, and to expert military knowledge, SANDBOXX illuminates the entire military journey, bringing clarity to a world that is often shrouded in darkness. Developed by veterans with decades of service, SANDBOXX delivers the ease of connection that civilians take for granted. With SANDBOXX, service members and their loved ones can stay in touch, no matter how far apart they may be. Digitizing the time-consuming processes of sending physical letters and simplifying the booking of military-related travel, SANDBOXX empowers service members to maintain meaningful bonds with family and friends back home. Whether it is a recruit receiving a letter and photograph on the third day of boot camp, or an active duty soldier flying to his parents for Christmas, or a single mother attending her son's basic training graduation, SANDBOXX transforms quality contact with loved ones from a possibility to a reality.

By creating Units, a virtual community accessible anywhere and anytime, and producing expert military content, SANDBOXX offers service members and their families elucidation and support for their entire military journey, from recruitment to retirement. Service members are able to sustain the intense relationships with those whom they served, whether it be their last assignment or decades ago. Spouses and family members can network and access vetted products and services, ensuring service members' home life is simplified from one move to the next. With this powerful backing, service members can remain focused on their duties, capable of training and fighting with valor.

Choosing to defend the rights of fellow Americans comes with many sacrifices. It requires a willingness to move any place, and serve in any role, and often, to risk one's own life. But it shouldn't require isolation or obscurity. SANDBOXX builds illuminated pathways for service members and their loved ones to become connected and informed, giving them the confidence to thrive.



sandboxx.us



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

BUSINESSES DON'T BUY THINGS. PEOPLE DO.

The Only Way to Succeed in this New Age of B2B Selling: Stories

BY KELLY SARABYN

Oracle is the world's second-largest software company, a feat they have managed to accomplish without a single consumer-facing product. They are the global experts in business-to-business (B2B) selling. Despite offering highly technical solutions to sophisticated business, they have long realized that success does not hinge on the features and benefits of a given product. When Oracle is in front of a customer, they don't sell a database, they sell their story:

"Large companies are often very adept at explaining what their products do, but not as adept at explaining how and why their customers use their products ... salespeople don't often know the real stories behind why their customers bought."

For many B2B companies, the complexity of their product distracts them from building a strong brand identity. A common perception is that businesses — especially those operating in information-dense industries like aerospace, engineering, medicine, finance, and tech — are purely rational customers, and, as a result, when making purchases, they only need a comprehensive list of product features and benefits, not an emotional connection to the brand.

The truth is that there is no such thing as a business-to-business sale. Business purchasing decisions are always made by individual people. And people, even those representing businesses, are affected by factors beyond rationality. Technical decisionmaker or not, people's decisions are deeply rooted in emotion.

So, it should not be surprising that a study by McKinsey revealed that, B2B companies with strong brands outperform companies with weak brands by 20 percent. Not only that, the B2B brands that are the strongest have a powerful emotional element.

Examining the B2B financial services market, McKinsey found that, in contrast to the myth of the rational business buyer, "the emotional dimensions of a brand really matter for B2B companies." They also concluded that most B2B companies don't realize this, and instead focus on communicating product specifications. "For all the difficulties the banking industry has faced, for example, banks have also been enabling businesses to survive, invest, merge together and create funds for shareholders. But they don't tell that story."

Stories are as old as humanity itself, and, for thousands of years, they were essential to our survival. Prior to the mass dissemination of written texts, humans relied on stories to remember and share vital information about who could be trusted, who should be feared, and where it was safe to roam. Weaving facts through emotionally gripping stories empowered people to remember a significantly larger amount of information.

The unique ability of stories to communicate complex information with emotional resonance make them a perfect vehicle to drive B2B businesses' brand identity. When speaking to key business decisionmakers, even more so than when speaking to consumers, there is a need to communicate in a way that is both factual and emotional. Only stories can do that in a compelling way.

Virtually every story to ever gain widespread adoption follows an arc codified by Joseph Campbell, called the Hero's Journey: the hero is an ordinary person living in a broken world, who, after being handed a powerful gift by a sage mentor, is able to mend that world and restore it to harmony. This simple structure resonates



so deeply with people it can be found in stories across time and place, from the Bible, to *Moby Dick*, to *Jane Eyre*, to *Star Wars*. B2B-oriented organizations can use this arc to craft a brand story that will inspire key decisionmakers inside their target businesses, as well as to ensure their whole team, from sales to customer success to HR to marketing, is sending a consistent message, a vital part of building a strong brand.

UPS Supply Chain Solutions has built a strong B2B brand by following the Hero's Journey arc. On their website, for example, they describe the broken world of

retail businesses: "We understand what keeps you up at night ... the competition is tougher and more aggressive. The customer has demands unthought-of a few years ago. The business is ever changing The need to justify the required innovation to stay competitive has become more difficult, justification takes longer, and results aren't always a guarantee."

This broken world has emotional resonance for the person inside a retail company who would be driving the decision to use UPS supply chain services. This key decisionmaker has fears about keeping up with the competition,

and frustrations about the difficulty of meeting customers' ever-changing demands — anxieties fueled more by emotional realities than a rational business analysis.

UPS positions itself as the mentor with a gift for this beleaguered protagonist, writing that they can provide personalized and reliable service that will ensure the retail business's customers will be happy. UPS explains, "We combine our expertise with yours to create new opportunities. We understand logistics and we'll work to understand your business, and how they work best together...."

Our goal is to develop business solutions that create value and competitive advantages for our customers ...”

In the final element of the story, UPS describes the mended world the customer could experience, promising that, if they contracted with UPS, instead of dealing “with supply chain issues,” they could “focus on [their] retail strategy.” UPS assures the hero: “We can turn your retail supply chain into a competitive advantage Let us take care of your supply chain so you can concentrate on your core competencies.”

Contrast UPS Supply Chain Solutions’ use of a brand story to Groupe Cat’s, another provider of supply chain solutions. Groupe Cat’s website declares, in large letters, “Building a healthy and sustainable growth for everyone,” and then launches into specific features of their services, writing, for example, that they can coordinate “the physical and administrative management” of various “automotive parts.” By focusing on services, and failing to tap into a larger story unfolding in their customers’ businesses, they miss an opportunity to connect over their customers’ struggles, or inspire excitement about the product experience. B2B companies without emotionally invested customers see only 66% of the revenues of companies that have emotionally invested customers — which may partially be why UPS Supply Chain Solutions is about ten times larger than Groupe Cat.

More technical organizations may remain skeptical that they can achieve success without focusing on the details of their solution.



In addition to the previously mentioned Oracle, another B2B company that successfully executes a compelling brand story is Salesforce. Salesforce tells the story of providing businesses with the gift of growth by making it easy to cultivate meaningful relationships with their customers

That they do this through a CRM and data solutions is almost incidental. Many companies make the mistake of depicting themselves as the hero of the brand story, but Salesforce clearly understands it is the mentor, and its business customers are the heroes. Salesforce messaging is filled with language like, “Explore all the ways Salesforce helps you connect to your customers in a whole new way” and “Create deeper relationships with your customers.”

In a 16-year study of 450 B2B companies in 47 industries, it was determined that brand equity provides anywhere from a few million dollars of added value for companies with weak brands to tens of billions of dollars in added value for companies with strong brands. Another exhaustive study revealed that what most B2B companies thought were the most important components of

their brand identity — promoting corporate responsibility, diversity, and sustainability — had zero impact on buyers’ perception of the strength of the brand. It’s easy to see why, as those are generic platforms signed on to by almost every large company, and they are rarely tied into the larger purpose of the company.

Instead, B2B buyers perceived brands as strong if the brand appeared to care “about open, honest dialogue with its customers and society,” had “a high level of specialist expertise,” and fit “in well with my values and beliefs.” Business buyers, for all their factual expertise, are foremost people: and all people have emotional struggles, frustrations and hopes, and respond most acutely to messaging that taps into those emotions.

Across all industries, only 29% of B2B customers are engaged with the company they are buying from. For the preponderance of companies failing to make this connection, it costs them revenue in the short-term and significant market share in the long-term. But, for everyone else, it creates an opening for disruption and massive growth. By investing in the right story that resonates with individual decisionmakers, B2B organizations can establish an emotional connection that unlocks a new level of sales success and brand loyalty. **W**



Reach the level
of design complexity
and innovation you
never thought possible,
at any scale.

Wazp offers a digital supply chain,
powering on-demand manufacturing
from concept to delivery.

Wazp helped IKEA to create and produce the
OMEDBAR hand. Learn more at wazp.io





THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

HOW STORY CAN INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN EXECUTIVES

BY KELLY SARABYN

Sheri McCoy resigning from Avon Products marks the third prominent female CEO to leave her post in recent months. As only 5 to 6 percent of CEOs at the nation's largest companies are female, the loss of even three women CEOs is a step backward, revealing how fragile women's inroads to the top might be.

Why women aren't reaching the executive suite in greater numbers is a complicated question, but part of the answer lies with companies' internal workplace cultures. Uber, for example, has been heavily criticized for how its aggressive workplace culture created an environment where supervisors felt free to sexually harass women, bully employees, and engage in other forms of discrimination.

The tech industry generally has a reputation of cultivating a workaholic, "bro" culture that is inimical to women's professional success. A number of women working in the field have come forward to share their stories of an industry quick to look the other way when men in leadership positions sexually harass their female subordinates.

The culture of a company is the

invisible backdrop which shapes interactions among all employees, from interns to CEOs. It implicitly sets the standards and expectations for which behaviors are prized, and which are discouraged.

For a long time, companies have ignored workplace culture as an amorphous development outside their control, but recent research has revealed workplace culture's importance in retaining employees and keeping them productive. Companies are increasingly committed to figuring out how to harness their internal culture.

When companies discuss changing their culture to encourage women's success, they often talk in terms of benefits: offering maternity leave, setting up formal mentorship opportunities, the ability to work part-time, and equal pay for equal work, for example. Such benefits are important in their own right, but they don't necessarily change workplace culture, and in fact, without a culture to support them, they often go unused. Many tech companies, for example, offer generous maternity leave, but still have a work-all-the-time culture that punishes employees

who choose to use it. Across all industries, 90 percent of employees believe taking extended family leave will shrink their career prospects.

Workplace cultures that are explicitly misogynistic will hinder women from reaching the C-suite. Susan Fowler, the engineer who brought widespread attention to Uber's internal culture, wrote of a workplace that was dominated by "political games," "chaos," back-stabbing, and misogyny.

But a workplace culture need not be explicitly misogynistic to put the brakes on women's success. Much of what prevents women from obtaining leadership positions are unconscious gender stereotypes about women's ability to lead, and the implicit ways women are judged differently than men for the same behaviors. For example, subjective elements of performance reviews have been documented to cast women in a more critical light than men, even when they are exhibiting the same leadership flaw, such as being indecisive. For a man, indecisiveness might be interpreted as thoughtfulness, while for a woman it might be interpreted as



paralysis and anxiety.

Workplace cultures that are rudderless and undefined, or based on a win-at-all-costs ethos will allow these pervasive implicit biases to operate unchecked. Win-at-all-costs cultures, for example, rarely have structures or values in place that can refocus attention on more salient, objective factors of women's performance. Political machinations and powerplays in the office are relationship-based and highly subjective — allowing implicit biases to flourish, both implicit biases about women's leadership abilities, and the implicit biases of current executives seeking mentees who replicate their own personality and interests, which, because of the heavily male demographic of current executives, will also tend to be male.

A company's brand story can shape a workplace's culture by refocusing interactions and evaluations on the "why" behind the company. The "why" of a company is to empower the heroes of its story — its customers — to better their world. By structuring employee incentives, rewards, and attitudes around helping customers fulfill their ambitions, a company's employees will be engaged, and willing to go the extra mile.

A story-driven culture can facilitate women's advancement in a number of ways. First, by focusing on objective metrics of meeting customers' needs, implicit biases about women's leadership skills will be diminished. Prioritizing employees' abilities to empower customers on their journey, as opposed to softer, more subjective



criteria, will create transparent deliverables that allow women a clearer path to leadership.

Second, by cultivating a culture of purpose and meaning, leaders who value making a difference will excel over leaders motivated by power and status. In research studies, men have been found, on average, to put a greater priority on obtaining power and status, acting aggressively, and choosing to work in competitive environments, while women put a greater priority on the purpose of their work. A purpose-driven workplace will find more women rising to the top.

A story-driven culture is not just a springboard for women's success, it also improves a company's financials, as it creates engaged employees across the board, reducing turnover and shirking. It is also likely to improve sales: for most companies, the heroes of their story are both men and women. Having a C-suite that is over 90 percent male creates a

rift between company leadership and the customers they are trying to connect with. Deloitte, for example, reframed their internal gender initiatives as "a way to boost client satisfaction and generate revenue" by better connecting with female customers.

REI is a perfect example of a company that has a story-driven workplace culture that has translated into more women leaders. Forty-four percent of REI's corporate officers are women, which far surpasses the U.S. norm of twenty-three percent. REI's female leadership and focus on empowering everyday heroes to experience the great outdoors led the company to realize, despite claiming the outdoors made them feel free, women were more reluctant than men to embark on outdoor adventures. To address this, REI launched products and marketing initiatives specifically designed to inspire more women to embrace the outdoor lifestyle. Such initiatives not only create more customers for REI, they provide its employees with a strong sense of purpose.

Companies with at least 30 percent women in the C-suite are more profitable than companies with fewer women in the C-suite, which might be partially explained by story-driven workplace cultures creating both greater opportunities for women leaders, and more sales. A story-driven workplace culture can empower women leaders while also keeping business booming. It's a win-win. **W**

The Stem are investing in more than an outcome: they secure a partner whose embrace of the

ARTZ and its supporters are inviting the forgotten back into society, to a

With Auro, there is no longer a divide between listeners, artists, and audio. With Auro, sound moves all.

For a night or a lifetime, B+YND is making wellness not just livable, but deliciously real.

Berel & Co. rekindles the age-old traditions of haberdashery and custom tailoring, and puts them squarely in the hands of the modern man through a one-of-a-kind experience that revolves squarely around you.

Freedom Mortgage treats borrowers not just as a set of numbers, but as people who are working to make the world amazing.

PageDip brings the power of technology to go deeper, and make dynamic connections that truly engage and inform.

Bluecoat belongs in the cocktails of the adventurous — those imbibers who aren't afraid to try something different in their quest to discover the extraordinary.

ProPep cares about a man's life after cancer, and is providing surgeons with the tools to preserve it.

When any provider chooses to work with Veralon, they can push forward

the customer is not abandoned; they find the security they need to thrive.

the rift between employment needs andAuthess has

For nearly 80 years, telecommunications contractors have relied on German equipment to complete jobs on time

TBJ Gourmet rewards the excitement that comes from the inventiveness of cooking.

With Grower's Secret, farmers find good people, good products, all in harmony with the earth.

The future of production is Wazp's mutually connected hive of innovators.

In the Nation's birthplace, Peddler Coffee is democratizing the pleasure of good coffee, returning it to its historical roots.

Pledgeling helps businesses grow brands people through giving

Ech provides just a mobile imaging tools; and growing economic most promising technology empathetically geared — and its patients'

Fleet owners need a simple, reliable efficiency and the impact of drive have the

SmartPlate sees with what's on

digital age means they can confidently meet even the unforeseen challenges of the future.
place of laughter, connection, and a rediscovered sense of self-worth.

CoMeet empowers managers to build teams the way they operate: collaboratively. Organizations that deploy CoMeet experience a transformation.

between education and
needs to be mended, and
the tools to do it.

communications technicians and
General Machine Products (GMP) tools and
e and on budget, above ground or below it.

The commitment
to transparency
within the Clear
Title family empowers
everyone, from the
new employee to
the seasoned
real estate
professional to
the first time
homebuyer.

When it's time to
outfit your home,
H&H Appliance
Center makes you
feel at home.

For Mezzacca &
Kwasnik, community
is more than just a
word - it is your home,
and the people who
inhabit it are your
family.

Sandboxx builds
illuminated pathways
for service members
and their loved ones
to become connected
and informed,
giving them the
confidence to
thrive.

designers, and producers working together to
bring products to market faster than ever.
Recycleim's new standard in
recycling is good for business,
good for communities, and
good for the environment.

The businesses that want
to run fastest trust their
data to Redis Labs.

noNous
les more than
ile suite of precise
it is building a vibrant
cosystem of the world's
nnologies, thoughtfully and
to the healthcare community's
- most pressing needs.

able solution to measure fuel consumption
er behavior. In Vnomics, those fleet owners
partner they need.

erves your future
your plate today.

ward with confidence that it's not about us and them. It's about us.

Each advance, from Gutenberg to
Google, opens up a new way for
people to collaborate more
effectively - the mutual
ownership Rocket.Chat has
established with its
community accelerates
these changes like
never before.

There is an "aha"
moment for every
customer who tries
Redshift's products.

Redshift riders are going
faster, riding longer, and
feeling more comfortable.

With Qapital, people are
seeing the big picture of their
financial lives, and achieving their
vision for the future on their own terms.



from Hi! to Hired

When most people find their next
partner on their phones

Why are you still recruiting like
it's the 20th Century?

**Comeet is recruiting
for an emoji world 🌐**

comeet.co/emoji

comeet.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

SELLING IMMORTALITY: HOW ELYSIUM BRANDS ITS IMPOSSIBLE PROMISE

BY ERIN J. MULLIKIN

“When I was a boy the Dead Sea was only sick.” George Burns, who spent 93 years in show business, and famously died mere weeks after turning 100, had a humorous way of looking at his century on the planet.

Burns’ self-effacing nature is not widely shared in today’s culture, which is obsessed with aging. In 2015, the global anti-aging market surpassed \$281.6 billion: an enormous annual haul for preventing illness, joint corrosion, cellulite, stretch marks, bone weakening, wrinkles, gray hair, incontinence, and memory loss (to name a few). Thanks to the exploding biotech industry, by 2020 the world will be spending \$331.3 billion each year to forestall the effects of aging.

The anti-aging industry is massive because aging (at least for humans) and dying are inevitable. It’s a market driven by certainty: everyone is going to age and everyone is going to die. Any business in this space is among thousands, and it’s perpetually difficult to find ways to be different. When every product is trying to meet the same underlying need — stave off the fact of aging

— it’s easy for consumers to see them as the same or similar — with only slightly differentiated features and benefits.

In a cacophony of options, it’s effective message that allows brands to break through the din.

George Burns understood his brand: his signature humor and cigar helped him build a career that spanned from vaudeville to radio to television to film — the first of which he starred in at 79. “I don’t believe in dying. It’s been done. I’m working on a new exit. Besides, I can’t die now — I’m booked.” Burns defied aging with an endearing authenticity, despite its visible effect on his body. For the companies offering Burns-like vitality at a price, the issue of authenticity rings even more true: Are the changes all skin-deep, or a genuine salve in the inevitable march toward mortality?



Meet Elysium. Not quite the golden fields and natural, ephemeral place in Greek mythology where gods were given immortality, but pretty close, if you believe their story.

Co-founded by legendary MIT biologist and anti-aging researcher Leonard Guarente, Elysium seems like, indeed, a mythological paradise with a 2017 update: pristine labs and genius scientists attempting to hack man’s cellular structures to slow how and when we age, with the possibility of extending the human lifespan.

Elysium sells a combination of two, readily available over-the-counter supplements— if you can fork over \$60 per month. Pay-per-month programs are quite common across health services, so the business model is nothing new. What makes Elysium stand out is the language it uses to tell its story. Where other health and wellness subscriptions might promise fantastic results, Elysium focuses on scientific validity and advancement. Elysium’s scientific advisory board is made up of seven Nobel Laureates in chemistry and physiology or medicine, and that certainly lends credibility to its

messaging.

Elysium has a highly-touted advisory board on its website, which it uses to elevate the company's purpose above its competitors' commercial concerns, further giving an air of credibility: "Rather than endorsing a specific product, this network of scientists, clinicians and health professionals advises the Elysium team on product identification and development, clinical studies and ongoing research." The advisory board is augmented by partnerships with the University of Cambridge, Harvard University, and the University of Oxford to research aging and cellular health. These laureates and partners are the gods in the fields of Elysium.

Elysium presents science in a way that is easy to understand, along with its vision and promise of potential. The company has mastered the art of translating scientific advances that could transform humanity into sharable elements consumable over social media. Yet it is exactly this process of translation that paradoxically makes the promise unclear.

Any consumer who has browsed health products is familiar with the term antioxidant. But what percentage of buyers really know what an antioxidant is? Most don't – they just know that antioxidants are supposed to be good for them. Antioxidants are only an example of how marketing for supplements takes advantage of ignorance and reliance on hope. Consumers trust terms like organic, non-GMO, natural, supplement, and immunity boosters even if they don't understand the science behind why those terms matter in



the first place.

Elysium might be a young company, but the science behind what Elysium promises to do has been around for much longer, and it may be the first to so overtly tie themselves to the scientific community. With such a heavy emphasis on science and its illustrious academic backing, most consumers would assume Elysium's product, Basis, has been approved by the FDA. But since Elysium markets Basis as a dietary supplement, it isn't. Some might find the combination of human test subjects and limited oversight alarming; however, Elysium goes out of its way to assuage these concerns by stating they are "creating a new category in the health industry by translating advances in science and technology into effective, scientifically sound health products available to people in their everyday lives."

They're even nice enough to break it down in an animated video: it's proven that cellular science works for anti-aging, but there's a fine line when it comes to branding between a science-backed supplement and a quack remedy. Elysium must navigate a tough balance: as a non-FDA approved product, Basis is missing the peer review and critical eye that verify whether its claims hold

up. On the other hand, the health supplements industry is rife with snake oil products that promise unlikely results and rely more on ignorance of the consumer than on sound science.

Elysium bridges this gap by translating the technical language of its scientific research to a more general vernacular. Slick marketing reinforces the mission "to solve the biggest challenges in health with science, to help people live healthier, longer." Elysium even states honestly, "The time required to develop a new product is approximately two years, and not all compounds that we research or study in pre-clinical and clinical trials will ultimately come to market." This admission of vulnerability builds trust immediately. Even its minimalist packaging design demonstrates a deliberate nod to present and futuristic sleek design — there's elegance to it that supersedes any vitamin or supplement you'll find at GNC.

There are no simple pill bottles at Elysium – instead, solutions arrive as if emanating from the future of medicine and science.

Elysium's branding efforts and apparent transparency have certainly made an impression on others: Fast Company says that Elysium offers "[t]he opportunity is the chance to make a difference by translating findings in the booming field of aging research directly to consumers today." Scientific American states: "Elysium is taking no chances when it comes to scientific credibility...I can't remember a startup with more

stars in its firmament.” New York claims: “[T]he pill’s seduction was powerful. The potential benefit was profound.”

Read the complete, original sources, however, and things appear less clear. Most sources, including the ones with selected quotes used by Elysium themselves, question the validity of Elysium – the product and the nature of the company.

For all of its lofty claims and scientific advisers, the compounds Elysium uses in Basis are identical to those found in other products. Along with dozens of other supplement companies, Elysium purchases these compounds from ChromaDex. In the short-term, a story about evading the certainty of death might push

Elysium to success. But if the

product itself can’t keep the promise, will the company be anything more than a flash in the pan?

Elysium is just one of many high-tech companies peddling a solution to prolonged life.

Mortality has been the one obstacle that has escaped every person, no matter how intelligent or what resources they have access to. It’s why the promise of “solving” this problem is so enticing, both for the companies working on it, and the consumers who embrace the products they produce. After all, if both aging and dying are inevitable, what is there to lose? And how much are consumers willing to both believe and pay for the chance to undo the undeniable?

George Burns once told *The Washington Post*, “You can always pay someone to make it better.” Although it took 88 years for him to arrive at that observation, he wasn’t talking about aging – he was referring to creating material for entertainment. In business, that same maxim may not apply. Failing to offer context in marketing places consumers at the mercy of a company’s collateral and messaging. When that message is earnest and authentic, it can be a powerful signal to customers that they have found a solution for their ills. However, if that story is merely skin-deep and does not apply to the core of the product, it becomes one of deceit, and spoils the authentic relationship a company is building with its consumers. **W**





WITH PLEDGELING, BUSINESSES BECOME BELOVED BRANDS.

In a marketing campaign with a donation widget and mobile messaging, Discovery's Project C.A.T. is supporting the WWF in a global effort to double the number of tigers in the wild by 2022. Driven by a singular mission, Discovery is turning each customer interaction into an opportunity for impact and the foundation for a stronger relationship with the help of Pledgeling.





THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS MAKE A GREAT STORY: YOUR BRAND AND ITS CREATION MYTH

BY ED LYNES

“You know, you really don’t need a forensics team to get to the bottom of this. If you guys were the inventors of Facebook, you’d have invented Facebook.”

The Social Network purports to be the origin story of Facebook: how Mark Zuckerberg started coding in his dorm room each night, and cravenly outmaneuvered his early partners to build the world’s most popular social network.

Your founding narrative may not be worthy of an Aaron Sorkin screenplay, and it’s unlikely that you’ll personally get the Lex Luthor treatment. But your business does have an origin story—and, if deployed correctly, it can arrest your audience as if David Fincher directed it himself.

Creation myths were among the earliest stories to be passed along in the oral tradition. For early humans, the world was a mysterious place — full of phenomena beyond explanation.

As these early people formed into tribes, leaders needed a way to explain the unexplainable, and establish shared values for their group. These narratives were more than tales that explained how the

sun rose each day. They defined the purpose of community and explicitly worked to bind people together.

In Bruce Railsback’s compilation *Creation Stories from Around the World*, he identifies several consistent elements of the globe’s different creation myths: the superiority of the storyteller’s people, the establishment of core values for the community, an aspiration to a greater purpose, and a desire to understand the world.

The last point is not unique to creation myths, of course. Storytelling was developed primarily to communicate complex or abstract ideas that might not otherwise be understood. Creation stories weren’t meant to be literal explanations for the state of the world—just a shared method of understanding the audience’s role in it.

Your brand’s origin story, its creation myth, functions in the same way.

The roots of the story are the shared values that define community. The Judeo-Christian

myth instructs people to spread across the world the creator made for them. Japanese and Chinese creation myths establish the divinity of ruling people or classes. The Apache myth describes the symbiotic relationship between the tribe and nature.

For your business, this core value is the promise you make to your customers. Philadelphia coffee favorite La Colombe is built around the promise of bringing better coffee to America. So its origin story, based around founder Todd Carmichael’s global adventuring to find the best coffees in the world, works to not only inspire interest, but effectively reinforce the value behind the brand.

While the founder is most often the protagonist of an origin story, it shouldn’t be about them beyond a superficial level. Rather, the founder works as an avatar for the audience.

The primacy of the community is important in creation myths. Hearing that they are the chosen people of the creator had the effect of empowering early audiences and binding them together. The effect can be similar when your audience hears your brand was created for



them. When your audience sees something of themselves in the origin story, they believe in the importance of the brand.

Whitney Sales, the VP of Sales at TalentIQ, has a framework for how origin stories can be effectively used to fuel growth. Sales' approach, which relies on establishing common ground, mirrors the structure used in the 21 different myths collected by Railsback.

Think of the humble beginnings often described in creation myths for Hewlett-Packard (in a garage in Palo Alto), Google (another garage), or Facebook (a dorm room). These stories go beyond just the initial shared value in any brand story—they create a common ground around the problem the founders shared with their audience, and humanize the brand.

Most importantly, they provide a path to understanding. Microsoft's path to software dominance is anything but linear. Yet, in the context of an origin story, it's as

simple as two college dropouts trying to analyze Washington state's traffic patterns.

The final component of the creation story is an aspiration to a higher state, and the community's collective role in achieving it. In early myths, this reflected the world in which the community lived, such as the Israelites' Eden. Effective brand origin stories make their audience part of this aspiration, too.

A piece of Apple's origin story involves Steve Jobs' experience taking calligraphy classes. It's a story that effectively incorporates each element of the creation myth: it articulates the founder's humble beginnings, communicates the "why" behind their brand (beautifully designed, intuitive to use products), and binds together a community of people who appreciate that sentiment over raw computing power. It's a story that creates Apple's gestalt, and inspires the community around it.

Most brands' origin stories are not completely accurate—and

that's not required to be effective. It definitely took more than seven days to create the Earth, yet each Sunday millions of people file into church pews across the world.

Much more important than accuracy is alignment with the overall narrative your brand is attempting to instill in its audience. Origin stories are powerful ways to engage early adopters or provide guiding principles to employees, but they're a tactical application in the same way that a customer anecdote is. In fact, Whitney Sales applies her model to customer stories in the exact way she does the origin story.

Your brand's creation myth has the ability to be much more than a small anecdote that opens sales presentations. By aligning it with your overall brand narrative and deploying the framework of an effective origin story, it can evolve into a parable that inspires others to not just join your cause, but to preach it. **W**



"Woden helped us bring our brand story into clear focus." - Bart Patterson, CEO

We built a strong, high-performing company in our first 10 years, but we needed a clear brand focus to align our entire team to continue that growth into the next decade. Now, with Woden's help, our vision is crystal clear.

cleartitle 
Agency of Arizona

cleartitleaz.com | 480.278.8484



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

THE RIGHT KIND OF WRONG: SZECHUAN SAUCE AND THE HERO'S JOURNEY

BY MARY MCCOOL

Can a hot mess be manufactured? McDonald's recently proved it's willing to try. Earlier this year, the chain's "Mulan Szechuan Teriyaki Dipping Sauce" returned to cultural memory in animated comedy *Rick and Morty's* season three premiere. Despite the condiment's troubling mix of culinary traditions, or perhaps inspired by that very ridiculousness, bringing back the sauce became a cause for the show's nihilistic fans to believe in. It was a golden (arches) marketing opportunity.

But the nationwide event celebrating its return spun into chaos, and the lack of sauce at many McDonald's locations led to widespread social media outrage. The experience left *Rick and Morty* fans feeling like Jerrys, and observers outside the fandom puzzled by the strategy of the stunt itself and its aftermath.

Whether the scarcity was planned all along or the genuine result of surprising demand, it represents a failure by McDonald's to appreciate its audience, and build a meaningful connection with them. By callously

exploiting fandom, the brand pushed the adage "there is no such thing as bad publicity" to its extreme.

The Szechuan Sauce debacle was a promotion to hype the release of McDonald's new chicken strips, designed to capitalize on the momentum generated by *Rick and Morty* fans. Like all McDonald's promotions, quantities were limited and "prices and participation may vary," but McDonald's appeared caught off guard by the response to the campaign.

McDonald's must have known that demand would be high. *Rick and Morty* is the top-rated TV comedy of 2017. There were multiple online petitions with thousands of signatures calling for the sauce's return, and roughly half a million engagements on show co-creator Justin Roiland's tweet announcing McDonald's' personal gift of Szechuan Sauce to him back in late July. If McDonald's did not expect the incredible response, why go to the pains of skirting copyright infringement to court fans?

Nonetheless, there was a severe shortage — with many advertised

locations receiving no sauce at all. Once frustrated sauce-seekers began protesting on social media and in person with chants of "We want sauce," the brand issued a tepid, 140-character statement. After all its promotional effort, McDonald's demurred in replies to customers: "we could only make so many packets!" The next day brought a full, thoughtfully-worded apology in the language of the show, promising a more appropriately-scaled return of the sauce this winter.

So, what's the big deal if McDonald's bungled a promotion into a boat-load of free publicity? If McDonald's knew demand for the sauce would outstrip supply, it stands to reason this enraged fan base was all part of the plan — including a larger opportunity to make everything right with an apology and a bigger promotion next time, hopefully not involving the police.

The capitalist seams showing in McDonald's fan service campaign gone wrong have triggered widespread cries of "wubba lubba dub dub." But the rhythm of the whole campaign also mimics a

timeless storytelling technique used in the show itself, the hero's journey arc. Perhaps this journey of excitement and disappointment should have been recognized by the fans waiting in line for their precious sauce?

In drama, tales of redemption are always more powerful than stories where the hero doesn't experience discomfort. Grit, growth, and obstacles overcome are hallmarks of this technique; the hero must complete her journey and return changed. Audiences love a comeback story. But a comeback requires a descent.

As Dan Harmon, co-creator of *Rick and Morty*, puts it:

"Why this ritual of descent and return? Why does a story have to contain certain elements, in a certain order, before the audience will even recognize it as a story? Because our society, each human mind within it and all of life itself has a rhythm, and when you play in that rhythm, it resonates."

Harmon is a proponent of the hero's journey structure, and in the narrative arc he constructs for his characters, the protagonist has a need, goes through a difficult journey to address it, and returns changed. This journey is expressed as a circular model—a wheel—in which order turns into chaos, and continues the revolution to establish a new, improved order.

This essential formula can be repeated ad infinitum in the plots of books, plays, films, and TV shows. And, perhaps it was used in a promotional campaign to engage audiences by giving them a taste of defeat and an eventual triumph. As Harmon observes about this cycle:



"It will send your audience's ego on a brief trip to the unconscious and back. Your audience has an instinctive taste for that, and they're going to say 'yum.'"

If McDonald's was planning on using this formula to generate attention around a planned failure, and counting on the cycle to resolve in redemption, they would not be the first to do so.

Greater attention can be won with well-orchestrated mistakes and recoveries than if nothing goes wrong at all. Popular culture is rife with examples, from Marilyn Monroe's successful response to her early nude photos, to the carefully constructed saga of Taylor Swift's music and media presence. These stories all fit the cycle: a hero stumbling through an unfortunate (media) incident, a need for recovery, and an ultimate redemption. It creates a pleasurable, shared journey that brings fans ever closer.

The subtle art of doing something a little wrong sees big results in audience engagement

and free publicity. But it must be finely calibrated, so that the redemption outweighs the transgression. The Starbucks phenomena of misspelled names on customers' cups is a perfect example. Customers en masse shared pictures of the iconic Starbucks cup with funny and perplexing misspellings of their names — generating a stream of free marketing for the brand.

Research has shown that while likes are cheap, seeing friends use a product increases the likelihood a consumer will use it themselves. Starbucks has not copped to its recurring name mistakes being policy, but, given the widespread nature of the trend, it's unlikely that baristas just happen to misspell even the simplest of names in stores across different geographies.

Starbucks's failure to spell a customer name correctly creates an experience for the brand that goes beyond the mere transaction of buying coffee. The purposeful mistake is a chance for people to share a joke over coffee, and creates a sense of community among customers. That it's an easy campaign for people to spread organically is all the better: a classic idea fueled by contemporary delivery.

Rick and Morty's audience appears prime for McDonald's to target; the show is beloved by millennials. Furthermore, studies show that while this group eats at McDonald's in large numbers, they are overwhelmingly not likely to recommend it. McDonald's may have thought it was taking a page from Starbucks' book: creating an in-person experience and hoping



millennials would evangelize for the brand by posting about it. But *Rick and Morty* fans are a cynical bunch, and the failure to put them and their needs front and center led to angry mobs chanting at McDonald's employees.

The reactions of show creators Harmon and Roiland are telling. McDonald's was happy to quote *Rick and Morty* heavily in the copy around the re-release, thanking the fans who have clamored for sauce. McDonald's portrayed itself as part of the fan community, but ultimately slighted the source of inspiration and the audience they share.

If the shortage was genuine, it reflects a halfhearted attempt to deliver on a promise fans took seriously. If it was manufactured, it's a cynical ploy to leverage affinity that blew up in everyone's face. Either way, it signals the brand does not understand the

hero of the story.

The hero's journey structure works so well in fiction because it allows us to share experiences we don't necessarily want to have in real life. But in the real-life situation of a brand experience, it's risky if not handled properly. Many people got to savor the terrible experience by reading about it, but much of the core audience, the true evangelists, actually experienced the unpleasanties.

The customer should always be the hero, and the experience enabled by the brand should benefit them first and foremost. But McDonald's took away customers' ability to enjoy the experience, instead leaving them victims to it. In doing so, and later "saving the day" by promising the sauce's return, McDonald's positioned itself as the hero — a

surefire way to turn off consumers.

In doing so, they eroded some of the valuable trust their customers will need to camp outside stores when the sauce returns this winter.

While the campaign won McDonald's a lot of attention over the news cycle and a modest uptick in stock price, it ultimately missed the opportunity to begin the return phase of the hero's journey narrative. Instead, the brand is in the same place it was before: one whose most dedicated customers find associating with it too embarrassing to tell their friends. It succeeded in generating attention, just not the right kind. **W**

SOME MEN CHANGE HISTORY.
SOME MEN CHANGE THE WAY YOU EAT.



TBJ
GOURMET™
fun fine foods

www.tbjgourmet.com

*USDA CERTIFIED
ALL NATURAL*

Bacon Jam at its core is bacon, brown sugar, onions and a whole lot of stirring. Every jar of TBJ Gourmet's bacon jams contains 50% uncured bacon.

*CREATIVE IDEAS
IN COOKING*

TBJ Gourmet's products bring cutting edge flavors and trends to the restaurant, home table, backyard, and anywhere else people gather to enjoy a meal.



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

THE SECRET TO MILLENNIAL RELATIONSHIPS: THEY'RE PEOPLE

BY NGOZI ASSATA

Any effective brand today is in the business of feelings. The secret strategy of those brands, especially when it comes to reaching the desirable millennial market, is always to tell the audience a compelling story. This is especially true in the saturated industry of advertising, where there are far too many sellers, and not enough storytellers. Since people no longer feel connected to content in the media, advertisers must find new ways to reach their audiences. This makes sharing stories and experience more vital than ever. Storytelling must be compelling enough to inspire audiences to tell the story again — it's the now and future of advertising.

Any communications class will tell you that communication and mutual disclosure are absolutely necessary to build interpersonal relationships. Even with the strongest attraction, two-way communication must be present in the relationship building process to maintain a connection. And the even the strongest connections burn out quickly when communication is lacking

Advertising is not so different. After all, brands are dealing with real humans, and real humans are emotional beings that crave connection.

Consumers are starting to distrust brands that follow the traditional advertising structure. One-way communication that asks only of the consumer while giving nothing of the advertiser just doesn't give people anything to work with. Consumers are like a frustrated significant other wanting to be let in, and the brand is that partner that just won't open up. People need a story they can participate in to feel connected to the people and things around them, and that includes brands. It is critical for people to feel like they are in a thriving relationship with the brands they support

Approaching consumers with a story is a gift from the brand, and it begins the process of mutual disclosure on the side of the brand that is essential for building trust. Giving consumers a story is more than just a way to hook them — it's the beginning of a dialogue with the customer. Emotional maintenance is not just necessary

in individual's relationships, but in the marketplace as well.

A new campaign used a societal gap that needs closing as a means to bridge the similar one with their customers

Secret Deodorant has released an ad that NY Magazine called "groundbreaking," portraying a transgender woman in a bathroom stall, who is anxious to emerge after hearing a few boisterous and giggly women enter the room. Audiences watch the increasingly apprehensive protagonist, Dana, and feel apprehensive as well. Her raw emotions are captured so effectively that anyone who watches this ad is mentally transported to a moment when they felt her anxiety. Even though the audience cannot hear Dana's heartbeat, they know it's beating fast — just like their own. They know that she is probably building up a bit of a sweat. Secret swoops in and assures its female audience that they have their backs — that moments like these are what the product is made for.

The effectiveness of the ad goes far beyond its addressing of an important social issue, and is



encapsulated in an empowering message with the tagline: “There is no wrong way to be a woman.” The ad itself creates vulnerability on the part of the brand, and uses this disclosure to build trust. Secret stretches out their arms for a virtual embrace and lets audiences know that it’s okay to be who you are, because being yourself is never wrong. This message has the power to impact any woman that has ever felt inadequate (which is a lot). This inspirational narrative maneuvers its way deep into the heart, finds its strings, and tugs on them with vigor. The power of portraying Dana’s story is undeniable, and encourages audiences to open up their own emotional core in return.

Secret’s ad impacted women from every generation, but it has especially garnered the attention of the famously skeptical millennial audience: one of the most important audiences of today, and one of the hardest to

impress. Based on studies published in ‘Psychology Today’, millennials are generally socially conscious and have a high tolerance for diversity. They value social responsibility from brands they support — Secret knows its audience and is speaking directly to them. The core of advertising today isn’t to rush to a purchase decision, at least not among millennials. The millennial purchase journey is not cut and dry, but is a dynamic process that unfolds with authenticity and empathetic connection.

Advertisers like Secret are entering the narrative that is already occurring within consumer’s brains. Millennial communication is saturated with self-reflection, understanding their environment, and building interpersonal relationships. What Secret did so well is, well, they didn’t hide anything. They know the insecurities faced by their consumers and that those insecurities are the narratives

happening in their minds. Secret let the cat out of the bag, and in a brief snippet, said: “we feel your pain, and here’s a way to never feel that again.” Secret respected the process of self-empowerment, which many millennials strive for in their media consumption and purchasing behaviors. They told a story which has been repeated over and over in personal conversations then offered solace through none other than a product. By placing trust in their audience and beginning the process of mutual disclosure, Secret served that understanding up on a platter.

Storytelling is the key to brand development for the foreseeable future. People aren’t so easily seduced by traditional advertising anymore, and brands must adapt to the growing need for connection to survive in a competitive climate. By telling stories brands increase engagement, create a sense of community, and ultimately build relationships. **W**



WODEN

INSIDER

Story never sleeps.

Story doesn't stop with the StoryGuide. Your story evolves along with your business, and with every retelling. That's why you need a connection to a like-minded group: WodenInsider.

WodenInsider brings together clients, partners, and Woden team members to discuss the ways story is being leveraged to advance organizations and ideas. It's a way to collaborate with others, and a conduit to the best practices for implementing your StoryGuide.

Let us become part of your journey.
Become a WodenInsider.

Request more info at connect@wodenworks.com



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

SWEATING SALES? STORYTELLING ISN'T THE ANSWER.

BY ED LYNES

“The mistake people make is thinking the story is just about marketing. No, the story is the strategy. If you make your story better, you make the strategy better.”

— Ben Horowitz

There’s a pretty good chance that if you and I are on the phone, you think your marketing sucks.

Virtually every conversation I have begins with that self-diagnosis, and evolves from there. Maybe your brand’s social engagement isn’t doing what it ought to, content marketing is not attracting the right prospects, or nurture sequences aren’t advancing people through your pipeline. You keep hearing about the importance of “storytelling” in marketing, and know Woden’s excellent at it — so we have a conversation.

The value of story in marketing or sales is fairly intuitive. You don’t need me to tell you that Oracle uses storytelling to power its sales team, or that Dove has moved 180 million people to tears with the same approach.

Of course, it’s also become a buzzword that is cringe worthy, even for me. It’s too

often synonymous with public relations, advertising, design, or other marketing services that are constantly rebranded to match new technologies. But if your objective in leveraging storytelling is purely to grow sales or amplify your marketing, here’s some counterintuitive advice: don’t do it.

There are easier, faster, and cheaper ways to grow revenue than storytelling.

Leveraging narrative is an all-in approach for an organization. You either need to commit to defining a brand story and embracing it in all facets of your business, or dispense with it altogether. Disciplines like product, people, marketing, and finance are the bricks of your business’s house: story is the mortar that holds them together.

This approach works because: Storytelling isn’t actually about telling stories.

The art of narrative was not invented to entertain, but to inform. In *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, Jack Zipes outlines the origins of storytelling: “We know that humans began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech ... to communicate

vital information for adapting to their environment. Units of this information gradually formed the basis of narratives that enabled humans to learn about themselves and the worlds that they inhabited. Informative tales were not given titles. They were simply told to mark an occasion, set an example, warn about danger, procure food, or explain what seemed inexplicable. People told stories to communicate knowledge and experience in social contexts.”

At the core of each story is the concept a person is looking to communicate: the story’s moral. Morals are universal truths that audiences are able to apply to their own lives, allowing them to intuit difficult to understand concepts.

Your organization also has a moral

The 31 million people who have watched Simon Sinek’s “Start With Why” TED Talk would recognize it as that, but “why” and “moral” are essentially interchangeable. Your organization’s purpose for being is the moral of its story.

Translating a complex offering or product into an easily understood moral provides a single guiding principle for the organization. Once you build the rest of time’s

most tested storytelling structure around it, it delivers an immediate return on your most valuable asset: people.

I participate in a monthly CEO forum in Philadelphia. There is one topic that inevitably arises each month: the millennial workforce, and how to engage them. Millennials are the most talented workforce ever, but for those in Generation X or earlier, they can be quite mercurial. Their ways often leave managers asking: What do they really want?

Unlike their managers, millennials are largely unmotivated by profit, advancement or the other clear-cut corporate motivators of the past. Deloitte completed a study that illustrates how millennials are primarily driven by a belief in the purpose they're working toward. It's not about Google-style perks, or even the vaunted work-life balance. It's about building an organization that has real impact the team can believe in.

In this case, story becomes not only a retainer of great employees, but an attractor of quality talent. When your organization becomes defined by purpose instead of a specific product, the brightest young people will be determined to make it a reality.

That leads to a second non-marketing impact of narrative: customer experience. Social media has created an informality that exists between brands and individuals. It blurs the lines of marketing and customer service and the difference between brands and people themselves. This has transformed customer experience: brands need to build friendships



and connections the same way people do.

Researcher Tobias Langer has observed: "The emotionality evoked by loved brands is just as intense as that evoked by a close friend. Moreover, consumers experience emotions in a brand love relation that are even more positive than those evoked in close, interpersonal liking relationships."

Story provides a framework for the experience customers have with an organization. It creates a more relatable, personal and human interaction that's less transactional than it is supportive. That makes it easier for audiences to see brands in this intimate manner. It creates clear guidelines for how the team interacts with customers. And it makes it easier for people to share their experiences.

When customer experience is defined by listening, relationship, and shared purpose, it informs product development in a unique way. A mercenary company might attack product development in a purely financial way by asking: will our customers buy this new offering? Will this allow us to win more market share? How does this drive the bottom line?

Story-driven product design looks at it from a different angle. Instead, it asks: are there additional ways that we can help our brand's hero (customer) achieve their purpose?

The global economy is moving toward increased specialization for

people and firms. A clear, codified story for an organization reduces mission creep, and keeps things on-task. For every new feature or product, it forces the team to ask: is this helping our hero on their journey?

Product development and user experience design firm Thrive cuts to the core of this on their blog: "As we said before, things change, but the brilliant thing about story is it's a low budget way to course-correct a brand." Meaning: stories do not just make product development cycles clearer; they reduce time spent on solutions your customers don't need.

"There's something deeply human about storytelling: it's part of how we learn language as babies, and it's part of how we come to understand our world as adults."

— Nicolas Thompson

Story does sell, of course. Our brains are hard-wired to accept information this way, and story-driven brands are almost always going to be more successful at engaging audiences and creating evangelism. But better marketing and higher close rates are a bonus of putting story to work in your business. Its most transformational impact is internal – for your team, your customers, and the strategy that propels your organization forward. **W**



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

MAKE THEM EARN IT: NOW IS THE TIME TO MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR CUSTOMERS

BY ZACH KLIGER

This year's surprise video game hit is not another entry into the Call of Duty series. In fact, it doesn't seem to follow any standard at all — eschewing cutting edge graphics and groundbreaking gameplay in favor of animation and music harking back to the 1920s. Cuphead is a seven year labor of love that owes more to the early work of Disney Studios than its contemporary peers. Yet, in two weeks, it has sold well over a million copies.

Most remarkable? It's a game almost designed not to sell, not to be popular, and not to be accepted by its audience.

Cuphead was created specifically to be truly and painfully challenging. One reviewer observed that it “requires the player to be fully engaged with it, exhibiting quick reaction times and multi-tasking between jumping across platforms, avoiding both the enemies and their gunfire.” Difficult as this sounds, people can't seem to get enough of it; in fact, difficulty is routinely praised as a fundamental piece of what makes it such a special game.

It makes no sense that a game

so challenging continues to sell so many copies. But, while the aesthetic of Cuphead recalls a bygone age of animation, its success is a message to contemporary businesses: stop making your customers lives so easy.

It's time to start making things more difficult for customers.

Cuphead's success runs counter to almost everything brands are told about making a product successful. Prevailing logic is that accessibility and broad adoption are related: -less terms, such as “frictionless” and “seamless” function as buzzwords admonishing brands: make it easy. Technology continues to break down barriers and increase ease of use, but like all cardinal rules of design, there is a point of diminishing returns.

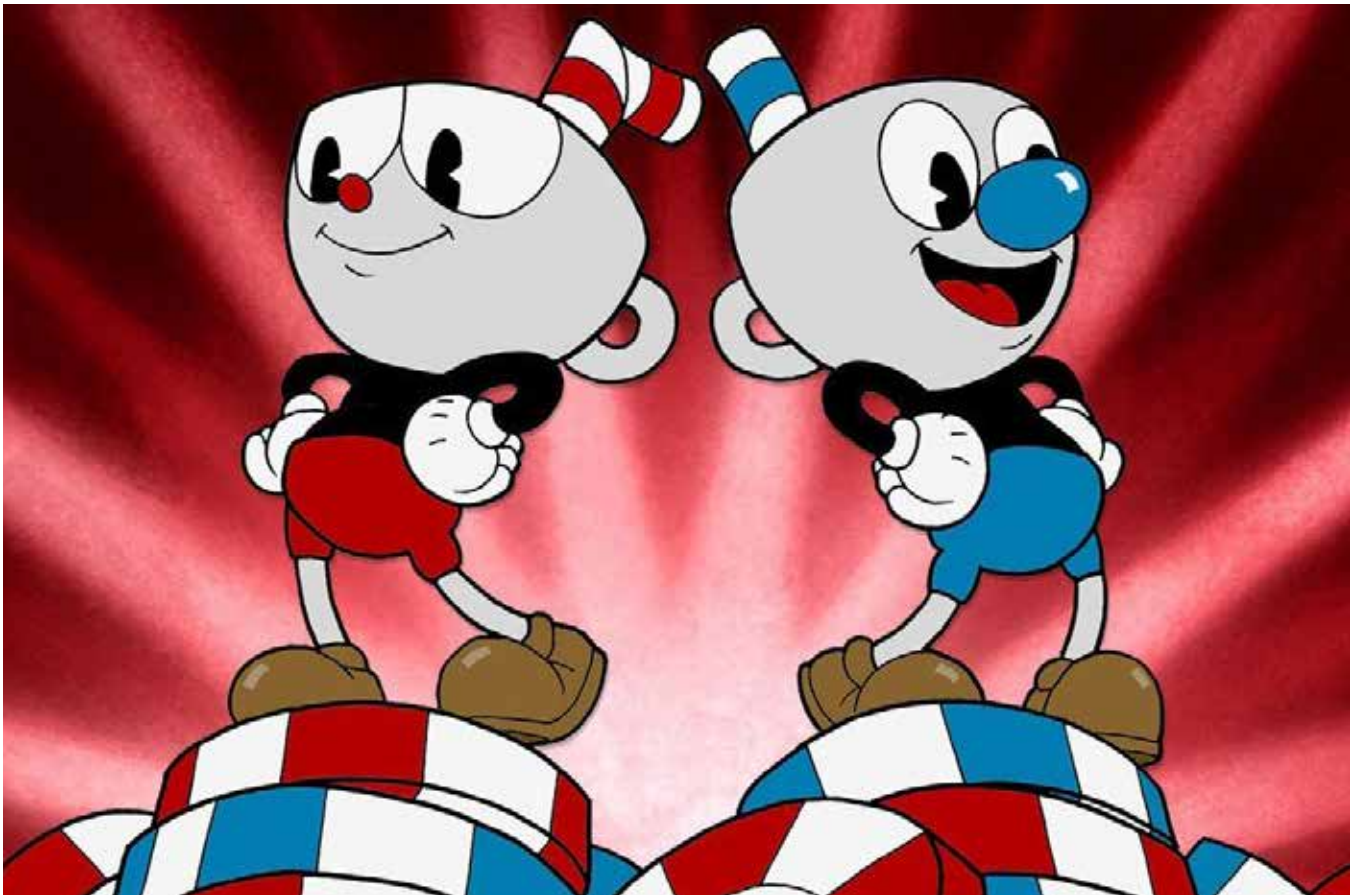
Understanding why people would want to play such a difficult game is rooted in the cathartic experience of a great story. It's a classic tenet of storytelling other brands can leverage to motivate their own growth strategy.

No one wants to read a story where the hero has it easy every step of the way. Without challenges or obstacles to

overcome, there is no tension in the narrative. And when the story reaches its resolution, certainty of success makes its reward feel neither earned nor deserved. The struggle of a powerless outsider has been proven to resonate with audiences, precisely because they see themselves in the hero overcoming each challenge. A product defined by its difficulty isn't a gimmick — it's a challenge customers will rise to meet.

Stories of struggle are so powerful and lasting because of that final moment of catharsis. Whether a person is going through a struggle of their own or watching it play out on a screen, nothing beats the emotional release that comes when the “big bad” is finally beaten. Stories aligned with the hero's journey translate so well from myth to the modern day because they are bedrocked in the endlessly resonant tale of struggle and reward.

Few brands have mastered catharsis like IKEA. Each one of their customers has a personal story about deciphering instructions, working out the puzzle of construction, and feeling the sense of accomplishment once



their furniture is erected. IKEA makes it difficult, yet its “IKEA Family” are some of the most loyal customers in the world.

This well-documented phenomenon is referred to as the “IKEA effect.” The progenitors of the theory, Harvard business student Michael I. Norton and colleagues from Duke and Yale, Daniel Mochon and Dan Ariely (now Chief Behavioral Economist at Woden client Qapital) describe it this way: “labor alone can be sufficient to induce greater liking for the fruits of one’s labor: even constructing a standardized bureau, an arduous, solitary task, can lead people to overvalue their (often poorly constructed) creations.” By requiring personal investment, IKEA creates stronger

relationships for an objectively inferior product than competitors who make it easy for consumers to furnish their homes.

Tesla’s velocity in large part may be because of the similar difficulty it infuses into its brand and its product. It’s difficult to buy a Tesla car — for a reason. A prospective Model 3 buyer can’t simply waltz into a dealership, talk to a salesperson, and drive away in their new car. Each vehicle must be custom ordered, and the buyer awaits delivery for as much as a year. Even that process understates the challenge of limited charging stations and the lack of dealer network to support owners. Yet that long wait only makes the moment when the car finally arrives that much

sweeter, and the small difficulties of ownership only add to a feeling of community. Buyers feel they’re ahead of the curve, and passing through the crucible of ownership only amplifies the catharsis felt on the day of each Tesla’s delivery.

These approaches are scary, precisely because they challenge the deeply held belief that every customer experience should be as pleasant as possible. Examining the roots of customer and user experience in architecture reveal the flaws in this approach. Fundamentally, the goal of architecture is much the same as user experience work: to build a space that is both functional and beautiful. In architecture, making simplicity and seamlessness your guiding principle is but one of

many approaches. Yet in designing products or services, it is dominant.

Apple's incredible level of success is largely to blame for why simplicity and ease of use have become the new defining standard for what marks "good design." In seeking to emulate Apple, company after company follows their principles doggedly without realizing that simplicity works for Apple because it is fundamental to who Apple is. Design is an extension of the brand story. Simplicity at Apple feels authentic; for decades their customers' catharsis was the decision to switch. For others, it just feels contrived.

Ease of use for the customer

is valuable only inasmuch as it advances the message of your brand. Brothers Chad and Jared Moldenhauer dedicated seven years of their lives to creating Cuphead. They spilled their own blood, sweat, and tears in the process, painstakingly crafting each frame of hand drawn animation until they were done. It's a feature, not a bug, that the game is so difficult that at least one reviewer couldn't even get past the tutorial section.

Like every upstart initiative, there was likely plenty of trepidation and doubt along the way. But in creating a game as uncompromising as they are, the Moldenhauer brothers established a bond

with their audience. They found something in their own struggle worth sharing, and in fearlessly delivering that to customers, they have been rewarded.

Theodore Roosevelt once said that nothing worth getting comes easy. Ease of use, simplicity and frictionless onboarding sound obvious, but they reduce the value of a company in the eyes of customers. If those traits aren't core to their message, brands should stop holding their customer's hand. Instead, treat them as a real hero: one worthy of struggle and the satisfaction that comes from their own personal catharsis. **W**



"You know you have a great elevator speech when no one wants to leave the elevator."



**WE GO THE EXTRA MILE
BECAUSE YOU ALREADY HAVE.**

Sovereign Lending Group
NMLS: 189421

Incorporated



Lowest Historical Mortgage Rates

- Debt Consolidation
- Home Purchase Loans
- Mortgage Refinance

www.sigmortgage.com





THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

BIRCHBOX, AND WHY EVEN THE BEST PRODUCTS STILL FAIL

BY KELLY SARABYN

Today, there's a monthly subscription "box" for every niche market. From menswear to beauty products to spices, carefully curated packages mailed direct to the consumer exist in every vertical imaginable. For these monthly deliveries, consumers have one company to thank: Birchbox. In 2010, it kicked off the trend by offering a box of beauty samples to women — a simple idea that attracted 80 million dollars in investment, and over a million subscribers.

Yet, seven years later, its massive debt is almost due, it had two rounds of layoffs in 2016, and, with its growth plateauing, it's not clear it will survive as an independent company.

Contrast that to fellow subscription service, Ipsy, a company that launched two years after Birchbox, and has since acquired more than twice as many customers as Birchbox. Just like Birchbox, Ipsy sends subscribers five beauty samples a month for ten dollars. Yet as Birchbox is facing the chopping block, Ipsy has flourished.

Birchbox won't be the first

innovative idea to be cast aside in favor of a new competitor, or evolving tastes. New products fail at a rate of up to 90 percent. But many of these products look like Birchbox: failing despite being innovative and having a real customer base.

No matter how great a product is, it will disappoint if it's sold with the wrong brand story. Accenture determined that a company who breaks a promise (even implied!) about their product quickly loses 38 percent of their customers. Even worse, they become in jeopardy of losing an additional 52 percent as those customers begin searching for a substitute product. This has costly ripple effects, as those fleeing customers post bad reviews, badmouth the brand to their personal networks, and fail to make referrals.

In order for a good product to succeed in the marketplace, it has to connect not just with any customers, but the right customers with the right expectations. The only way to deliver that entire package? A well-crafted brand story aligning the entire customer experience into a satisfying emotional journey. This alignment

creates the customer trust and engagement that is vital to a company's financial sustainability: almost 80 percent of customers choosing between two products of the same quality and price will choose the product sold by the company they trust.

Back to Birchbox. Why was Ipsy able to so thoroughly overtake them, even though Birchbox was there first, and Ipsy offered a largely indistinguishable product? Ipsy developed a better understanding of why people were buying the product, and pivoted away from the contents of the boxes and towards the emotional story behind them.

Ipsy knew from the beginning that it wasn't just selling monthly makeup samples. Ipsy co-founder and CEO Marcelo Camberos explained, "The Glam Bags were never the point ... these days, beauty brands don't decide what products are cool: Instead, it's beauty bloggers and other creators that are controlling the conversation ... we wanted to be at the forefront of the new way that consumers would interact with beauty brands."

Ipsy developed a brand story of empowering a beauty community formed around women's self-expression. Rather than seeing women's beauty choices as subject to the verdicts of large makeup companies, well-known magazines, and large retail stores, Ipsy saw women as being able to make those choices themselves, in the context of a thriving digital community of makeup aficionados. With Ipsy's assistance, every woman could participate in this community, deciding the merit of different makeup products for themselves. Ipsy knew who their hero was from the beginning, and was able to figure out how to make sure their product delivered on its core emotional promise.

In order to execute this brand story, Ipsy facilitated relationships between its product, individual women, and beauty content creators by carefully matching popular influencers with suitable brands, paying influencers a salary and providing them with the resources needed to produce quality content. As a result, women were able to see more content from the beauty influencers they were already watching, receive feedback and advice on the samples, and chime in with their own opinions in the multiple digital communities that Ipsy curated.

This sent a clear signal: the voice of Ipsy users matters. Unlike traditional media outlets, beauty influencers, online forums, and social media platforms provide a space for self-expression from all members. On their homepage, Ipsy writes, "Once you're an ipster, you're part of something big — a community that's leaving the rules behind and making unique beauty

a real thing. And we'll be with you all the way."

In contrast, Birchbox lacked a coherent vision for who they were trying to empower with their product and their brand. The Birchbox CEOs told Fast Company, in 2015, that the monthly beauty subscriptions were a "tactical play," a "Trojan horse that lets Birchbox slip into its customers' medicine cabinets and bedside vanities." Such a comment reflects Birchbox's cynicism and deep disconnect from their core customers, as well as their failure to develop a brand identity that could guide their product development.

This lack of brand vision led Birchbox to a fragmented pursuit of various products. Birchbox opened a retail store, and an ecommerce store, selling full-size versions of its makeup samples. It advertised itself to makeup companies as providing data on monthly subscribers, to help the companies better target customers. Then Birchbox started selling a men's beauty subscription box. More recently, it launched a more expensive, more customized women's beauty subscription box, to sell alongside its ten-dollar box.

These various product attempts sent a clear message: Birchbox was more concerned with generating revenue — whether it be from beauty manufactures, men, or higher income women — than with understanding and empowering their core customers (who remain their primary source of revenue).

In addition, without a brand story to build around, Birchbox fell into internal discord. In 2015, one of the two cofounders and co-CEOs left, and in 2016, the

remaining CEO's approval rating sunk to 27 percent on Glassdoor. One of the common complaints in the negative employee reviews reflects deep dissatisfaction with this lack of a coherent company vision, stating, "Upper management definitely needs to work on being more aligned."

Despite flailing, Birchbox continues to push its e-commerce store, leaving open the question of whether Birchbox will find a coherent brand story that can not only guide its product development, but inspire and empower its core customers.

In the end, the well-defined Ipsy brand story and its execution through the entire customer experience and product development, has resulted in Ipsy acquiring over 2.5 million monthly subscribers — more than double Birchbox.

More than four million women have purchased beauty subscription boxes. But having an in-demand product, and being the first to market, isn't enough. Just ask Birchbox. Ipsy's emotionally evocative brand story enabled it to forge powerful connections with its customers, remain focused on the right product opportunities, and overtake Birchbox's market share, despite selling a largely indistinguishable core product.

Companies understandably feel passionately about the products they spend years developing. But connecting with the right customers, and building customer loyalty and lasting customer relationships, requires more than releasing an amazing product. In fact, the more amazing the product is, the more likely other companies

— like Ipsy after Birchbox, or Lyft after Uber, or Groupon after LivingSocial, or Instacart and Peapod after Webvan — will soon sprout up with similar products to compete for customers. In order to stay ahead of the competition, a company must comprehend the emotional impact behind their product, as this not only creates powerful emotional connections with customers, it ensures product development continues to track the true emotional needs of customers.

Gallup has found that today's consumers are "more inclined to spend [money] only with businesses they feel good about ... consumers will give more money to the businesses they feel emotionally connected to." This emotional connection can't be created through an amazing product alone. Instead, it requires developing a compelling and consistent narrative that transforms customers into the heroes of an emotionally satisfying journey every time they use the product. Only by forging these powerful, story-driven relationships with customers can a company ensure that their amazing product will translate into lasting sales. **W**





FINAL THOUGHT

WHO'S ON YOUR CREATIVE TEAM?

BY KATIE FAIGEN

“History repeats itself.” Bath and beauty product manufacturer Dove would have been wise to take this cautionary proverb to heart before their latest brand blunder. The social media world exploded in contempt this month over a three-second GIF that Dove posted to Facebook. The image, which showed a black woman peeling off a dark t-shirt to reveal a white woman taking off a white t-shirt, isn’t the first time Dove has misfired on issues of race. Like an earlier Dove ad, it harkened back to a trope in soap advertisements of the late 19th century: when products were implied to turn darker (or “dirty”) skin to a lighter tone, a supposed symbol of purity.

Of course, Dove pulled the ad and issued an apology in response to outrage; they stated that the company is “re-evaluating our internal processes for creating and reviewing content.” While Dove’s shift into damage control was nimble, it’s ironic that this area continues to be a stumbling block for a company that seeks to be known for embracing the unique, true beauty of all women.

When history repeats itself, especially given the legacy of race in soap advertising, the likelihood of an honest mistake diminishes. The question for Dove is: are these

missteps merely a misguided attempt to attract attention? Or do they represent a fundamental misunderstanding of Dove’s messaging by their creative team?

Several writers have suggested fault for this campaign is rooted in the structure of Dove’s creative team, calling into question “their approval process, their execution, and general common sense.” Dove has been hit with accusations that its team is not aware of the history of the soap advertising industry, that they do not consider the opinions of the “real women” they intend to promote, and that they are not truly “committed to helping all women realize their personal beauty potential.” The technical abilities of the Dove team are clearly top-notch, but teams are more than a group of people with the skills to execute a task — they require the right mix of personalities to function well.

Dove’s mission is to represent the beauty of diversity, whether it be body shape, race, or age. The landmark Real Beauty campaign, which included “real” women in the place of models, earned Dove the trust of a slew of evangelists by presenting beauty as a source of confidence — instead of anxiety — for all women. Dove so perfectly expressed its brand promise that

it became a safe haven for women who felt alienated by the beauty product industry.

Those existing expectations make even a three-second disappointment all the more painful. Everyone on Dove’s team needs to commit to the promise of empowering all women to cultivate self-esteem, particularly within a society that promotes unrealistic standards of beauty in advertising. Yet, those behind the messaging failed to recognize the offensive messaging — meaning people of color, rightfully, called into question a core element of the brand promise. Poor judgment once is a mistake, but repeated missteps beg the question: does Dove understand its brand as its customers do?

Self-image is an emotional, personal topic for consumers. Any company that speaks on that level, from giant Dove to the youngest startup, must handle the topic with tact and create a culture of acceptance. And then, they must live it each day and in every interaction with their audience. That means the story doesn’t start with an ad campaign: it begins with the right team, and an internal culture that emphasizes making all decisions derivatives of that narrative. That means team

makeup, as opposed to skills, are the most “significant role in determining team performance.”

In other words, aligning team members behind the mission is more paramount to success than their abilities — as Dove’s technically perfect but narratively confused campaigns demonstrate.

The most recent ad may be in the forefront of people’s minds today, but there is a second Dove ad that compounds the alarm about the company’s message. In 2011, Dove executed a campaign that featured three women against a backdrop of two types of skin, one that’s desired, and one that could be made desirable. Here, the models are lined up by skin tone, with the lighter-skinned woman placed furthest to the right, where smoother, cleaner skin is signified. Although the objective was to sell a product that evened out skin roughness, the echo of historic soap advertising and the racial implications were clear.

Dove always maintained the ad had the best intentions. Similarly, Lola Ogunyemi, the African American model in the recent GIF ad, weighed in with an op-ed piece arguing the brand’s vision was misinterpreted: “All of the women in the shoot understood the concept and overarching objective — to use our differences to highlight the fact that all skin deserves gentleness.”

Dove’s strong brand message, support of those involved in the ads themselves, and their response to the uproar indicate these haven’t been shameless attempts to grab attention. Still, the before-and-after nature of both ads raises an alarm: repeated campaigns showing a darker-skinned woman

transforming into a lighter-skinned woman are clearly not congruent with the true beauty promise of Dove.

It’s impossible not to see these ads in context of the historical use of race in beauty product advertising. By equating cleanliness and beauty with whiteness, both campaigns imply a clear sense of superiority and civilization tied to skin tone. How could Dove think this would be embraced by their audience?

Dove’s campaign clearly was not malicious, but it was certainly ignorant. The only reasonable explanation for that is a dissonance within the organization; a separation between the story Dove tells the world, and the values it reinforces internally. In this case, that tension became public — with embarrassing results. With a compelling, noble company-wide vision to create products that appeal to all types of women, it is unfortunate the Dove team continues to misfire. Moving forward for Dove, and for any company that is having trouble clearly communicating their message to consumers, requires two steps.

The first is to clearly codify the brand story. Having a clear story in place provides the framework organizations need to make decisions, and motivates consumers to invest in a product. In addition to evangelism, a core story motivates employees, defines company culture, and provides a vision to attract investors and define future product development. In order to continue to see success in the future, Dove must live out its promise and align its messaging with its story of real beauty.

The second is to ensure that its



team members are not only committed to its brand promise, but that they’re equipped with the right psychological factors. Any team must be able to empathize with its audience. By hiring the right people, or those with the emotional intelligence and cultural awareness necessary to authentically tell their story, Dove can avoid this public shame in the future.

Advertising is often the first way a potential consumer interacts with a brand’s story. Ensuring that message is communicated clearly, and accurately, is of the utmost importance. For brands looking to send the correct message outward, they should begin by looking inward: first by defining their story clearly, and then by holding every person on the team accountable for living it fully each and every day. **W**

PEDDLER COFFEE

1

ARTISTRY

The right beans, roasted in just the right way, artfully.

2

DEMOCRACY

Born in Philadelphia, we never favor trends over quality.

3

SIMPLICITY

The alchemy of good coffee is simplicity. Period.

WODEN ANNUAL

BRIEFLY NOTED IN 2017

BY KELLY SARABYN

BUILDING A STORYBRAND: CLARIFY YOUR MESSAGE SO CUSTOMERS WILL LISTEN

BY DONALD MILLER
(HarperCollins Leadership)

Derived from Miller's work helping businesses of all sizes craft their brand story, this book offers practical step-by-step guidance to businesses struggling to connect with their customers. According to Miller, many businesses make the mistake of overwhelming their customers with information, without being clear on what their core offering is. Other businesses err in portraying themselves as the hero of the story. Filled with detailed advice for

business owners and marketers on the components of a compelling brand story, and anecdotes about Miller's clients, this practical book illustrates the power of a brand story in marketing.

THE END OF ADVERTISING: WHY IT HAD TO DIE, AND THE CREATIVE RESURRECTION TO COME

BY ANDREW ESSEX
(Spiegel & Grau)

CitiBank paid 41 million dollars over five years to create a ride share program in New York City, purchasing 6,000 bikes — with the Citi Bike logo on the side — and installing them around the city for

residents and tourists to rent. This popular program not only garnished CitiBank worldwide press, it created 6,000 roving mini-billboards for the company. Andrew Essex, the former head of an acclaimed advertising agency, argues businesses will have to shift to such unconventional advertising methods if they want to survive in an era of ad-free TV, Internet ad blockers, and a generation of children coming of age exposed to fewer ads. Even though Essex's theory fails to account for the astronomical number of ads Google and Facebook are delivering to consumers, his witty and provocative prose illuminates many of the challenges — and possible solutions — for companies trying to connect with customers in the digital era.



"Ground zero for the next quantum leap in technology, lead visionary speaking."

EVERYBODY LIES: BIG DATA, NEW DATA, AND WHAT THE INTERNET CAN TELL US ABOUT WHO WE REALLY ARE

**BY SETH STEPHENS-
DAVIDOWITZ**
(Dey Street Books)

In his extensive combing of digital data, Stephens-Davidowitz shines a light on a wide range of human inclinations and thoughts, from the idiosyncratic, to the disturbing, to the

hypocritical. He found, for example, that people who mention “God” or use the word “promise” in their peer-to-peer loan applications are less likely to pay back their loan, and parents are 3.6 times more likely to search Google about regretting the birth of their children than their childless peers are to search Google ruining the decision not to have children. Stephens-Davidowitz is optimistic about big data’s ability to efficiently reveal greater truths about humans and their true preferences, but he doesn’t sufficiently grapple with big data’s inability to separate correlation from causation, and distinguish between an idle curiosity (or fleeting mood) and a person’s lasting feelings. Still, this thorough examination is filled with interesting anecdotes, and it illuminates the current, and possible future, uses of big data to understand and predict human behavior.

HIT MAKERS: THE SCIENCE OF POPULARITY IN AN AGE OF DISTRACTION

BY DEREK THOMPSON
(Penguin Press)

In the mid-twentieth century, Robert Loewy was responsible for designing hundreds of products, including the Greyhound bus, the Lucky Strike cigarette packet, and the Coldspot refrigerator. Loewy accounted for his success by his commitment to creating the “most advanced, yet acceptable” product. Derek Thompson rephrases this concept as “something new that opens the door to comfort.” More a meandering compilation of interesting anecdotes than a scientific study, the book examines Brahms’ lullaby, *Star Wars*, *Fifty Shades*

of Grey, Facebook, and Disney princesses in order to identify what it is that causes products to become widely adored. Though no magic formulas are uncovered, Thompson offers many insights into the economic and cultural forces shaping consumer purchases.

PRINCIPLES: LIFE AND WORK

BY RAY DALIO
(Simon & Schuster)

Ray Dalio founded Bridgewater Associates, one of the most successful hedge funds in the world, responsible for managing more than \$160 billion in assets. Inspired by Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, this book is Dalio’s magnum opus, detailing his rise from modest beginnings in Queens to a personal net worth of \$17 billion. Dalio shares what he sees as the principles that led to his firm’s astronomical success, all

centered around a core of “radical transparency.” At Bridgewater, employees are constantly rating each other on 75 different metrics — the firm even produces “baseball cards” listing employees’ strengths and weaknesses. Dalio claims this commitment to brutal honesty leads to an idea meritocracy, and an open, data-driven culture where ego is put aside, and employees can be placed on the most effective teams, and put in the most effective roles. In the last few years, Dalio has tried to take a step back from running the day-to-day of Bridgewater, and the firm has struggled with a revolving door of CEOs, raising the question of whether Bridgewater’s success is less from these principles and more from the charismatic leadership of Ray Dalio. Even so, the book elucidates a fascinating and provocative philosophy of what kind of internal culture makes for a successful firm that should provide insight, and inspiration, for business leaders in a wide variety of industries. **W**



“I love hearing about what it was like when he was the biggest thing in Center City.”



AURO
TECHNOLOGIES



*"The closer to real-life sound,
the more immersive the
sound experience"*


Wilfried Van Baelen,
Inventor of Auro-3D
CEO Auro Technologies

HEAR MORE

FEEL MORE

WODEN

1520 LOCUST STREET
FIFTH FLOOR
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102



// WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT //

// STORY.WODENWORKS //