



killianbranding

Vol II: Marketing Survival in 2014



Darwinian Marketing Adapts!

22 more ways to improve your prospects

why birds?



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Sadly, the people creating
a new vodka created a
new vodka.



Those assigned to develop new products or services rarely develop new brands.

That results in a flood of failures.

The team (and it's often a committee, isn't it?) puts on blinders, and the limited vision imposed by the words "create a new product" results in an abysmal and expensive failure rate. A failure of imagination triggered by failures of process.

Process failure #1

They rarely consider the possibility of a grander vision, creating not just a new product but a new brand. They're even less likely to dream of creating a so-called blue ocean concept, creating a first-in unique category they could dominate.

Process failure #2

Researching what the market wants. The market does not know what it wants – until you show it to them. It's the difference between asking focus groups to create – versus react – to something. Even using focus groups at all is dubious. Committees are not creative. Don't ask a focus group to paint a painting. Iterative one-on-ones where you can go into depth with motivations are usually more productive.



Process failure #3

The change-one-attribute launch. It's a line extension dressed up as a new product. Sure it works sometimes, but the batting average is way below the Mendoza Line.

Process failure #4

The "juice in the jug" starting point, which we discussed previously in connection with antiperspirants and vodka. A well-meaning team starts off in the R&D lab, getting the product contents right, aaaaaaand then finding out how to make the market want it. We strongly advocate turning that upside down: perfect the messaging to make people salivate first, and then engineer how to make it. (Those clever dudes in R&D can make chocolate vodka – that's the easy part, since more than 100 of them already exist.) Since a brand is the cumulative perception of the marketplace, creating perceptions should be square one, yes? Unfortunately, most organizations do the opposite, leaving the crucial persuasion issues until late in the plan.

Process failure #5

The we-made-it-because-we-can fallacy. Going on safari to find a market for your widgets can be a very expensive error. Listen to Peter Drucker's ghost: make sure there's really a market before investing the first dollar to plan production.

There's no sure-fire stone cold lock magic formula to new brand success – but we can certainly help you restructure your processes to improve your odds.

Page 1 SERP guarantees you ... nothing. It's only 1/3 of a solution.



Is page one SERP your dream?

Reaching the top of search engine results pages (SERP) is every brand's dream. As if page 1 of Google = hitting the lottery. SERP city, here we come....

Companies on that SERPin' safari sometimes fall victim to the snake oil Search Engine Optimization (SEO) grifters who spam us all twice a day. Or they resort to the black hat or gray hat tactics that might get them banned from Google. Or (today's point) if they actually get to page one, declare victory and wait for great things to happen.

Understand, we're big fans of getting to first place on Google (the G spot, as it were), but anything on the first page can be an against-the-odds triumph. Sorry to say, the work is only 1/3 done at that G-whiz moment.

For a website to produce real value from a search, three Aha! moments have to happen.

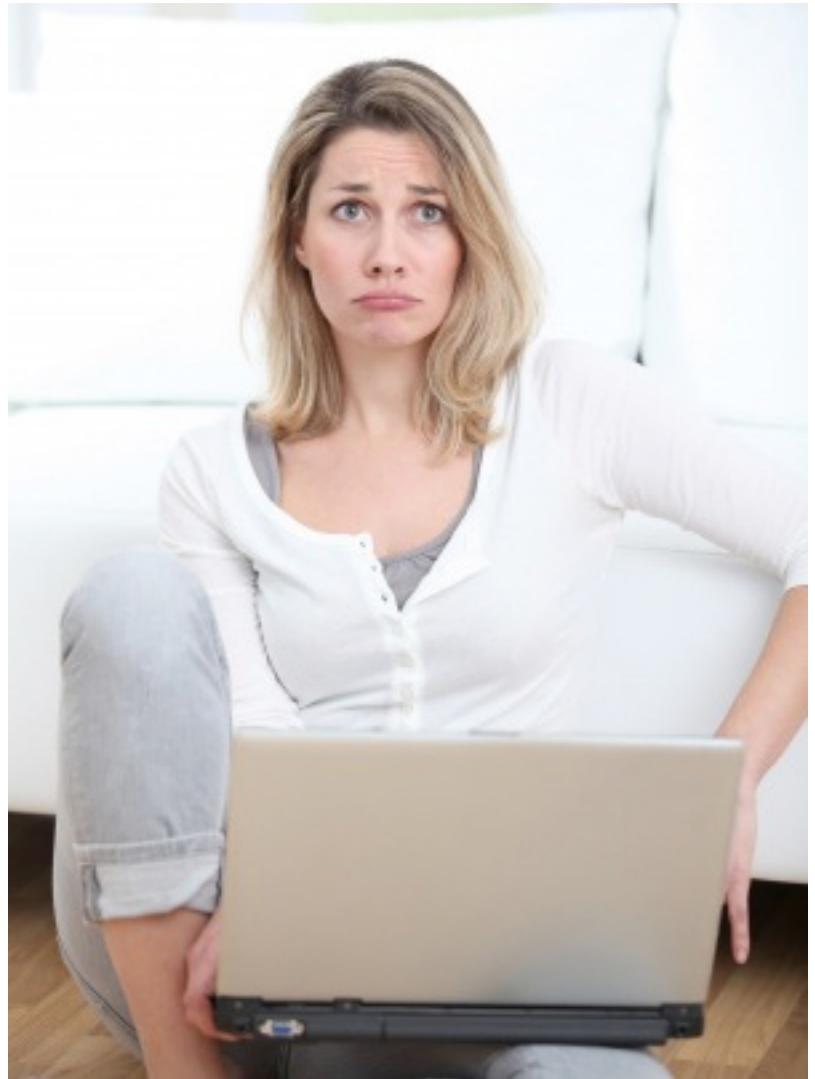
Good SEO may take you to that coveted first page on the SERP (Aha! #1) but you could potentially linger there, unclicked.

Aha! #2 is to be clicked on by the prospect, and that depends very much on the headline and description visible on the page. This is something you can control in the coding of your landing page, but a huge percentage of sites do this very badly.

We've written about this before, getting into the **selection set**, the one, two or three listings clicked on from the ten on the SERP. We wrote, "A SERP description allows 17 to 25 words, total – yet so many squander that opportunity. Most brandholders fail this test even though they can totally control what that description is – it's written into their site's code.

Some sites fail even to include a description tag in their code, but many more have ridiculous description tags with 60 or more words, with important, differentiating terms invisibly placed beyond the 25-word-limit of what will be visible. Rule of thumb: Decide on a single keyword crucial to your brand, and get it in the first three words of that description."

So our Aha! #2 is when your well-crafted, differentiating headline and description get investigated. Now, the job is 2/3 done.



The final Aha! is when and if the slightly warm prospect sees the page that opens upon clicking, and decides she's come to the exact right place. Unfortunately, you'll only get 4.5 seconds

to convince the visitor, and this is another frequent failure.

Where does the process go wrong? Often, it's the landing page not corresponding to the visitor's exact need. If you use your home page as your landing page, you've squandered the opportunity. Here's how that works: a home page should describe your whole enterprise, and invite exploration of all you offer. But a visitor coming in from a search is looking for something much more specific, and will be very impatient to find it. 4.5 seconds, folks.

Say you're a law firm with multiple practice areas, or a restaurant that does catering, or any enterprise where different people visit with different agendas. It's okay for your home page to say you do securities law and family law and P.I. But think how much more powerful it is when visitor looking for child custody law opens up a landing page seeing a headline about custody law expertise. That can and will stop the searching, and you will be examined closely.

So here are best practices to create the 3-Aha! chain:

- **great SEO to get to page one,**
- **a compelling listing and description to get into the selection set, followed by**
- **a landing page catering to the exact need of the searcher.**

Game, set, and match.

This isn't easy to do, and many web designers and developers fail. How's your SERP visibility, your site, your ability to get actual value from your website? We have ways to measure that, so call and ask us about it.

Badge brands



If television ads are to be believed (work with me, work with me), the surest road to the admiration of your peers and/or the attraction of hotties is to ask the bartender for the precisely correct beverage. Works every time.

Some examples might seem ludicrously obvious to, um, grownups, but they're still persuasive to the target demographic, anxious males age 21 to 21 and 1/8. We've seen the research that shows young men who state a beverage brand preference at age 21 tend to stick with that brand in good numbers – fully half are still loyal at age 29.

Beer and spirits are among the most visible of badge brands, but we all define ourselves to the world with shoes, wristwatches, tobacco, designer gear, tattoos, logo stickers, baby strollers, cars – almost any purchase visible to others. What you buy makes a statement to your audience, whether it's the other ladies who lunch observing your Christian Louboutins, the guys on your construction crew seeing the Camels rolled up in your AC/DC t-shirt sleeve, the passengers boarding your Gulfstream IV, or your street gang assessing your colors. You are what you eat? Nope. You are what you're seen eating.

We had an interesting discussion the other day with a prospective client about badges and badge brands. The

context was a new product launch in a category that's clearly badge-worthy, one where the psychographic self-image of the user will be matched and enhanced by this visible purchase, especially if we get the naming right.

Over the decades, we've worked a lot with badge brands, executing brand messaging that sends out positive signals, without going so far as to backfire. BCSO, as Urban Dictionary says, means people will snicker at your Corvette.

These are things we know:

- Badges are important enough to create the intention to purchase.
- Marketers in these categories must create striking, distinctive brand narratives to reach badge status.
- There are often gender-role issues involved, because gender role anxiety is pervasive, and badges represent socially acceptable expressions of self. See Sure vs. Secret deodorants for a vivid case history.
- Packaging, we say, is the last dialog with the consumer. Hey, the package remains important well after purchase.
- Iron City beer is socially proper in that bar hard by the steel mill, but go for Three Floyds with your



sorority sisters. Horses for courses, as they say.

Does your brand have a devoted constituency? If yes, get them to flaunt it. Harley tattoos, anyone? CAT gimme caps? Notre Dame onesies? If no...

Is there a demographic (or, more potently, a psychographic) audience segment looking for you as an affirmative badge? Is there a Hispanic motor oil? An LGBT rum? A motorcycle for the timid? A beer for gamblers?

If your brand addresses an emotional urgency for your customers/clients, why aren't prospects joining in? (No fair using the easy-out "they just aren't aware" excuse. That can prevent you from seeing qualitatively different attitudes to be addressed.) Customers, however, can become evangelists, and giving them a badge to be proud of could be rocket fuel for your brand.

How can you double sales? Triple? Ten-tuple?



**Looking for a “ten-bagger” where sales increase 1000%?
Double sales growth starts with understanding the
collective perception of your prospects.**

Let's put customers aside for this thought experiment. Re-purchasing comes from actual experience. Surely you already know what to do to keep customers happy. We can't all be Zappo's, but we can try.

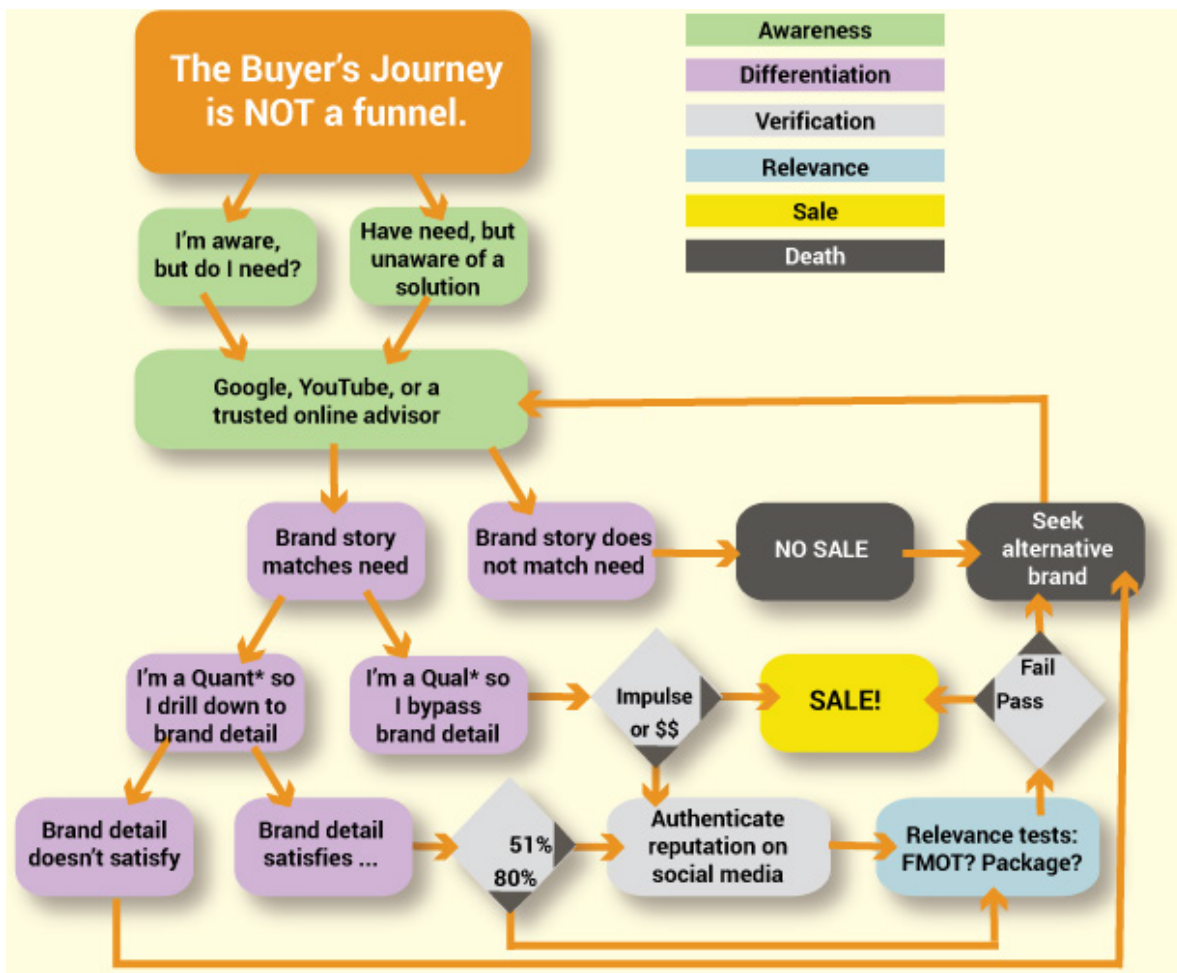
Want to double sales? Know how buyers decide. Understanding prospects is the most leveraged path to double sales. Prospects outnumber customers by 100 to 1 or 1000 to 1, or even more. Are you sure you know what they perceive now? How's your visibility and reputation? How clearly are you differentiated? Is that differentiator emotionally urgent to identifiable prospects?

Restrain the impulse to put on rose-colored glasses. Projecting what you know about customers onto prospects is an easy trap to fall into, but it will never get you to double sales. Customers already like you and have chosen you at least once. Don't assume prospects are customers-in-waiting, just needing another teaspoon of awareness to flock to your door. They may have different needs, and always have different attitudes.

Years ago, marketing was a sermon, a one-way, high-frequency sales pitch. Today it's a conversation, and your brand's future depends on putting those insights to their best use.

Research the gestalt of your brand, the total effect of all its expressions working together: not just the name, logo and tagline. Study the perception of your brand narrative. Your reputation, social media presence, web look and feel. How do prospect feel about original content, tone of voice? Approachability, likability, urgency? Explore all the decision touch points (see our chart, above) to see where you can influence the dialog. It is not a sales funnel.

This is a task you should do, benchmark, and repeat at intervals on the path to double sales. It's also something you should consider outsourcing, for professionalism and objectivity. We know guys who are really good at this.



How's your brand visibility? SEO and Google.



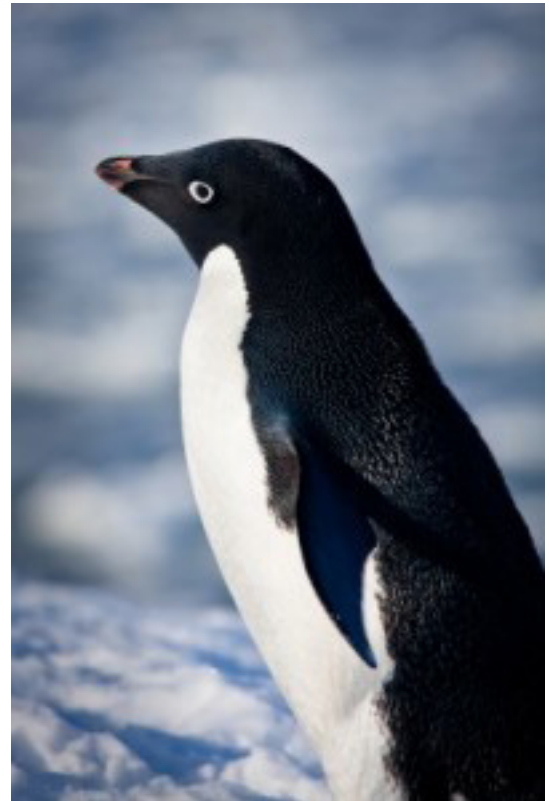
How's your brand visibility on Google?

Did it recently change? Recently, Google implemented one of their rule changes, always codenamed after a cute animal, and the brand visibility of some sites plummeted. (That bass drum you hear is the Salvation Army, sinking). Some sites moved up. Our site, BTW, continues to do superbly on searches.

The people who watch this closely are offering up analysis and strategic advice, lots of it speculative, since Google is famously, understandably, opaque about its alchemy. Here's a common-sense simplification of what we think you should do going forward:

#1. Google's evolving rules keep getting better. They want to improve the search experience for people, to continue their dominance of the category.

#2. There's no evil empire. The rules change to facilitate #1, above. You don't have to be afraid of the next Penguin or Panda if you're authentic.



#3. Over time, results pages will be more and more relevant to the searcher.

#4. Your brand visibility on line depends on Google. (Duh.) So predicting Google's future methodology should inform your digital strategy.

#5. Therefore ... keep your focus on content. Totally. Original content. Original content that's useful to the people searching for what you offer. If you have expertise, or powerful solutions, or meaningful approaches to problems, prove it. Over time, the mere directory sites will fade away, the cut-and-paste assemblers of content will be downgraded, the black-hat tricksters and link farms will be exposed, and sites with genuine lookie-what-I-found substance will rise to the top.

Brand visibility is your first duty in marketing, even before differentiation. (Hey, if a differentiated tree falls in the forest, but nobody sees it, what possible difference does it make what that differentiator is? You can be the low-cost provider, or the most responsive, or have intergalactic customer service – and say so, but until your key prospects actually hear it, it's futile.)

Wallowing on page five of Google in your category? Page 5 is the same as page 312, my friend. We're here to help.

Mobile websites are obsolete. R.I.P.



Do you believe you need a mobile website?

Well, you don't. You may have been justified three years ago, but .mobi sites are now old technology.

Yes, a large and growing number of people will connect with you on a small screen. Your best strategy, however, is not a second site, but one responsive website that behaves appropriately depending on the device (computer, smart phone, tablet) where it's displayed.

Perhaps "obsolete" is a bit of an overstatement. If you have a large site that draws from multiple databases (say, Amazon) it makes sense to have a separate mobile site. But for the other 97% of sites, responsive site coding is a much better choice, and getting better by the month.

Marketing is evolving faster than ever. Failure to adapt, as Charles Darwin might have advised you, is a road to extinction. What will your organization need to thrive in today's competitive environment? Let's talk.

Think outside the bubble. Category experience can kill creativity.



If you're scheduled for surgery, you (really truly deeply fervently) want the surgeon to have category experience – to have done that procedure 512 times before.

With a creative resource, not so much. You are, after all, looking for the breakthrough, the category changer, the wow factor, an end product that delights, surprises and opens the wallets of buyers. Aren't you?

And yet... category experience is often demand number one.

That's understandable – it's an easy disqualifier to sift through candidates: "We want someone who speaks our language." "How many widget-maker clients have you had?" It's also reassurance for the insecure: "Don't blame me. I chose the guys who did it 512 times before."



Yes, it's a comfort to find someone already in the bubble. But it's often the road to Ordinary.

To illuminate, a personal story: years ago I had a subgroup within the creative team who handled our one-and-only ag client, a company I won't name, but their initials are Monsanto.

The subgroup consisted of an art director and a copywriter who had tons of ag experience. Then, with a deadline approaching for a new product intro, the art director had a heart attack, and the writer had a nervous breakdown. In a matter of days, I had one guy in a hospital, one guy in a rubber room, and a big problem on my hands. I recruited a brave art director, and flew to St. Louis to meet with the client. We asked for and got a one-day immersion in the product and the market, starting from our city-boy ignorance of “post-emergent herbicide” and “no-till” and when the heck do farmers make purchasing decisions?

Back home, but still basically ignorant, we pulled together a campaign that made sense to us, told the brand story, and made us smile. We held our breath. Net result? It was record-breaking in its impact, and won all kinds of industry awards. The success, I am convinced, came from our not knowing the traditional way things are done.

In short, growing your brand exponentially-not-incrementally might require a bomb-throwing disruptor more than a careful, surgical clinician with category experience. Celebrate the unexpected.

Yesterday, we got an RFP from a manufacturer looking for a re-branding which asked for recommendations from three other manufacturers for whom we had “done similar work.” Sigh. We knew two things for sure: they’re likely to get an Ordinary campaign – and we wouldn’t respond.

Are toll-free numbers obsolete?



We were meeting with the customer-facing team of a new client, conducting one of our InsightStorming™ sessions, to explore perceptions of the brand, prospect demographics and psychographics, competitors, market dynamics, and messaging.

As usual, our team learned a lot from their team. Practical insights that will help to shape an effective brand narrative.

One interesting morsel that popped up in the middle of the dialog provoked us to reexamine a marketing tactic almost a half-century old: the toll-free number.

Those of us old enough to remember May 2, 1967 understand why 1-800 numbers (made available for the first time that day) were so appealing. Long-distance calls were expensive enough to stir up anxiety. It seemed extravagant or reckless to make a call without watching the clock. The new numbers began springing up immediately – they were a clear, easily understood, wildly popular customer benefit. They went viral.

Fast-forward 47 years, and see evolution at work. A large percentage of today's consumers have phone service that treats all calls the same, whether local or cross-country. Some plans even include calls to Belgium, Brazil or Bhutan the same as calling your neighbor. The clock-watching anxiety vanished

when the expense became trivial or nonexistent.

In counterpoint, the perception of 800 numbers is evolving: what was a clear benefit may now be regarded (as our client group participant pointed out) with some suspicion. “I always think that toll-free means I’m going to a call center in Bangalore.” It seems one sort of anxiety is being replaced with another.

The divergent perceptions are age-related, of course. Older people are more likely to value (or at least not question) toll-free as a benefit. Younger people, not so much.

Everybody wants to know a new vendor or resource is real, and in a real location.

So, the practical insight we extract from this? If your organization wants to be trusted as authentic, or at least concerned-enough-to-answer-locally, then you should offer a local number. Instead of the toll-free number? No! Many of your prospects remember 1967. Make the *choice* available.

Today, it makes sense to offer a local number in addition to, not in place of, toll free.



Why are the yellow pages like nursing homes?



Yellow Pages: The Nursing Home of Marketing Tools:

- They're shockingly expensive,
- few people under 70 use them, and
- many who do are a little out of it.

Moral of the story? When you invest in Yellow Pages advertisements, you're setting fire to money. Are we being a little harsh on this venerable (read: antique) information source? Hell no. This obsolete technology sucks millions of dollars away from more cost-effective marketing tools, while delivering less every year. There are better uses for your budget, especially if you market goods and services to people who don't remember the Truman Administration.

Way back in the 20th Century...

The answer to "Where can I buy a refrigerator?" "Let your fingers do the walking." But the only people who continue to walk those fingers in this millennium are the ones who got into that habit of looking through yellow pages advertisements decades



ago. Google and Yahoo, to cite two sites, offer vastly more information, from more sources, more quickly. Fresher info, too. The accuracy of yellow pages advertisements begins to decay the moment it comes off the printing press. Look at your brand message: how can you best tell your story? If you can draw prospects – via broadcast or print ads, good search engine rankings, sponsored search (or a KinetiZine like the one you're reading – to your website, you can offer information precisely tailored to those prospects, with as much drill-down information as they desire. And pictures. And video. And animations. Even pages of technical specs, or multiple languages, if prospects need them. Bingo. Home run. Yahtzee.

Note carefully: we said “prospects” three times in that last paragraph, and not by chance. In branding, we pay less attention to your customers. Customers' attitudes toward you are contaminated by reality; product performance will dictate repeat purchases. The bigger lever to your growth is to create a powerful brand, to influence positively the collective perception of your best prospects.

Your opportunity for geometric growth is in direct proportion to your brand strength among people you *don't* know.

Let's hammer that a little more: how many customers do you have? How many prospects? What's the ratio? 100-1? 1000-1? 10,000-1? Your opportunity for geometric growth is in direct proportion to your brand strength among people you *don't* know. Given that, why would you want to spend a king's ransom on Yellow Pages advertisements? Those rectangles

of static, limited information will be ... this is where your investment gets monumentally wrong ... surrounded by every competitor you have. You've spent big money just to set off a round of comparison-shopping phone calls. If you're the one called first, you can't close the sale; if you're called second or third, you have to be the low-price spread. It's a lose-lose. You may even be ignored totally if the prospect focuses on your competitor and never sees you. YP is a "put two dollars in, get one dollar out" crapshoot.

Measure your ROBI

Companies try to analyze Return On Investment to justify their continued use of Yellow Pages advertisements, comparing the cost of the ads to the sales attributed to the medium, but this is deeply flawed, for two reasons.

The first flaw is the dilemma discussed in the last paragraph:

you're spending money to be compared to every competitor, right there on the same page. It's impossible to measure but easy to imagine how many sales you lost that way, greatly reducing your ROBI (Return On Bad Investment). Let's get real: is your YP ad so magnetic that you will capture a reader's eyes totally? So powerful she won't even look at the ad two inches



to the left? The second flaw? Too many sales are attributed to Yellow Pages advertisements: Prospect A has seen your magazine ads and bus sides, heard your radio spots, and decides to call. If he looks up your phone number, the answer to “where did you hear about us?” will often be mis-attributed to that thing sitting in front of him. Look at your numbers. If you’re a YP advertiser, you’re probably seeing declines from year to year, a trend we confidently predict will continue. The total number of YP users will decline, because, as a tobacco client once put it to us about their brand’s diminishing number of loyal users, every year a portion of them “leave the market.”

It’s an addiction, and fear of withdrawal is what keeps the Yellow Pages on life support.

All the fear tactics of “combined rates” and “volume discounts” and implied threats to banish you to a “bad position” if advertisers reduce the size of their Yellow Pages advertisements miss the point: they are all bad positions – overpriced, underperforming, and outdated.

Join the revolution: you should keep a simple line listing for older people who need to look up your phone number, but quit display ads cold turkey. Start now, because it will take 12 to 18 months to recapture and redeploy those budgets. Consider anyone who says “oh, our company has always used the Yellow Pages” as a person failing to adapt to changing times. That’s understandable, actually, because none of this would have

It’s an addiction, and fear of withdrawal keeps the Yellow Pages on life support.

been true 20 years ago. Even ten years ago, before high-speed connectivity became almost universal, it was not a slam dunk. Yellow Pages are in year-to-year decline, but a few businesses remain addicted out of fear.

Are there exceptions? Of course.

If you're marketing to the elderly and/or poor (credit furniture, payday loans, monthly-pay car insurance, bankruptcy counseling ...) Yellow Pages advertisements may be cost-effective.

Your best media strategy?

Assuming you're not one of those rare exceptions, your most effective, most leveraged approach to media can best be planned by brand strategists with the help of media planning specialists, considering your service or product, your geography, the demographics and psychographics of your primary and secondary market segments, your seasonality, budget, research ... it gets even more complicated than that, but we'll be happy to help you sort it out, to get you into this century's best branding practices. One thing is fairly straightforward and immediate: if you're spending anything on Yellow Pages advertisements, it's time to kick the habit.

Brand evolution and the science-rejectors



We often preach Darwin around these parts.

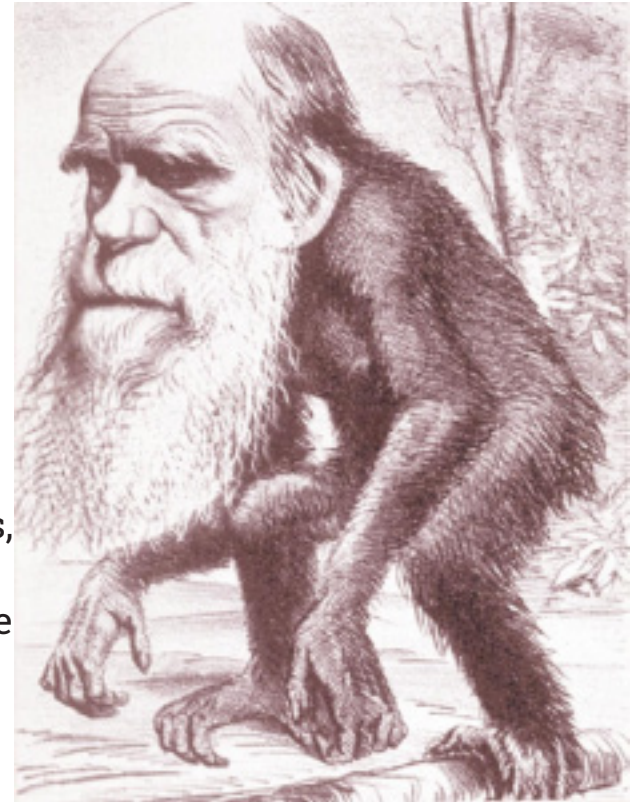
Because business.

It isn't always an easy sell. We are often asked if we risk rejection by potential clients skeptical about, you know, science-y stuff. That's a legitimate concern; an extraordinary number of Americans are unpersuaded by evidence. Pew Research found millions of them.

These people would no doubt reject the concept of brand evolution as well.

We press on, regardless. The reasoning is sound – marketing processes mimic biological processes. Language, too, follows the pattern of adaptation and evolution. The naive question, “If man evolved from monkeys, how come there's still monkeys?” is answered by “If English evolved from German, how come there's still German?”

Even social movements go with the flow. Look at the startling speed of attitude change regarding marriage equality. Logically, evolution principles also apply to brand survival. Don't let your competitors out-adapt you.



Awareness of profound change opens you up to better decisions. Anticipating the next wave of change lets an agile brand guide brand evolution one jump ahead of competitors. Like Darwin's Galapagos Finches, that will help you flourish. Yes, both you and your competitors face the same digital-era challenges (*"Is anybody reading those pdfs we send out?"**) but it's a race to find the solution first. Last one in loses.

Adding it all up, evolution rejectors are less than ideal clients for us.

The optimal agency-client relationship requires a bucket-load of trust, which takes time to cement. Reality-tested advice ("don't put your phone number in a radio spot," "don't dabble in many media if you can dominate one," "don't use the word quality in a tagline") may fly in the face of old-school beliefs. That doesn't always end well. It seems we'll have to content ourselves with brilliantly incisive clients.

*That question worries most CMOs. Sending out old-fashioned PDFs doesn't produce much actionable information about your prospects. Even if you have great content, you can't know who's actually reading, or how much, or who's engaged.

But digital evolution has now created the KinetiZine, which not only engages your market with interactivity, but identifies and monitors the readers. (You're reading one now.) More info, **here**.

What's a "biz dev" person worth?



Suppose you want to hire a business development person, and you've got a candidate who looks very promising.

She's diligent, anticipates prospects' questions, offers answers that are easy to understand and relevant to their needs. She has a command of product knowledge and industry knowledge, and will provide as much detail as the prospect needs – no more and no less. She's attractive, has an engaging personality, and would represent your brand well.

You believe she'd turn suspects into prospects into leads, shortening the sales cycle by defining you in a way that clearly differentiates you from competitors.

So the question is: what should you pay her?

Think it over. Remember, you wouldn't want her working as a

?



biz dev for your closest competitor.

Let's now add that she is multi-lingual, and works 24/7/365. Never goes out for lunch. Never catches the flu. She is, we blush to reveal, not a human, but your ideal website.

If you're like many firms, you now have another question to answer: why are you reluctant to invest as much in this biz dev "person" as that biz dev person?

Most organizations want a strategic, professional, content-rich, brand-building site, but don't/can't/won't budget enough to employ a customer service star for six months. Why not?

Where are you on the brand elevator?



Ground floor:

"I know that brand"

Up to

"I like it"

Up to

"I need it"

Up to

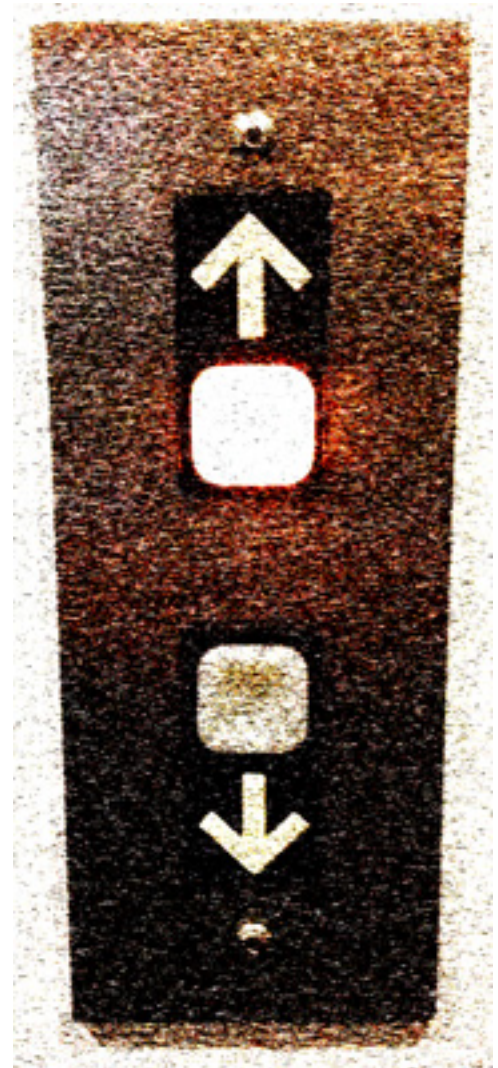
"I have to own it"

Up to

"I'll buy"

Up to

"I'm glad I bought it and you would be, too."



Are you rising on the brand elevator?

Going up? Awareness, Preference, Desire, Urgency, Purchase, Evangelism.

Awareness is merely the ground floor.

Those who obsess over awareness (because it's so measurable?) still have five more stories to climb. Your product service candidate idea subscription event whatever must be visible, yes, but that just gets you to a starting point.

BTW, stop using "sales funnel." It's misleading. Given time and gravity, every funnel is 100% efficient. Persuasion is way more complicated.

For those obsessed with purchasing as the end point, know that great brands multiply their value when they postpone the celebration until they generate fanboys. Think Apple, or Harley-Davidson or J. Crew or Jack Daniel's or Weber Grills or Zappo's or Warby-Parker or Pope Francis. What are you doing post-purchase to make this happen?

Short attention spaniels, revisited.

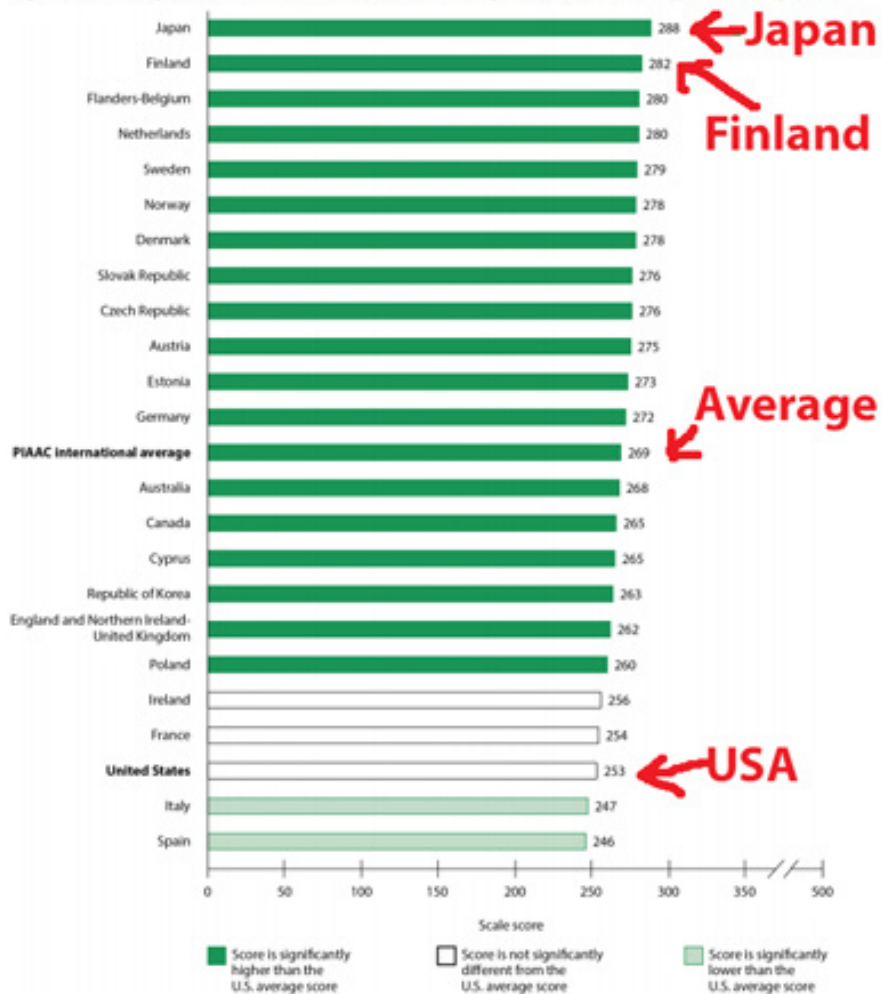


We've written before about the Post-Literate Era, populated by the Short-Attention Spaniels. You know, those people you're trying to reach, with minimal success?

Turns out, it's getting worse. A substantial number of Americans are functionally illiterate, and compared to other nations, slipping farther behind. (If you're marketing to people in Finland and Japan, no problem. You can even use three-syllable words.)

There are numeracy problems as well – numbers present insurmountable obstacles as often as words do. This report has data that will amaze you. They detail the tests, which seem like simple tasks, but are utterly baffling to huge chunks of our short attention population. We're Ridgemont High, and mostly Spicolis.

Figure 1-B. Average scores on the PIAAC numeracy scale for adults age 16 to 65, by participating country and region: 2012



A wise client once showed me research that validated his opinion that most people cannot process percentages, so any attempt to persuade someone with percentage comparisons was a doomed message. I've avoided them ever since, even in the face of clients in banking and insurance who believe a % is a headline.

The perceptive writing coach Anne Wylie wrote about this recently, and offered solid suggestions to edit yourself to reach more of your struggling audience. We heartily endorse those approaches – for example, we test every blog post and BrandAid against the Flesch Readability Scale to make sure it measures over 60.0, relatively easy to read. We have very few spaniels on our mailing lists, I'm sure, but hey. It's a useful discipline.

One approach we recommend to clients about text is to have less of it. Fewer words. Shorter words. Shorter paragraphs. A drastic reduction in big blocks of gray type. When you realize your prospects don't read, or won't read, or can't read, you face a choice. Push that boulder up that hill, or use other tools. Video. Infographics. Animations. Some other shiny thing.

Feel you can't escape heavy text? Can't explain your message in pictures, songs, saxophone solos or interpretive dance? Call us, and we'll talk you off the ledge.

Envelopes = Death



We have been advising clients for many years not to put brochures into envelopes – a large and growing percentage of which get thrown away unopened.

Frankly, we tell most clients not to put anything into snail mail at all, but that's not an absolute rule. Dimensionals, for example, are often opened first.

I just retrieved an envelope from the garbage to prove the point. It was a plain #10 size, with only a logo from a high-end appliance retailer (which I won't name, as that might be apt to hurt someone's feelings). Inside was a colorful sales catalog, with some attractive pricing on hundreds of items.

Instead of hiding this inside a paper coffin, one could blank out part of an outside panel for an address, then add a wafer seal to make it into a self-mailer. Would this be a wonderful piece? Maybe or maybe not, but pictures of 80-inch plasma TVs, Weber gas grills and colorful KitchenAid doodads would greatly enhance the odds of getting people to explore it. The visual stimulus would cause many more people to break the seal and daydream about shiny new refrigerators.

The ROI of deathvelopes that never get opened is, well, zero.

Every time you make a PowerPoint, a puppy gets crushed.



One item usually requested when we create or recreate a brand identity is a PowerPoint template.

We used to comply, because strategic sales tools give everyone in the choir the same sheet of music. A disciplined sales force can be a brand's best friend. Yada yada yada.

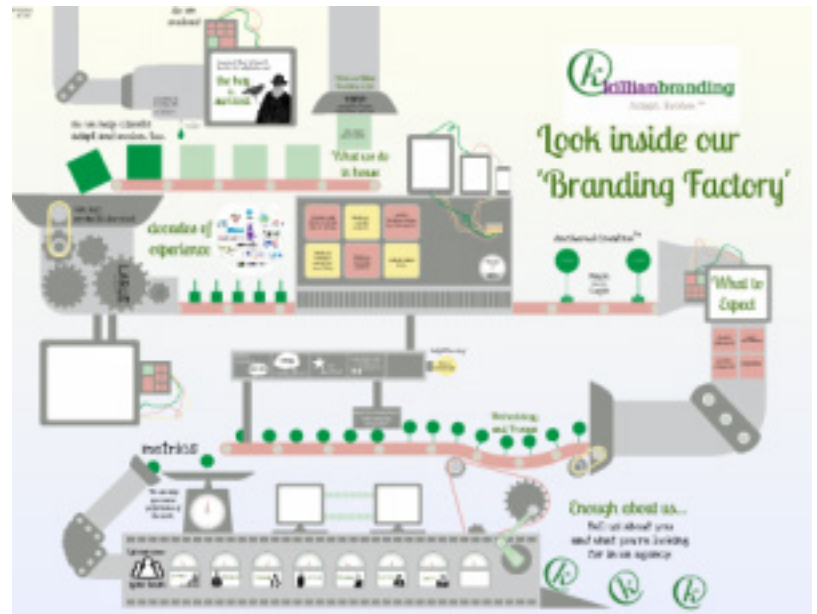
But visions of the dreaded PuppyCrusher™ out there made us rebel. Nobody need commit the sin of PowerPoint any more.

Kick the habit! Think of those puppies in danger. Even worse, think of your audiences sitting slack-jawed and nearly comatose as slide 47 adds 112 more words to the pitch. Mercy.

There are of course better alternatives. Check out for example Prezi. Dynamic beats static once again, in a rout.

Another alternative to PowerPoint is video to put your brand into motion. When used creatively and with attention to production values, it need not be expensive or mind-numbing. Keep it on message, keep it moving. Make sure you have good audio plus music. Keep it short and visual, not exhaustive and text-y. A picture is worth something north of 900 words. Many kinds of animation BTW are far less costly than they were in the old days, five years ago. Ask us about that.

Better to have multiple 40 to 90 second videos with surprises and delights rather than one 4-minute MEGO*. If it's for the home page of your website, or a traffic-stopper for a trade show, discipline yourself to a 59 second maximum. Keep subtracting until you get there.



Maybe best of all is a KinetiZine™ which combines content of all kinds in an easy-to-use format that works on any device. (You're in the middle of one, now.) Creating one is faster and less costly than you imagine. Ask us.

*Don't know if that acronym is still in general use, but it was common journalist slang for stories about economics or wars between two faraway countries or zoning ordinances. My Eyes Glaze Over. 99% of all PowerPoints are MEGOs.

How much does Big Data weigh?



That is, how many people are needed to lift Big Data?

We were told the main reason for the announced mega-super-colossal merger of two ad giants was, um, “Big Data.”

We were skeptical. They apparently believes (or cynically wanted to convince us) that it takes 130,000 employees to wrestle with all those 1s and 0s. But the last time we hefted data, it was remarkably light. A much smaller number of people could access, analyze, manipulate and draw insight from data.

Turning data into decisions has always been a job for smart strategists. Adding platoons of foot soldiers won’t guarantee better thinking. There is no economy of scale in the idea business.

Even a giant client must realize deep down they enjoy zero benefit from the 99% of that army that works on other clients’ concerns.

Furthermore, Big Data is a remarkable targeting tactic, but just a tactic, not a strategy. What can be derived from BD still depends on creativity to create a visible, differentiated, urgent brand narrative that’s emotionally true to the targeted audience. Is a staff of 130,000 more effective, creative or strategic by the numbers? Snake oil.

The supersize-jumbo-mumbo merger, of course, fell apart. Toejaso.

Why beer advertising fails: Anchored Creativity™, Part 2



Think about beer advertising.

You've seen a mind-numbing parade of beer advertising, year after year after year. Some campaigns were memorable, most were forgettable, and forgotten. The forgotten ones flopped, of course. Even some of the memorable ones failed to move another keg, can or bottle out of the warehouse. Every year new assaults are introduced with fanfares, followed by silence when the market share needle stays stock still.

The central issue is this: effective beer brand advertising is damned difficult.

The category is crowded*, brand loyalties are sticky**, the best prospects are hard to reach***, everything you can say about beer has been said, 57 times over****, and Anchored Creativity™ in the category is rare*****.

***The field is jam-packed.**

Yes, two brewers control 94% of the market. Consider all their brands, however, plus odd imports, plus the mushrooming



number of craft beers (6% and climbing) – there are thousands of identities looking for their beer advertising to go beyond awareness-building, to deliver a purchase-intention injection. (In vein?).

****But brand loyalties are persistent.**

We did research some years back when we were representing some beer and distilled spirits clients, and a fascinating nugget from a tracking study stuck with me. Of those young men who had established a brand loyalty at 21, about 50% would still be loyal at age 29. Half! It's a big challenge to get a committed 25-year-old to switch brands.

*****So it pays handsomely to capture them young, which carries with it the problem of media vehicles to reach the bullseye of the audience (males, age 21 to 21 1/8).**

Outside of Ultimate Fighting, there are few media choices that efficiently reach the testosterone-poisoned. There's also the, um, awkwardness of not being allowed to target people below LDA (legal drinking age, usually 21 in the US). Everyone pictured in beer advertising on TV, for example, is required to look at least 25. (Not a problem for The Most Interesting Man in the World.)

******What can you say about beer?**

There's the water, barley, hops, cute brewmaster, coldness, macho-nicknamed bar call, can design, bikini-clad beach buddies who admire anyone wise enough to choose just the

right brand, or stylishly-clad bar buddies who admire anyone wise enough to choose just the right brand, etc. Rinse and repeat. And repeat.

*******Anchored Creativity™ is in very short supply.**

With a few notable exceptions, such as the Dos Equis campaign which actually did increase market share, the category is littered with retreads.

Strategic creative breakthroughs are waiting to be born for beer advertising. It's just plain lazy to create the 912th hot-babe-won-over-by-delivery-of-the-Amazing-Correct-Beer. Especially for agencies who congratulate themselves on clutter-cutting...

The metaphor in motion:



Show and tell. More to the point, Show vs. Tell.



You know those people who always interject “Know what I mean?” or “Do you hear what I’m saying?” into conversation. It’s a deeply felt (and well-deserved) insecurity.

In the eternal quest to do that very hard thing – to get people to change their minds – there are two tactics that must be considered. Show and tell. When you ask people to change their established loyalties, you ratchet up the level of difficulty from “very hard” to “dragon-slaying-blindfolded-on-a-unicycle hard.”

You can Tell people about the product/service/candidate/concept, give them reasons why, detail the awesome benefits, or scoff at the limp and/or dangerous consequences of not changing, ad infinitum. This is the home base of those who serve up doomed “10 Reasons Why” communications.

The alternative to all that textual dysfunction is to Show the benefits, consequences, and so forth.

It’s possible, sometimes even desirable, to do both, but in the head-to-head effectiveness battle, Show will defeat Tell 9 times out of 5.

The “Bottom 10” brand demotions you should run away from



A checklist of obsolete, misguided and/or reckless brand demotions that destroy budgets and brands.

1. Setting fire to money

You can spend money on radio advertising all you want, but iPod, XM and Pandora listeners will never hear you. Radio's not the only medium in a death spiral, so seek professional help.

2. Burying your message in a coffin

If you're still using snail mail, for the sake of all that's holy, don't bury the message in an envelope.

3. Believing in a “sales funnel”

It's a dreadful metaphor: funnels keep everything in until gravity works its magic. The truth is, many prospects jump overboard for many reasons, some of them very different from what was true in, say, 2003.

4. Naming yourself

Use professional namers to keep you from making the dreaded “3-initial mistake” you'll have to un-make later.

5. Long printed text: the buggy whip of branding

Do you expect your prospects to, like, read?

6. Remember QR codes? From 2010?

Yeah, neither do we.

7. Cold calling – another bonfire of benjamins

We know. Father did it. Grandfather did it. A boiler room of dial-and-smile grunts, grinding away to provide leads. Well, if they're working for nothing, the ROI might be satisfactory. But only if.

8. “Customer-centric” can be “prospect-blind”

Yes, love and serve your customers. Very admirable sentiment. But unless you have insight about how and why *your prospects are different from customers*, you may blow the strategic opportunity to grow your business exponentially.

9. Content with less content?

Don't stop changing. Content is king, so you can't let your blog and website be static for weeks. Original content creates visitors, links, mentions – and better search engine results.

10. The bottom of the Bottom 10: printed directories.

Among which, of course, we include that budget-draining king-of-the-zombie brand demotions, the eco-nightmare Yellow Pages.

Serial brainstorming with The Concept Dispenser™



We are, as faithful readers may recall, somewhat hostile to the idea of brainstorming.

It's an attractive idea which often creates enthusiasm – but it's a massive waste of time without a perceptive editor to sweep up afterwards. The crucial element is, of course, that action-oriented person who separates wheat from the overwhelming chaff, refines the results and directs the important next steps in ideation.



We have better alternatives. One of them is serial brainstorming.

To the untrained eye, this looks like a roll of wrapping paper, but that's where you're dead wrong, buster. You're looking at The Concept Dispenser™, the only one in captivity anywhere.



What makes a memory vivid?

What do really vivid memories have in common?

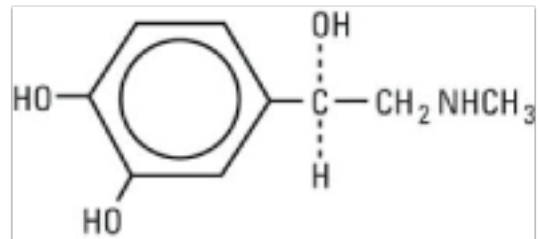
You know, the ones where “I remember every detail,” “time seemed to slow down,” “it’s like it happened yesterday”?

The ones where “we won the state on a buzzer-beater,” “Kate and William kissed on the balcony,” “our car got hit and we flipped over into the ditch,” “Kermit rides a bicycle!” or, you know, that skinny-dipping after the prom thing.

Whether it happened to you personally or vicariously, the common element is the brain chemical **epinephrine**, also known as **adrenaline**. That instant of laughter or sorrow or conflict or danger, that fight-or-flight moment stimulated the flow of this powerful neurotransmitter, which imprinted the sensations.

The lesson for marketers? Every communication is a chance to evoke conflict, or danger, or humor, or any other emotion that makes the juices flow. Don’t be merely rational. It’s the difference between “remember when your pants fell down?” and “remember what you had for breakfast last Thursday?”

Why you remember the skinny-dipping:



Marketing's latest evolutionary adaptation



KinetiZine™, Evolved Content Delivery

Would you like to know more, much more, about your prospects? For instance, which ones are ready to buy?

You already have great content to influence your audience. Unfortunately, it's in old-fashioned PDF form, or (worse) printed on paper. You can't tell what's been read, or who's engaged with your material. Yes, you threw it to them. But what did they catch?



kinetiZine™

IMPROVING YOUR PROSPECTS

Enter the KinetiZine:
an interactive

publication that improves your prospects. (Psst: You're reading one now.) [don't include previous sentence in blog post version]
Mobile-friendly KinetiZine is a visually appealing, kinetic format easily accessed on any device, in up to 19 languages. Your content springs to life.

A KinetiZine's actionable analytics gather valuable information on your audience's experience. Their engagement becomes your insight. You'll be told each page or video or slideshow they saw, and how long they spent looking at it. You get insights into prospect engagement that let you identify,

segment and even auto-respond to prospects on their journey to become customers.

To demonstrate (provided you spent more than one minute on this chapter) we'll send you an invitation tomorrow asking if you want to see what time you spent in this KinetiZine, what pages you looked at, and so forth. This is data you need about your brand messaging, the kind you cannot get from sending out old-fashioned PDFs.

The days of "spray and pray" email blasts or passively waiting for web readers are going the way of the dinosaur. KinetiZine evolved to help you contact the most engaged prospects in your audience, and move them along the journey to become customers.

Don't just send content. See who cares.