
INSURGENT MARKETING

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Insurgent Marketing

Outsmarting the Giants in Your Market

written by:

Mario Parisé

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“If you stand for something, you will always find some people for you and some against you. If you stand for nothing, you will find nobody against you, and nobody for you.”

– Bill Bernbach, co-founder, DDB.

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Introduction

You have a voice. You have an independent will. You have untapped potential. Even within the bounds of reality, the sky is the limit in terms of who you can be and what you can achieve.

And yet, most of us don't feel that way. We feel our options are limited to picking a lane and following the leader. You're worth so much more than that.

I long wondered why we feel so limited, so constrained. What is it about life that beats the originality out of us?

I believe the answer can be found in this 1928 classic, *Propaganda*:

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this **unseen mechanism of society** constitute an invisible government which is the **true ruling power of our country**.

"We are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.

"[...] Whatever attitude one chooses to take toward this condition, it remains a fact that in almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons – a trifling fraction of our hundred and twenty million – who **understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses**. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world."

– Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, 1928.

Bernays wrote those words in a book dedicated to how positive of a force it is to have an unseen government manufacturing the consent of the public. Whether you think of it as good or bad, however, you should ask yourself: *is it true?*

Is there really an unseen force shaping the world?

I believe it's true, and this book is written for those who want to regain their power to persuade and shape the world around them.

In *The Game of Life*, players are shepherded along a pretty linear path, with only a few meaningful choices to make: To go to college or not, and to have kids or not. It's not a particularly subtle form of propaganda, teaching us at an early age that there are certain milestones we're expected to hit, and failure to do so makes you a loser. Winners go to school and start families. Losers get to watch the winners advance further and further ahead until the game is over.

What's remarkable is how few of us recognize it as propaganda: "It's just a game!"

If I were to make such a game, I'd call it: *Manipulators*, in which all players compete to manipulate one another to get the result they want. Cynical? Perhaps. But it's also a much better understanding of reality, and I prefer to live in reality.

In the real world, there are over 8 billion people, each with their own agendas. To Bernay's point in *Propaganda*, if everyone truly thought for themselves and did only what they independently decided to do, we'd tear the world into 8 billion little pieces.

Have you ever noticed how often your choices boil down to just two options?

- Good vs Evil
- Coke vs Pepsi
- Mac vs PC
- iPhone vs Android
- Liberal vs Conservative
- Queer vs Straight
- Male vs Female

But, what if this dualism points to something important about our desires? There are a plethora of

options in each of the categories above, but the vast majority of us choose one of the two big ones. What if the truth is, most of us don't really want all that freedom to begin with?

Bernays again (emphasis mine):

“It is not usually realized how necessary these invisible governors are to the orderly functioning of our group life. In theory, every citizen may vote for whom he pleases. Our constitution does not envisage political parties as part of the mechanism of government, and its framers seem not to have pictured to themselves the existence in our national politics of anything like the modern political machine. **But the American voters soon found that without organization and direction their individual votes, cast, perhaps, for dozens or hundreds of candidates, would produce nothing but confusion.** Invisible government, in the shape of rudimentary political parties, arose almost overnight. Ever since then we have

agreed, for the sake of simplicity and practicality, that party machines should narrow down the field of choice to two candidates, or at most three or four.”

But wait, there’s more:

“In theory, everybody buys the best and cheapest commodities offered him on the market. In practice, if every one went around pricing, and chemically testing before purchasing, the dozens of soaps or fabrics or brands of bread which are for sale, economic life would become hopelessly jammed. **To avoid such confusion, society consents to have its choice narrowed to ideas and objects brought to its attention through propaganda of all kinds.** There is consequently a vast and continuous effort going on to capture our minds in the interest of some policy or commodity or idea.”

How could it be any other way?

Marketing = Propaganda, Oh My.

Why am I opening this book with a rather nasty look at the dark side of our industry?

Because if you're going to be a successful insurgent, you need to look uncomfortable truths in the eye. The powerful and entrenched can afford to lie to themselves and us (for a time) as they try to bend reality to their will. But you're the underdog. You need to face it head-on. Eyes open.

If Bernays is correct and some form of coercion or persuasion is required to unite the population into something less chaotic, there's no reason we have to leave it to politicians and bankers. We can change the world, too.

I'd say it's our moral obligation. There's no escaping the fact that the world is led by propagandists like Bernays. *But they don't have exclusive access to this power anymore.* Technology allows us to put out our own messages, our own propaganda. We don't need anyone's permission. Not in service of a master, but in

service of ourselves, our values, and society as a whole. We can amplify quieter voices with the things we choose to share.

This newfound opportunity is neither good nor bad, it simply is, and we see evidence of it every day.

- One group amplified their voice to the point that they were able to raid the US Capital on January 6, 2021.
- In July 2003, a small group of activists pushed Japan to become the first nation to recognize transgender rights. 14 years later, my home country of Canada did the same.
- In 1938, all Cannabis production was banned in Canada. Within a few years of social media, the tide turned quickly and public support shifted so much, in such a brief window, that it was legalized in 2018.
- #BlackLivesMatter has changed the conversation around race dramatically in just a few years, and is literally only made possible by social media.

- The “Arab Spring” of the 2010s led to radical shifts in the political structures of Tunisia, Lybia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain.
- #MeToo hardly needs any introduction, having very successfully forced a conversation about sexual harassment and assault in the workplace.
- Occupy Wall Street gained tremendous attention for a number of years, although it appears to have failed to lead to any lasting change.
- In 2022, the conservative movement in the U.S. celebrated a long-fought victory in overturning Roe v. Wade, eliminating the constitutional right to an abortion.

Again, I’m not saying any of the above is good or bad. I have my feelings about each of them, and likely so do you. But there’s no denying that these are massive changes brought about by social movements; that those social movements are happening with or without the help of political parties; and they’re being fueled by technology.

The times they are a-changin’.

By contrast, if we look back to the earliest days of mass media, we find that social change only happened when large media organizations supported the change. The American Revolution couldn't have happened if Benjamin Franklin wasn't such an effective media baron. National Socialism would have failed much sooner than it did if it weren't for Joseph Goebbels' horrifically effective publications.

But today, we're all publishers. If you're not putting your voice out there, you're letting others speak for you.

In the game of Chess, your game pieces are locked into who they are. They have a limited number of options, and everyone dies except for the King. But now and then, a pawn from the bottom of the totem pole makes a break for it.

D'Angelo Barksdale: These right here, these are the pawns. They like the soldiers. They move like this, one space forward only. Except when they fight, then it's like this. And they like the front lines, they be out in the field.

Wallace: So how do you get to be the king?

D'Angelo Barksdale: It ain't like that. See, the king stay the king, a'ight? Everything stay who he is. Except for the pawns. Now, if the pawn make it all the way down to the other dude's side, he get to be queen. And like I said, the queen ain't no bitch. She got all the moves.

– The Wire

It's time you stopped being a pawn, cross the damn board, and become the Queen you were meant to be.

Maybe it's time you launch that business you've always talked about. Perhaps you need to take charge back at the office, and not be so compliant and complacent. Maybe you need to join that non-profit or convert more people to The One True Faith (whatever it may be).

We're all selling something. Isn't it time you sold for yourself instead of everyone else?

Preston 'Bodie' Broadus: A'ight, so if I make it to the other end, I win.

D'Angelo Barksdale: If you catch the other dude's king and trap it, then you win.

Preston 'Bodie' Broadus: A'ight, but if I make it to the end, I'm top dog.

D'Angelo Barksdale: Nah, yo, it ain't like that. Look, the pawns, man, in the game, they get capped quick. They be out the game early.

Preston 'Bodie' Broadus: Unless they some smart-ass pawns.

Some Smart-Ass Pawns

If you've browsed the marketing section of your local bookstore recently, you'll have found a plethora of books with titles like _____ Marketing:

- *Punk Marketing*
- *Guerilla Marketing*
- *Email Marketing*
- *Video Marketing*
- *Permission Marketing*
- *This Is Marketing*
- *Marketing Management* (a reversal!)
- *Conversational Marketing*
- *Digital Marketing*
- *Influencer Marketing*
- *Data-Driven Marketing*

...the list goes on and on. And here I am introducing a new one: *Insurgent Marketing*. How original!

I've spent years mulling over whether the world really needs another marketing book. Hasn't everything that needs to be said been said by now?

Hopefully by the end of this book, you'll agree *Insurgent Marketing* belongs not on your bookshelf, gathering dust, but on your desk, dog eared, with post-it notes, highlights, and ideas scribbled in the margins.

So what is Insurgent Marketing already?

In·sur·gent

noun:

a rebel or revolutionary.

"an attack by armed insurgents"

opposite:

Loyalist

adjective:

rising in active revolt.

"alleged links with insurgent groups"

Broadly speaking, you're an insurgent marketer if you're marketing a business that isn't already dominating your market. If you're the underdog, you're an insurgent. It's as simple as that.

My goal in writing this book is to explore the strategies, tactics, principles, and processes that successful insurgents of all stripes have and continue to use to chip away at market share.

These include:

- Knowing the traditional marketing rules, so you can buck them.
- Embracing calculated risk.
- Developing an obsession with what your customers truly desire most.
- Treating your entire business as a story. Anything that isn't newsworthy is a missed opportunity.
- Earned media (PR) is generally better than paid media (advertising).
- Understanding that advertising is a results multiplier. Nothing will make a great product succeed, or a bad product fail, faster than a killer ad campaign.
- Identifying the things your competitors are unwilling to do, and doing them.

- Developing relationships with other insurgent brands so that you have allies when you need them.
- Investing heavily in marketing, but only where it gives you an edge. (Marketing is not synonymous with advertising. More on this distinction later.)
- Pursuing niche but high-margin opportunities, where the returns would be meaningful to your business, but insignificant to your multi-national competitors.
- Embracing your own eccentricities as a person and as a brand to attract like-minded customers.
- Picking an enemy (your competition) and boldly going after their lunch.
- Embody an ideal. Pick a value that is more important to you than money. Something you're willing to sacrifice revenue to support. Make it the heart of your business. Let it guide your decisions.
- Sacrificing short-term market share for long-term customer loyalty. (You'll get more market share in the end by doing this.)

- Viewing most business advice with skepticism – this book included! Most business books were written by the victors, and they're not about to teach you how to supplant them. They tell you the polished story they want you to believe, not the ugly truth about what it really took for them to succeed.

In short, insurgents treat business like it's love and war, because that's what it is. It's a war against your major competitors, and it's a battle for the hearts and minds of your customers. Successful insurgents find allies among their customers, suppliers, and even among friendly competitors. They align themselves with people who share their wish to change the world in some meaningful way.

Know Your Enemy: The Other Side's Playbook

They say you need to know the rules before you can break them. I don't know if that's true, but what I do know is your enemy has a playbook. And it would behoove you to study it.

So before we go into the *insurgent* art of war, let's take a look at what the established players are up to, and why their ways won't work for you.

The Pyramid of Needs

You've surely heard of this one. According to Abraham Maslov¹ and his pyramid, motivation can be best understood in terms of a hierarchy of needs.

First, we take care of physical needs like food and shelter. Then safety. When we feel safe, we long to be loved. When we're loved, we want esteem, to feel good about ourselves. If we feel good about ourselves, we

¹ Who, it should be noted, was an unrepentant jerk who tortured animals and abused infants.

then try to enrich our minds. If our minds are enriched, we turn to aesthetics like art, fashion, and our homes. After that, we go into self-actualization and transcendence.

Read that over again and ask yourself: Does this sound like hard science to you? “Self-actualization”? “Transcendence”?

And even if you buy into it – because he may have been right – so what? How does this help you market your business?

The Pyramid of Needs is brandied about the corporate world like it’s a revelatory map to what people will buy, ignoring that it was meant to help *psychologists*, not marketers.

In over 20 years in the marketing business, I have yet to see a single decision from any leader that was inspired or informed by the pyramid of needs. I’ve seen decisions rationalized after the fact, but I have never seen it used in any helpful way.

To quote David Ogilvy: “They’re like drunkards, using lamp posts for support rather than illumination.”

Is there a better way? Yes. Thank goodness.

A celebrity in his native France, René Girard discovered a much more useful framework for understanding human motivation: Mimetic Desire. More on this later.

Economies of Scale

Here's a simple truth for all insurgents: the economies of scale will never work to your advantage².

The idea is straightforward: As a business grows, it begins to order larger quantities of supplies from its suppliers. The more it orders, the more negotiating power it has. The more negotiating power it has, the lower its cost of goods. They can then pocket the difference as profit, or lower the price of their goods to increase market share.

Here's why this is bad for you as an insurgent: The economies work in exactly the opposite way for you. You and your competitors both need the same widget,

² The one exception that proves the rule might be software startups. The beauty of software is that it scales infinitely at almost no cost. This is why the majority of new companies making it to the Fortune 500 tend to be in software.

but they need 10x or 100x more of them. So you'll pay \$10 per widget and they'll pay \$1. As a result, you have to increase your sales price to cover your costs plus a profit margin.

There are only two types of businesses that can succeed at this:

1. Those that sell a substantially better quality product, or
2. Those that serve one or more niches that are too small for the big players to want to compete in.

You have no choice. You can't just make an acceptable product. Your customers can get that anywhere, and at a fraction of the cost.

But a portion of the market will gladly pay a premium for:

- Craftsmanship (big companies can't afford craft; they need automation, scale, and consistency)
- Devotion to a principle or ideal (big companies can't afford to lock themselves to an ideal, because they need to chase nearly every

opportunity to keep growing; but you can afford to be more selective)

- A solution to a problem that only hundreds of people have (big companies need to solve problems for millions or even billions of people)
- A product with a great story (it's much easier to tell a story about one or two people than it is about the many cogs in a corporation's many processes)
- Convenience (what are you willing to do for your customer that your giant competitors won't?)
- Self-help (if believable)
- Once-in-a-lifetime experiences (big companies like experiences that scale)
- Reliability (big companies like to cut corners; you need to be reliably great)
- Durability (big companies love planned obsolescence)
- Customization (big companies need things to be as generic as possible to achieve their economies of scale)

- Innovative ideas (the bigger an organization is, the harder it is to bring any new idea to light... innovative ideas tend to die by a thousand cuts)
- Flexibility (big companies need everyone to follow their systems, otherwise it all falls apart, but *you* can bend for your best customers)
- Customer support (every big company has a support department that is completely removed from the rest of the company; don't do that! If possible, be the support person yourself)
- Expertise (it doesn't scale! You can only hire so many experts, so this is a natural advantage for small players)

See? The big players want you to be scared of them, but in fact, they're scared of you.

When Bill Gates was asked what the biggest competitive threat facing his business was, he replied:

“I worry about two guys in a garage.”

There's plenty of room to thrive. Many of the world's most successful people string a number of niche businesses together to form miniature empires of their own. There's nothing stopping you from doing the same, or from serving one niche with potentially thousands or tens of thousands of customers around the world.

Market Research

This is another scary truth insurgents need to embrace: Your enemy can afford more research than you. They employ entire research firms whose only purpose is to continuously probe the market for new opportunities or threats. It's all they do.

However, what the big players universally suffer from is the inability to see the trees from the forest. They see numbers and trends, and they will see those better than you ever will.

But what they won't know is that Mary-Sue's been coming to you to do her taxes ever since her husband passed away, because you shoveled her driveway that winter. They won't know that you got 5 other clients,

friends of Mary-Sue, because they feel they can trust the accountant who shovels driveways for widows.

They won't know that all the Mary-Sues are worried about their grand-children, in a world that just seems to be getting harder to manage in countless ways.

The big players are only ever interested in change. They're always looking for The Next Big Thing, rather than noticing all the little things that have always been around. This is why sometimes fantastic products simply stop being made: Even though they solve an important problem for millions of people, if it's not growing every year, big business doesn't care about it. They have quarterly earnings to hit, after all.

But you? You're a person. If you stop supporting your products, your customers will call you. You'll have some explaining to do.

And that's half the market research you need.

My simple advice: Address the things people bring up to you the most. If only one person says it, there's a good chance you don't need to address their concern.

You'll spend all your time chasing tiny problems if you do that.

As soon as two or more people tell you the same thing, however, assume the problem is 10X bigger, and thus 10X the opportunity to create value.

But! There is a danger here. Sometimes you need to accept that a large group of people don't like what you're up to. You can't please everyone. It's OK to piss off one group of people, as long as doing so creates more loyalty in an even bigger or better group.

For example: Justine Martin runs a small local bakery in Sudbury, Ontario. Over the years, she's increasingly embraced feminism as a core part of who she is, and thus a core part of her brand. This doesn't appeal to everyone. Indeed, she's turning away large parts of the market who dislike or are even offended by the ideas she's espousing.

Conventional marketing theory says she's shooting herself in the foot. After all, what does feminism have to do with baked goods? Why limit your reach by needlessly offending non-feminists? Conventional

theory would say she's losing large swathes of the market for no reason.

Insurgent marketing theory, however, recognizes the deep loyalty she's forming with her customers. Those customers in turn *love* to tell her story. Every cake and every cookie has a story. Stories spread. As a result, she's developed a loyal fan base who eagerly share every post, and she's gaining fans far beyond her local reach. More on her story later.

The 4 Ps

The 4 Ps of marketing are:

1. Product,
2. Price,
3. Placement, and
4. Promotion.

In short: You need a good product that solves a real need or desire; you need to sell it at a price the market can bear; you need to make it available where your customers will find it (placement); and you need to promote it.

Let's imagine getting any one of them wrong:

- Let's say you have a great product. You've priced it well. And you've established distribution in the right stores. If you don't promote your product, it's just another box on a shelf. It's effectively not a solution to anything, because your product can't solve problems if people don't know about it. You go out of business.
- Now let's say you have a great product at a price the market is willing to pay, and you've promoted it, but you don't have distribution: You have a market demanding your product and no easy way for them to get it. You go out of business.
- Or let's say you have a great product, placed in the right stores, and very well promoted, but your price is too high. The market wants your product, but not at that price. Perhaps you can't lower your price without losing money. Either way, you go out of business.
- Finally, imagine you have the price, placement, and promotion dialed in just right, but the product is a dud. The more people who buy it, the more quickly people learn that you don't

have the goods. Word spreads. You go out of business.

Consider the 4 Ps like the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Get any one of them wrong and your world is about to come to a halting end.

Although I touch on all these subjects throughout this book, it should come as no surprise that I'll be paying primary attention to the last one, promotion. This *is* a marketing book, after all.

Cost Centers vs. Profit Centers

Business 101 tells us you want to maximize revenue and minimize costs to get the highest possible profits. So far, so good. No argument from me here.

Where big business tends to go wrong is that as the business gets more complex, the temptation is to view some parts of the business as a profit center and others as cost centers. In this view, sales is a profit center, but marketing is a cost. Manufacturing is a profit center, but accounting and the management of it is a cost.

The problem with this view is that sales don't happen in a vacuum. Every function in your business contributes to both costs and profits. If anything truly isn't needed for the sake of profit, it should be eliminated. But you can't eliminate marketing, accounting, HR, logistics, building maintenance, etc., because they're all necessary to run your business and turn a profit.

The better way to understand your business as a whole is to think of it as a machine for converting some money into more money.

As an insurgent, you can't afford any inefficiency in this process. You need to map out your business from initial customer awareness through to the delivery of goods, the collection of money owed to you, and the building of customer loyalty.

Every business is different, but a high-level view of your process might look something like this:

1. Market demand: Everything begins with demand. As a marketer, job #1 is to increase

demand in such a way that profits grow faster than your marketing costs do.

2. Supply chain: You want to have enough inventory to make your product (less of an issue for service businesses or those selling digital goods), without having so much of it sitting around that it eats up all your cash. In an ideal world, you should only have inventory on hand to produce the work you're doing today. Anything above that is waste.
3. Production: If your product goes through multiple processes before being ready for delivery to the customer, map out those processes. Figure out which process is your biggest bottleneck, and design your system around keeping that bottleneck working as efficiently as possible. Never let other processes create more inventory than your bottleneck can handle, as that generates backlogs and more waste.
4. Sales: If possible, you want the sale to happen before you make the product. That way, your sales fund your supplies and production costs. However, this is rarely a realistic scenario.

5. Profit: Assuming you made money, how will you reinvest your profits for growth? The key is to understand your system and know where your biggest constraint is at any time. (It's almost always market demand. Without demand, everything else is meaningless.)
6. Loyalty: You've invested heavily to acquire this customer. What processes do you have in place to keep them coming back? It's always more profitable to sell to an existing customer than to make a new one.

Of course, each of those steps is made up of sub-processes as well.

When you take a holistic view of the business, you see there's no such thing as cost and profit centers. There's only a process for converting money into more money, with variable and fixed costs at each step of the way. **It's the process as a whole that creates both profits and losses.** One part is not more important than any other unless you truly have unnecessary and wasteful steps in your process.

When you spot such a wasteful step, the thing to do is not to try and decrease the cost of it, but to eliminate it entirely or change it until it's no longer wasteful. You may even have to increase your investment in these areas in order to better balance your system overall and eliminate waste.

Your resources are limited. Every ounce of waste in your business has a negative and multiplying effect on your bottom line.

A business that loses money year after year is not a business at all, but a charity that runs for the benefit of your employees and/or customers. I don't know about you, but I'm not *that* nice.

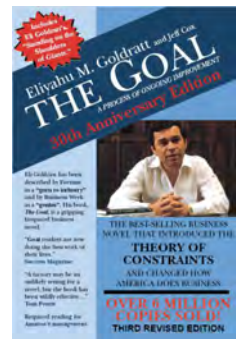


Further Reading:

The Goal

By Eliyahu M Goldratt

If you want a solid primer on how to optimize your business for the best results, pick up this book immediately.



Buy on Amazon³

³ <https://bit.ly/3ojTA44>

Risk Aversion

If you've ever played poker, you know there's a calculation that players make as they start to get low on their chips. At a certain point, playing it safe isn't safe anymore. You need to take a gamble.

As an insurgent, your stack of chips is low. The big players can afford to spread their risk over many initiatives, but you're going to have to put your eggs in one basket for a little bit.

The key is deciding on which basket. At the risk of hubris, may I suggest *anything other than what your competitors are doing?*

“In the new world of business, the riskiest place you can be is trying to do the same things in the same way as you've always done them. Few things are as foolish as hoping old behaviors will somehow present new results.”

– Robin Sharma, *The Leader Who Had No Title*

Your competitors are in a different situation than you are. Stop copying them. Their tactics won't work for you.

That doesn't mean you should throw caution to the wind. Not at all. I'm as cautious and frugal of a person as you're going to find.

But doing business the way it's always been done is the riskiest move of all.

Let's take a look at some examples:

- Facebook invented a whole new media playbook. Where the old media acted as curators and editors, Facebook turned that function over to the public.
- Wikipedia invented a whole new way of documenting and sharing collective knowledge. The old way was to have gatekeepers deciding what did and didn't belong in an encyclopedia. Now, we do it ourselves.
- When Microsoft launched the original Windows, they did so with a mission to see a computer in every home. People laughed. IBM laughed. Now

we have multiple computers not just in every home, but on every desk and in every pocket.

- When Tesla launched their first electric car, a century of “common sense” said it couldn’t work. Electric wasn’t suitable for transportation. Today, roughly half of all car buyers are going electric or semi-electric.

I could go on, of course, but I’m not in the business of filling up page counts. Look over that list again. The first 3 are all major players in their industry now. But they each started as insurgents, as underdogs that went against the prevailing wisdom of the time.

Does that mean that “going against the grain” is a guarantee of success? Of course not. 90% of businesses fail within their first year. Surely some of them went against the grain, too.

But no one reaches new heights by following in others’ footsteps. That’s a great way to get where others have already gone before, and guess what? They already took all the rewards and the glory.

You need your own mountain to climb. Choose wisely,
and the world is yours.

Mimetic Desire

If you haven't heard of this theory before, prepare to go through the following stages:

1. That's a total load of crap.
2. Well, maybe it's true SOME times.
3. Well, maybe it's true for OTHER people, but not me.
4. Oh dang, it's true for me too.
5. Revelation!

It's ok. You'll feel foolish, but I assure you it's normal, and the benefit is worth it.

I Want What I Want When You Want It

Within minutes of being born, you started imitating those around you. They probably didn't notice, because you weren't very good at it yet, but imitation was your "boot code", in geek speak. It's what got you started down the path of learning and becoming your own person.

What's more, almost everything you've learned in your life has been learned through imitation.

It's deeply ironic that the way we become unique individuals is by imitating others, but so it goes.

The Theory of Mimetic Desire states that not only do we do what we see others *do*, and not only do we want what others *have*, we want what others *want*.

Let's think this through:

1. You're cold. You need clothing. This particular desire is not memetic. It's driven by a need. You could go to your closet and grab any number of items to keep you warm, and everything would be perfectly rational.
2. But, you'd like to *look good*, too. Where did *this* desire come from? Who decided what looks good? Who informed your understanding of fashion, and *why do you care*? Also: How can something be stylish one minute, and out of style the next?

The first desire was yours, but the second desire came from somewhere else. It's not rational to throw out

perfectly good clothing simply because it's out of style. It's not rational to trade 40+ hours a week for money, and then spend that money on things we're going to throw out. And yet, we do it all the time.

Why?

Why do we do things that go against our black and white self-interest? Where do these desires come from?

According to Girard, they come from observing others. In particular, they come from observing others *who you admire or loathe in some way*.

That may sound silly. After all, who did you watch admiringly before buying a new pair of shoes? Or, who did you loathe?

Well, let's say you saw people with better shoes than you. This might make you feel bad about your own shoes. Jane, a woman you admire, wears Nikes. You've always worn Adidas, but Sam, that jerk who got a promotion over you, also wears Adidas. You are now double motivated: You want to be more like Jane and less like Sam.

In other words, the decision was yours, but the motivation was external. You had no control over those motivators. You couldn't make Jane wear Nikes. You certainly couldn't make Sam stop wearing Adidas. No one could make you wear any particular brand. Yet, you find yourself deeply uncomfortable wearing your now-subpar shoes.

Keep in mind that in practice, all of the above tends to happen without you consciously noticing it.



It's important to realize *you* choose these models to imitate every day. No one is making you choose them. The problem is we're mostly doing so unconsciously.

It appears that our brains are as obsessed with imitation as they are with lying to us about it. As you study mimetic desire, you may soon find you can see it in everyone around you except for yourself.

But it's not enough to have what they have. That would just make you their equal, and we're competitive in

nature. We want to be better than them, even if they're someone we care about, because we know we can't hold onto perfect equality forever.

So not only do we want what our betters *have*, we want what our betters *want*. Because if we had what they wanted, we'd be better than them.

Evidence for this is literally everywhere, once you see it:

- ☑ The anti-establishment hippie who escaped society only to conform to the hippie life. They saw other hippies model the lifestyle, and wanted that for themselves. (The first hippies were, in turn, influenced by the beatniks.)
- ☑ The counterculture punk rocker who looks just like all the other punk rockers. In a desire to feel superior to the rest of society, our punk rocker modeled themselves after others who came before. (After all, they didn't all spontaneously decide mohawks were cool. They saw it and copied it.)
- ☑ The hipster who walks off the beaten path and ends up surrounded by crowds of others who were trying to do the same thing.

- ☑ The iPhone in my pocket that I swear is better than an Android, but probably isn't.
- ☑ Every. Facebook. Post. Ever. Everything⁴ on Facebook is either you admiring other people's lives and wanting what they have, or them wanting what you have.

Admit it: Doesn't this ring truer to you than anything about self-actualization or transcendence, as Maslov's Pyramid of Needs would have it?

That's why I use a hierarchy of my own, which I'm going to refer to as *The Pyramid of Buyer Motivation*.

The Pyramid of Buyer Motivation

Let me ask you a question: Would you prefer to sell someone a *need* or a *want*? Most people pick a need, of course. If people need what you're selling, you'll never run out of customers.

⁴ I feel like I should qualify this with "almost everything", but scrolling through my own feed, I find no exception.

Here's the problem with that: We're hard-wired to spend as little as possible on our *needs*, in order to save as much of our resources as possible for our *wants*.

Don't believe me? According to a 2023 study by the NYU Stern School of Business:

Industry	Net Profit Margin
Advertising	3.79%
Air Transport	-1.71%
Apparel	5.07%
Banks	30.31%
Beverage (Soft)	14.60%
Broadcasting	11.90%
Computer Services	2.53%
Computers and Peripherals	16.68%
Farming	5.66%
Food processing	7.10%
Food Wholesalers	1.09%

Groceries	1.96%
Restaurants	9.28%
Tobacco	23.46%

Look over that list and ask yourselves which ones are needs, and which ones are desires. In fact, focus in on just computers for a moment:

1. Computers themselves have a healthy margin of almost 17%
2. Servicing of those computers has a margin of just 2.53%

In other words, we'll spend extra on the computer itself, as it has value beyond the mere utility and necessity of using it. It's a status symbol and it brings us joy. It's new. But we'll spend almost nothing for the servicing of that equipment, because the servicing doesn't fulfill a *want*, it fulfills merely a *need*.

We *enjoy* spending money voluntarily on things we want, whereas we *resent* spending money on the things we need.

Or look at the story of food depicted in that table:

- The farmer fulfills a *need*, and earns 5.66% for his efforts. (Note: He'd be better off selling his holdings and dropping his money into an index fund.)
- Food processors fulfill a *want*. We could meet our needs by buying the unprocessed foods. But we *prefer* our foods processed to some extent. So we pay more for it, with a margin of 7.10%.
- Wholesalers fulfill a logistical *need*, otherwise we'd have to negotiate with every farmer and food processor and inefficiently drive to each one for every item on our shopping list. They earn just 1.09%.
- Groceries fulfill a *need*, and are rewarded a measly 1.96% profit for their efforts.
- Restaurants fulfill a *want*, as we've already discussed. They earn the most, with a margin of 9.28%. And remember: That doesn't even include tips, which go to the waiting staff. Restaurants are arguably the only ones in this whole food supply chain earning enough to occasionally beat the stock market, and they provide the least amount of utility of the bunch.

In other words, there is an inverse relation between how much we value something, and how much we need it. The more optional something is, the more we value it. The more we need it, the more we want it for the best possible price.

Models

If you accept it as true that our desires come from others, it stands to reason that we look to others as models for our desire.

So, the pragmatic and logical conclusion for a marketer is this:

Before my customers can buy from me, they need to want what I have.

Before they can want what I have, they need to see that desire modeled by someone they admire.

How can I model this for them?

The absolute best marketing campaigns do this:

- ☑ Old Spice: “Smell like a man, man.”
Accompanied by over-the-top depictions of an

idealized man. (They couldn't have taken Girard more literally.)

- ☑ Nike: “Just Do It.” Always accompanied by images of incredible athletes doing things we wish we could do.
- ☑ Apple: “Think Different.” The ultimate mimetic desire is to somehow stop imitating. So we imitate the contrarians (whose actions and desires are still driven by mimicry... they just do the exact opposite). As Girard puts it: “The effort to leave the beaten path forces everyone into the same ditch.”
- ☑ Dove: “Real Beauty.” This campaign somehow attached soap to the feeling of self-confidence that comes from embracing yourself. Millions of people saw these commercials and wished they had the confidence to bare it all like that.
- ☑ Dairy industry: “Got Milk?” This campaign was 100% driven by images of famous people with milk mustaches. The intention? These people you admire drink milk. You should too.
- ☑ GoPro: “Awards” campaign. This brilliant campaign celebrates the best GoPro-assisted

content, filling everyone who watches with a deep desire to have those adventures too.

I can go on and on, but the point is simple enough: The strongest campaigns tap into our desire to be or have what other people are, have, or want.

Notice the campaigns above barely give you even a single rational reason to buy the actual product. They're not touting the superiority of the materials, the functionality, the features, the price. They're not even pushing the aesthetics of it all. They're going straight for the jugular: People you admire use this product, so you should too.

That may seem mercenary or cold, but it's how it works.



Notice also that other than *Got Milk?*, none of the campaigns above rely on celebrity endorsements. They all attach a *product* to an *idea* of who you *want* to be. This is easier with a non-celebrity, as they're a blank canvas that we can project our desires onto. Celebrities come with baggage.

As an insurgent marketer, the biggest thing to take away from Girard's work is this: Ignore everything people tell you about why they bought a product.

Those are all post-decision rationalizations. If you want to get them to want your product... show them other people they admire wanting your product. This simple act transforms mere commodities into objects of desire, and we will gladly pay a premium to fulfill our desires. We'll pinch and save if we merely *need* your product.

There are other implications beyond marketing to Mimetic Desire, but for our ultra-pragmatic purposes, that'll do.

Your homework assignment:

Who does your customer look up to? Pick a celebrity if it helps, even though you won't be able to hire them to endorse you. Ex: If you think your customers would respond to Arnold, maybe you need to find bodybuilders to work with.



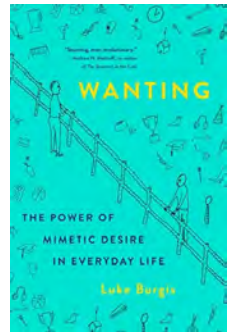
Further Reading:

Wanting

By Luke Burgis

You could always grab a copy of one of Girard's original works, but this is a much easier read.

Also available as an audiobook.



Buy on Amazon⁵

⁵ <https://bit.ly/43f5U4s>

Think like a War

Correspondent

Marketplaces are battlegrounds. Like war, they're won in the hearts and minds of the people. By the time the battle (the sale) takes place, the outcome is a foregone conclusion. In both cases, the victor is whoever was more persuasive.

As an insurgent marketer, you need to think like a war correspondent. You're looking for a particular result, and if you want the public to grant you that result, you need to answer 6 important questions:

1. **Who** is this product or service for?
2. **What** are you selling them?
3. **Why** should they want it? What's in it for them?
4. **When** is it available? Is there a limited time?
5. **Where** can they buy it? Online? In stores?
6. **How** can they buy it? Is financing an option? Do you take credit cards? Crypto?

What you're doing by clearly answering these 6 questions is transforming your business into a

newsworthy story. The more newsworthy your business is, the more powerful your advertising will become, and the less you'll need to spend on advertising in the first place.

As an insurgent, you're in the business of *capturing* attention and *converting* that attention into loyal ~~followers~~ customers.

1. Who

“Who’s there?”, opens *Hamlet*. Perhaps the most direct and simple opening line in all of literature, and also a great question for all marketers to ask.

Who is your product for? Don't say “everybody”. Insurgents lose the “everybody” game every single time. “Everybody” is a game for big companies who have the resources to please such a vast audience. You need to focus your resources on those you can most likely win over.

In other words, start with the low-hanging fruit. You can go after the high-hangers when you've become a giant yourself.

Most marketers think of “who” in terms of demographics: Age, gender, income, occupation, geography... that sort of thing.

A more important question is what do your customers have in common?

Your homework assignment:

- Are your customers looking for entry-level, mid-range, or top-of-the-line?
- What stage of life are they in?
- Are you focused on new or returning customers?
- Do your customers have any shared interests? Ex: If you’re selling BBQs, they likely enjoy cooking meat.
- Do those shared interests have any niche publications? Ex: Cooking shows and magazines.
- Do those shared interests have any popular events or occasions? Ex: Kitchen, renovation, and backyard trade shows.
- Do your customers have any shared problems or concerns? Ex: Propane costs, safety, general aesthetics.

- Do your customers have any shared values? Ex: Family time, sustainable farming, political views, etc.
- Do your customers have any shared fears? Ex: Fear of missing out, economic fears, fears of being alone, fear of other people, etc.

What you're doing by answering these questions is painting a picture of who your most loyal future customers might be. The more you have in common with them, the more they will see you as an ally in their lives.

We *need* products that solve problems in our lives. But what we *want* is to belong, to feel connected.

2. What

You probably sell more than one product or service. But what is it that you do better than anyone else in the world?

As Seth Godin writes in *The Dip*,

Anyone who is going to hire you, buy from you, recommend you, vote for you, or do what you

want them to do is going to wonder if you're the best choice.

“Best” as in “best for them, right now, based on what they believe and what they know.” And “in the world” as in “their world, the world they have access to.”

So “world” is a pretty flexible term.

First, define your micro-market or niche. This was step one, “Who”.

For that market, what do you have to offer that is better than any other competing offer?

Be honest with yourself. If you're not the best in your market, you have three options:

1. Accept mediocrity. This is the default.
2. Get better. Figure out what you need to do to be better than anyone else for solving a specific need in the market. Or,
3. Narrow the definition of your market until you find a niche that you can serve better than anyone else.

Narrowing your market doesn't mean turning down business, by the way. There may be good reasons to turn down business opportunities, but that's not inherently a marketing decision. That's a question of opportunity loss.

Narrowing your market simply means focusing on who you're chasing the most.

- When Apple began its big turn around under Steve Jobs, they targeted designers and developers. This seemed odd at the time, as that was an awfully small market. But by focusing on this core yet influential market, they became #1 for designers and developers. Turns out those are the people that the rest of the market turns to for computer advice.
- Nike famously markets to athletes. They make most of their money on couch potatoes like me.
- Ford almost exclusively markets the F-150. They make a full line-up of vehicles, but the F-150 is where they pour most of their marketing budget. Not only is it a bestseller, but it sells the idea that

Ford = raw power, which increases the appeal of the rest of their line-up.

I could go on. In fact, I will:

- Amazon sacrifices everything in the name of having the widest selection of products available via the fastest shipping for online shopping.
- Walmart sacrifices everything in the name of low prices on the widest selection for in-person shopping.
- Facebook sacrifices everything in the name of keeping your friends and family on Facebook. As long as they're there, they know you will be too. And most people only have room for one or two social networks in their day-to-day life.

Being #1 is so beneficial that it should be pursued at all costs. Becoming #1 usually means doing something impossible, improbable, inconvenient, or otherwise inconceivable. It usually means figuring out how to do something that no one else is willing to do.

But here's the point: Once you know *what* you do better than anyone else in the world, your job as a marketer is to simply let people know.

Marketing is only difficult when you're selling an inferior product. But if you're genuinely offering the best solution, people will buy it in droves. (Assuming there are droves of people with that problem.)

Your homework assignment:

1. **What problems do you solve?** List them all. Ex: If you're a realtor, the list might include finding a home, trusting your realtor, working with a lawyer, working with a bank, finding financing, etc.
2. **What other options do your customers have for solving those problems?** Ex: Other realtors, using a "sold by the owner" service, choosing to rent instead.
3. **Which of those problems do you solve better than anyone?** Ex: Through constant community outreach and service, I've become the most trusted realtor, as ranked by Local Town Paper.

4. **If you're not currently #1 at anything, what can you do to change that?** Ex: Make waves by transparently sharing what you earn as a realtor.

3. Why

In a now famous TED talk, Simon Sinek talked about finding a company's why.



Almost every company knows *what* they do. Good companies are pretty clear about *how* they're doing it. But great companies understand *why* they're doing it in the first place, and make that the core of their story.

Sinek gives everyone's favorite example, Apple, for illustration:

- What they sell is computers and tablets and phones.
- How they make them is by focusing on human-centric design.
- Why they do it is to make technology accessible to everyone (and make money).

When you tell it in reverse, it's a powerful story: Apple believes in making technology easy to use for everyone (a common pain point). They make it happen through the use of human-centric design and heavy investment in R&D (a believable story on how they solve the problem). This allows them to make products that people love and feel empower their lives for the better (something almost everyone wants).

Imagine the opposite. Imagine, oh, I don't know, Lenovo. What do they believe in? What is their why? They make computers, but what is their philosophy? As best as I can tell, they exist to sell subpar computers at an unsustainably low price. This does not engender confidence.

If you and your customers understand (and agree) on your why, and you're offering a quality product at a price the market can bear, you'll win their loyalty, potentially for life.

Just ask your average Harley rider.

Figuring out your why is one of the most powerful things you can do for your business. It should not be taken lightly.

But an even bigger question is figuring out *your customer's* why. You need alignment between your purpose and those of your customers.

A useful exercise for figuring this out is to think about archetypes. First popularized by Joseph Campbell in his classic, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, archetypes are broad generalizations that tend to resonate deeply within us. Almost all successful stories, whether by intention or mere intuition, incorporate these archetypes into their story.

As an insurgent, your job is to tell powerful and, frankly, romantic stories that connect your products with your customers.

1. **The Magician:** These customers like to think of themselves as visionary, charismatic, forward-thinkers. Their “why” is the need to be on the cutting edge. Ex: Tesla.
2. **The Hero:** These customers like to think of themselves as bold, inspirational, courageous, and strong. Their “why” is personal excellence. Ex: Nike.
3. **The Creator:** These customers are creative, imaginative, and artistic problem solvers. Their “why” is big ideas. Ex: Apple.

These first 3 archetypes share one common trait: They all serve the **ego**.

4. **The Explorer:** These customers like to think of themselves as adventurous risk-takers. Their “why” is thrill-seeking. Ex: Patagonia.
5. **The Outlaw:** Every insurgent’s favourite archetype, these customers primarily think of themselves as rebellious, revolutionary, even anarchistic. Their “why” is freedom. Ex: Harley-Davidson.

6. **The Jester:** These customers love humour, mischief, and wit. Irony plays strongly. Their “why” is not taking life too seriously and having fun. Ex: Old Spice.

These 3 archetypes share a devotion to **freedom** above all else.

7. **The Lover:** Romantic, passionate, committed, these customers will do anything for love, and will pay a premium for it as well. Their “why” is another person, real or imagined. Ex: Dior.
8. **The Caregiver:** Compassionate, generous, empathetic, these customers would gladly give someone in need the shirt off their backs. Their “why” is social justice. Ex: Habitat For Humanity.
9. **The Everyman:** Family oriented, hard working, down to earth. These customers believe in the simple things, like the joy of a well mowed lawn. Their “why” is being self-sufficient. Ex: Home Depot.

What do these 3 archetypes have in common? They're all outwardly directed. They're focused on society and their role within it.

- 10. The Innocent:** Playful, youthful, optimistic. The world hasn't beaten them down yet. The younger a customer is, the more likely they are to have retained their innocence. Their "why" is just having fun while you can. Ex: Nintendo.
- 11. The Ruler:** This customer sees themselves as being responsible above all. They take ownership and they take charge. They appreciate order and consistency. Their "why" is power – be it for its own sake or to implement the change they feel is necessary in the world. Ex: Rolex.
- 12. The Sage:** These are your thought leaders. They love to think deeply and share their wisdom. They're supportive, often have a strong position on spirituality and/or religion, but ultimately just want to help people by showing them a better way to live. Their "why" is being perceived as wise, as someone people turn to for advice. Ex: TED Talks.

These last 3 archetypes are said to be concerned with the order of society. They have big ideas about how society should be, and resonate with others who share those views.

The important thing is to figure out which archetype resonates most with your customer base, and aligning yourself with that. A lot of this is common sense: You wouldn't promote a motorcycle to the Innocent archetype. You wouldn't promote jewellery or perfume to The Everyman.

Most of us, of course, are not 100% stereotypes. Reading that list above, you probably found yourself nodding along to some, and scratching your head on others.

But what's most helpful about thinking in archetypes is that it makes it easier to be consistently YOU. When you know which archetype fits best, you have a clear and simple idea of who both you and your customers are. The closer you stick to an archetype, the stronger your brand will resonate with your customers. Like attracts like.

The brilliance in focusing on a single archetype is that it allows you to appeal to a wider array of people. This may be surprising. I just listed 12 archetypes and told you to pick one. Wouldn't that cut your potential market so that you're only appealing to 1/12th of the population?

No! Not at all. Again, almost everyone identifies with multiple archetypes. One person might identify with the Hero, the Explorer, and the Sage, for example. Another person might identify with the Creator, the Explorer, and the Ruler. These two people would be very different, but they overlap with the Explorer. If you focused on the Explorer archetype, you would appeal to them both.

Your homework assignment:

1. Which of the archetypes appeal to you?
2. Which archetypes do you feel would appeal to your customers?
3. Which archetype overlaps the most between yourself and your customers?
4. Are you ready to fully embrace and embody that archetype?

4. When

The only resource more scarce than money is time. You can never get more of it, and you never know when you're going to run out.

That's why timing can make or break your sales.

Imagine two scenarios:

1. You have a product the customer wants, and it's available 24/7/365.
2. You have a product the customer wants, but it's only available for one week out of the year.

Both scenarios have their strengths!

In the first scenario, you can potentially sell this great product all year long. But the downside is there's no pressure to buy now. You risk your product being continuously something the customer wants but doesn't pull the trigger on, because they can always get it later.

In the second scenario, you only have one week of the year to make your sales. But your customers have a big

motivation to buy from you NOW, because time is running out. You'll almost definitely sell more this week than you would have any other week – probably several times more – but not as much as you could have sold all year long.

What's to be done?

Meh.com has mastered the game by offering a different good every single day, but it's only available that day. You never know what it's going to be. But every day, they have a new product available for sale at a large discount, and nearly every day, they sell out.

The advertisement features a dark green background. At the top left is the 'meh.' logo with the tagline 'daily deals & community for the cynical consumer'. At the top right is a question mark icon with the text 'what is meh?'. The central focus is two cans of Celsius energy drinks: 'CELSIUS SPARKLING CUCUMBER LIME' and 'CELSIUS HEAT'. To the right of the cans is the headline 'Behold: A Fourth Choice' in large white text. Below the headline is a paragraph of text: 'Everybody knows the heavy hitters in the energy drink game—the holy trinity of street legal consumer-grade methamphetamine substitutes. The one with the wings. The one with the claws. The one you mixed with vodka that time before stealing a police van.' Below this is another paragraph: 'Well, the stuff that can get you banned from athletic competition in several Scandinavian countries also happens to be the performance-enhancing drug of choice for America's long-haul truckers, second-shift telemarketers, and 20-something degenerates.' At the bottom left, there is a progress indicator (a row of 12 circles, with the first one filled) and the text 'CUCUMBER LIME \$76 FOR 24 AT AMAZON' and 'MANGO TANGO \$57 FOR 24 AT AMAZON'. At the bottom center, there is a white rounded rectangle containing the text '24 for \$24 BUY IT'. At the bottom right, there is a circular logo with the text 'meh.'.

The product they happened to be selling on March 14, 2023.

A more common approach is to have both evergreen products that are available all year round, as well as products or special offers that are only available for a short period of time.

Guilty Pleasures Bakeshop, whose owner I interview later in this book, plays this game by having custom pastry orders available all year long, and also offering seasonal hits that you can only get for a short period of the year. One such product is their valentines cookies:



Famously also available with vulgar expressions.

Let your imagination run wild.

These cookies sell in droves every year, having become an annual event to look forward to. The fear of missing out is real, because once they're gone, you have to wait a whole year for your next shot.

If you don't have a product you can offer for a limited time, you can make special offers instead:

- Christmas sale, only available leading up to December 24.
- New Years Resolution sale, only available in January.
- Valentine's Day sale, only available leading up to February 14.
- March Break sale, only available during March Break.

Etc.

But if all you're doing is offering discounts, you're just like everybody else. Get creative!

Adoro Olive Oils and Vinegars⁶, for example, starting offering a subscription box in the lead up to the holiday season. They only take orders for a limited time. Of

⁶ Available at <https://adorooilsandvinegars.ca/>

course, you can buy oils and vinegars from them all year long. But the subscription boxes make excellent gifts, and by only offering them for a limited time, people look forward to the annual opportunity to gift a subscription to their loved ones.

Your homework assignment:

1. How can you make your offerings more special by adding a limited time component?
2. Can you package multiple offers together into a theme?
3. Can you associate a limited-time offer with an annual occasion?
4. Do you have any fringe offerings that you'd be willing to stop selling year-round, in order to increase demand during specific windows of time?

5. Where

As my realtor friends like to say: Location, location, location.

At its simplest, you want to do business where your customers live:

- It could be a storefront on a busy road.
- It could be a kiosk at a key location that your particular customers tend to visit.
- It could be selling on Amazon, if that's where your customers are likely to look for your kind of product.
- Maybe you can run your business from home, as long as you have a strong online and social media presence.
- It could be a particularly effective 1-800 number, such as 1-800-FLOWERS⁷. Easy to remember, easy to promote.
- It could be a flyer left on their windshields at the office or where they shop.

⁷ Can you guess their website URL? <https://www.1800flowers.com/>

- Maybe you can reach them on the right social network, such as LinkedIn if your customer base tends to the more professional and affluent.
- Maybe there's a cost-effective billboard you could install on a busy highway, such as by asking a property owner for permission to install one on their adjacent property for a few hundred bucks. (You'd be surprised how often the answer is "yes".)
- Maybe an allied brand has a newsletter that you could piggy-back onto to reach *their* customers.
- Maybe you need to negotiate shelf space with the right stores to stock your product.

The point is, you need to be discoverable. Whether that's your physical location or your metaphysical location (i.e. website, social media, advertising, etc.), people need to be able to stumble across you somehow.

That's really all there is to it. If they can't find you, you're dead.

Your homework assignment:

1. Where do your customers hang out?

2. Is there a way to reach them there?
3. What about at work?
4. On their commute?
5. At home?
6. Where they shop?
7. Online?
8. Since the answers to questions 2-5 should be “yes” if you get creative enough, the real question is: Which option allows you to reach the most customers for as little money as possible?

6. How

Finally, we get to the most basic of questions: Now that you've reached your customers, identified with them, and convinced them they want or need what you're selling, how do they go about buying it?

In other words, what action does the customer need to take? Always be clear in every communication about what the next step is.

This is commonly known as the Call-to-Action:

- Visit our website: *URL goes here*
- Call now: *Phone number goes here*
- Come in while quantities last: *Address goes here*
- Use coupon code XYZ at checkout: *URL or physical location goes here*

The next step doesn't always have to be the purchase. In fact, for particularly large purchases, that's usually the wrong way to go. Instead, you need to map out your sales process and then encourage the customer to take the next step:

- Fill in this form to lock-in your X% discount and get a call from one of our sales people.
- Order your copy of our catalogue by phone at *Phone Number* or visiting us online at *Website URL*.
- Call now for your free assessment: *Phone number*.
- Sign up for your free 1-hour consultation: *Website URL*.
- Get a free widget with every purchase when you buy online: *Website URL*.

Notice that you can increase the customer's willingness to act by adding additional incentives to do so. It could be a discount, a free offer, a bonus offer tied to the sale... the list goes on and the only limit is your imagination.

But if you don't *ask* for the sale, don't be surprised when people don't buy.

Your homework assignment:

1. Map out your sales process. How many steps does it take for someone to typically buy? Is it an

impulse purchase? Or do they need to be walked through it?

2. For each step in your process, work out a communication plan. This doesn't have to be complicated, but you need to understand what would motivate your customer to take the next step. If you're not getting the sales you want, but you believe you have a quality product that solves a real need at a fair price, then you probably have a communications problem. By defining your process, you can zone in on one where the problem is happening. Maybe lots of people want what you're selling, but it's too difficult to figure out how to buy. (This is a surprisingly common issue.)

Example

Brand Dr. Eye Saur, Optometrist	
Who	Primarily youth and older adults who are already patients . They read and watch screens a lot. Many are heavy social media users . Many enjoy sporting events and concerts , but it's hard to see the action. They value looking good , comfort , and durability . Most share a fear of looking unattractive .
What	<p>Since it's easier than ever to buy glasses online from overseas, the doctor focuses on what websites can't replace: Expert advice.</p> <p>Although the doctor technically sells optometry and eye wear, what she decides to focus on promoting is the quality of the service.</p> <p>She settles on the Look Good Guarantee: Her team of optometrists <i>and stylists</i> will guarantee that not only do you have good vision, you'll look good too. If you're not satisfied with your look within the first 30 days of receiving your glasses, exchange</p>

Brand	Dr. Eye Saur, Optometrist
	them for free.
Why	Having identified what she can offer better than her competitors (a Look Good Guarantee), her why becomes almost obvious: She believes everyone deserves eye wear custom selected just for them. Stop buying generic eye wear that doesn't do any justice to either your vision or your style.
When	To expand her customer base as well as be a little more egalitarian, on a first-come-first-serve basis, on the first Monday of every month, eye exams are free . This becomes a feel-good story that gets the optometry loads of attention from earned media . By limiting this offer to one day a month, she actually increases the perceived value of her services while giving them away: If people are willing to line-up for the free service, how much will people pay to skip the lineups and have a timely appointment with no waiting whatsoever?
Where	In order to be seen and also increase her

Brand**Dr. Eye Saur, Optometrist**

perceived expertise, Dr. Eye Saur leases an office in a well-trafficked medical office building. This has the added benefit of reducing her leasing costs, as she doesn't need to pay for a street-level store front.

In addition, she creates a simple and easy to use website focused on her services. She opts NOT to list her inventory of glasses, because that would encourage people to compare her to online vendors like Zenni, which she can't compete with on price. Instead, the website focuses on her message about allowing a team of optometrists and stylists help to create your new look.

To drive that message home, she hires a photographer to take headshots of some of her customers who are willing to give a testimonial about why they picked Dr. Eye Saur as their optometrist of choice, and lists these in a beautiful gallery on her website.

While her competitors are selling glasses, she's selling customers on themselves.

Brand	Dr. Eye Saur, Optometrist
	<p>Although her time is limited, she also creates an Instagram account to feature her customers’ photos and build an audience she can market to for free moving forward.</p>
How	<p>In order to live up to her promise of not needing to wait to see the doctor, she makes appointments mandatory and allows for 30 minutes per appointment – more than enough for a standard appointment.</p> <p>To support this, while people can of course call to make an appointment, she promotes visiting her website to fill-in an in-take form.</p> <p>Her call-to-action? “Skip the wait. Book your appointment online for the fastest in-and-out optometry appointment of your life: <i>Website URL</i>.”</p>
Sample Message	<p style="text-align: center;">Get the Look Good Guarantee™.</p>

Brand

Dr. Eye Saur, Optometrist

At Eye Saur Optometry, we guarantee you're going to love your look. We're so confident in our team of optometrists and stylists that if you're unsatisfied with your new eyewear, exchange it within 30 days for a free new pair of glasses, no questions asks.

To book your no-wait appointment, visit eyesauptical.com.

Eye Saur Optometry

123 ABC Street, AnyTown

P.S. Are your funds a little tight? Appointments on the first Monday of every month are FREE on a first-come first-served basis. Doors open at 8am.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Start with “Free”

First, Be Remarkable

In the previous section, we defined your business as a story: who, what, why, when, where, and how. I asked you to think like a war correspondent.

In this chapter, this is where that work pays off.

Communication is a marketer’s #1 job. If no one is paying attention, nothing else matters.

At the risk of oversimplifying things, there are two broad categories of ways to get attention:

1. You can earn it.
2. You can pay for it.

When you’ve earned the attention, this is known as *earned media* or *organic content*. Basically, you’ve put something out into the world that people find so fascinating that they have to share it with their friends and family.

When you've really knocked it out of the park, that's called *viral* content. It spreads without any additional effort on your part.

When your content doesn't spread on its own, you can pay for it to spread. This is known as advertising.

That's all there is to it. You can earn attention or you can pay for attention. Earning it is better, because it doesn't cost you anything other than your time. But it's also much harder to do.

The goal in this chapter is to talk about how you can earn it.

If you've done the work to make your business a remarkable story, you shouldn't have to pay for much attention. Many insurgent marketers are able to avoid ever incurring any advertising cost at all.

But first you need to be remarkable.

Pre-requisite homework:

1. Go back to the previous section, *Think Like a War Correspondent*, and ask yourself if your story is remarkable yet.

2. If not, ask yourself if there's anything you can change in your story that would make you remarkable. For example:
 - a. Perhaps you can change *who* you're targeting to a specific group that doesn't get enough attention.
 - b. Perhaps you can change *what* you're offering to something new that's never been done before.
 - c. Perhaps you can change *why* you've chosen to be in your particular field, aligning yourself with a cause that's near and dear to your heart.
 - d. Perhaps you can change *when* a product is available, to introduce a time-bound scarcity to what you're offering.
 - e. Perhaps you can change *where* the product will be available, selling in an unusual location.
 - f. Perhaps you can change *how* you make or sell the product, so that people might talk about how convenient or unconventional your offering is.

Whatever you do, do *not* proceed until you have a story worth telling. If your business sounds like every one of your competitors, stop. Start over.

Insurgents can't afford to be boring or run-of-the-mill.

If you want to get noticed, first, be remarkable.

Pick a Fight

There's a reason the news media tends to be filled with gloom and doom rather than a lot of positive and uplifting stories: people are attracted to conflict.

Without conflict, there is no story.

Even in a love story, we need conflict in order to become involved:

- In *Romeo & Juliet*, the conflict is that their families are in a literal war against each other.
- In *When Harry Met Sally*, the conflict is whether they can “just be friends”.
- In *Beauty & the Beast*, the conflict is two-fold: Can she learn to love a beast, and can society accept their love?

Without conflict, there is no story.

In business, the easiest and most obvious conflict is between you and your competition. Some brands have played this to magnificent results:

Avis is only No.2 in rent a cars. So why go with us?



**We try harder.
(When you're not the biggest,
you have to.)**

**We just can't afford dirty ash-
trays. Or half-empty gas tanks. Or
worn wipers. Or unwashed cars.
Or low tires. Or anything less than
seat-adjusters that adjust. Heaters that heat. Defrost-
ers that defrost.**

**Obviously, the thing we try hardest for is just to be
nice. To start you out right with a new car, like a lively,
super-torque Ford, and a pleasant smile. To know, say,
where you get a good pastrami sandwich in Duluth.**

Why?

Because we can't afford to take you for granted.

Go with us next time.

The line at our counter is shorter.

© 1962 Avis Rent A Car System, Inc.

Avis advertising campaign from 1962.

Avis famously became a top rental company by directly attacking their competition, claiming to “try harder” because they were only No. 2. (Fun fact, they were nowhere near the number two spot when they started this campaign.)

Without saying that Hertz was a bad company, they implied an awful lot:

- Dirty ashtrays
- Half-empty gas tanks
- Worn wipers
- Unwashed cars
- Low tires
- Seat adjusters that don't adjust
- Heaters that don't heat
- Defrosters that don't defrost

I have no idea if Hertz was guilty of any of that, and neither did anyone else. And technically, Avis never claimed Hertz was guilty of any of that. But they sure as heck implied it.

The result? Avis saw their annual growth jump from 10% to 35%.



Wendy's Where's the Beef campaign, 1984.

Wendy's famously took aim at other fast food chains, McDonald's in particular, by asking "Where's the beef?", implying their competitors were stingy when it came to their meat.

Of course, it was all tongue-in-cheek and exaggerated, but it got people to notice how little meat was in their competitors burgers compared to the size of the "fluffy" bun. The phrase became an instant sensation, what we would today call viral, and remains well known today, nearly 40 years later at the time of this writing.

The result? A 31% increase in sales in their first year alone.



Get a Mac campaign, 2006-2009.

In the famous Get a Mac campaign, better known as Mac vs. PC, Apple portrayed their competitor as stodgy, uptight, humorless, and no fun.

Of course, a moment of critical thinking would tell you that you can do anything you can with a Mac just as well on a PC. Indeed, at the time, there was plenty a PC could do that a Mac could not.

But it *felt* true.

The result? A 39% increase in sales in 2006 alone, and arguably the beginning of one of the greatest business turn-arounds of all time.

Now, you may have noticed, all three of those are advertising campaigns. So why am I bringing them in a section on *earned* media?

Because although they started as ads, they became massive sensations and got far more attention in the press and in water-cooler conversations than they ever did as actual ads.

Here's an even bigger example, with apologies for using Apple twice:



*Apple's famous 1984 campaign ad.*⁸

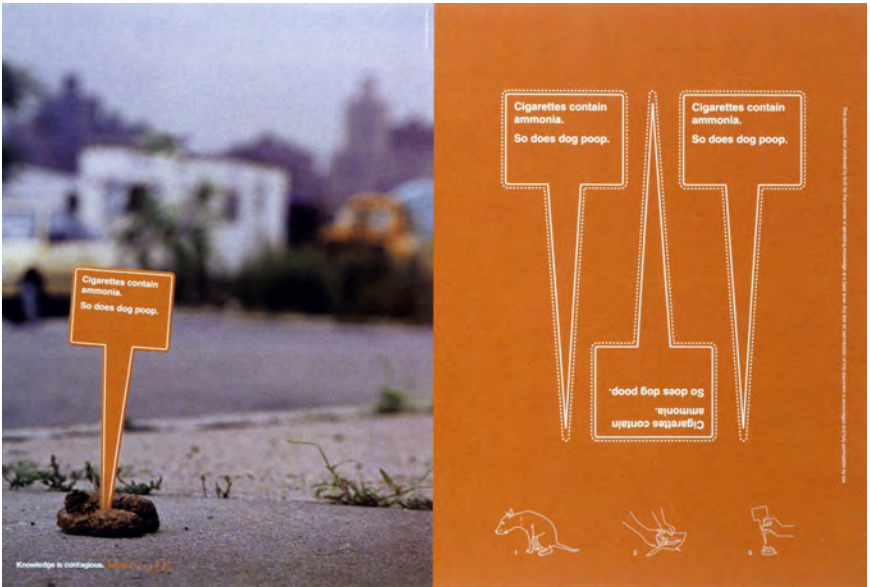
⁸ See it on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/41Xseyq>

You've almost certainly seen or at least heard of this ad. It premiered at the 1984 SuperBowl and took direct aim at their biggest competitor at the time, IBM. It implied that IBM was like Big Brother from George Orwell's 1984, and that Apple was the ultimate rebel.

What you may not know is that this ad ran only once, and the Apple board was opposed to running it at all. They thought it was far too expensive. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, Apple's original co-founders, put up the money themselves.

Unless you were watching the Superbowl, the only way you knew about this ad was because of all the earned media surrounding it. It was a sensation, with countless news stories about it, and is widely credited (or criticized) as having kicked off the now-annual tradition of massive Superbowl ads.

The result for Apple was \$3.5 million worth of Macs sold immediately following the commercial, and turned the original Mac into a massive commercial hit at a time when owning a computer was still viewed as the exclusive domain of nerds and stock traders.



Anti-smoking stunt by CP+B

This clever guerilla marketing campaign associated smoking with dog poop, by encouraging youth to print and cut-out these inserts to stick into dog poop on side walks.

The point? Even if you're going to pay to get attention, it better be remarkable.

Today, it's both easier to put your content out there, and harder to get noticed, because everyone is a content creator today.

So make it easier on yourself. Pick a fight. People are attracted to conflict like moths to a flame. We can't help it.

Don't believe me? Let's take a look at a brand with no marketing or advertising department whatsoever: Tesla.

Pick a Cause

Tesla is famously led by Elon Musk, who also runs Space X, recently purchased Twitter, and was a co-founder of PayPal. Musk famously doesn't believe in marketing.

Which is bullshit. He absolutely believes in marketing. He believes in it so much that he himself is the marketing machine behind these brands.

Love him or hate him, hardly a day goes by without him being written up in some major publication or making an appearance on some production or another. He's fully embraced the idea that there's no such thing as bad publicity.

To be clear, this is a risky route to take.

For a while, his approach led to a public persona as the closest thing to a real-life Tony Stark (Iron Man) that the real world had to offer: a counter-culture billionaire genius who routinely does what others say is impossible. Today, he's facing tremendous backlash for the way he's handled his purchase and ownership of

Twitter. But if I had to guess, I'd say he's going to come out on top before everything is said and done.

For decades, the electric car was derided as being unrealistic and unachievable, a pipe dream for eco-warriors everywhere. So the story goes: Musk looked at the science and decided everyone was full of it, and decided to prove it for himself.

In this version of the story, Tesla is leading the effort towards sustainable transportation and a key player in keeping this planet habitable.

The real story is that Tesla already existed and had already proven the technology. Elon invested in the company and immediately took credit. But that's not as interesting of a story.

Elon Musk, for all of his problems – and he definitely has problems – understands the value of a good story.

As a result, not only is Tesla valued at over 50X their earnings (!) at the time of this writing, but every major car manufacturer is now in the process of offering at least one electric vehicle, and most are working towards replacing their entire lineup with electric vehicles.

When you have a great story to tell, and that story touches on a common concern (like climate change), you don't have to work so hard to find people who want to hear it. We're already looking for a hero, and Elon positioned himself and Tesla to be that unlikely hero.

But maybe that was a lucky stroke, right? Surely, he couldn't pull this off twice?

Wrong!

Take a look at Space X. Arguably, Space X both touches on the same fear as Tesla and also makes the problem worse.

For those who believe the planet can be saved, Elon and Tesla are the heroes for giving us a way forward. (Again, I don't care if you believe that, only that this is the story and that the story has legs.)

For those who believe this planet is doomed, Elon and Space X are the heroes for giving us a way to get off this planet and colonize others. Never mind that most scientists would tell you it would be infinitely easier to reverse climate change than it would be to terraform

another planet. Space X is moving ahead and have arguably surpassed NASA as the most important player in space exploration.

In both Tesla and Space X's case, they tell a compelling story that allows them to play the role of being the heroes we need.

Again, for our purposes, it doesn't matter whether you buy their story or not. Many people do, and as insurgents, that's what we need to pay attention to.

Telling Your Story

So you've figured out your story. You've ensured it's remarkable. The next step is to tell someone.

Before you start preaching to the heavens, try your story out on a few people first. How do they respond?

1. The best response is that they're excited about your story and want to buy-in. You want them to voluntarily ask how they can purchase what you're selling *today*.
2. The second best response is that they hate your story. As long as there are more people who like your story than hate it, hate can work in your favour. People who are opposed to you strongly enough to talk about it are still magnifying the attention you receive.
3. The worst response, and the most common, is that they don't really care much either way.

Once you've tried your story on friends and family and have it tuned in so that most people either love or hate the idea, and only a minority feel tepid about it, it's time to start poking the bear.

Get Social: Pick a Platform

In the beginning, if you're following my advice, you're the one doing all of the marketing work. You're not spending on advertising yet and you've definitely not passed on the work to an underling. Own it until your business is too big to handle the marketing yourself.

Pick a social network and start promoting your ideas:

1. Facebook is generally a safe bet. Most people still use it heavily.
2. LinkedIn is better if your target audience skews professional. People don't use it as often, but there's also a lot less content to compete with.
3. Twitter is great if your target audience isn't local. Content on Twitter tends to spread further. (At the time of this writing, Mastodon has started to take off as a real Twitter competitor, largely in response to Elon's purchase of Twitter. It's too soon to say which will win, or if there will be room for both.)
4. YouTube is phenomenal if you're comfortable creating video content. Note that there's more

work involved in doing this well. But countless creators have found success going this route.

5. Instagram and TikTok are both great for getting large amounts of attention, and largely hit the same demographics. But the inability to include a link directly in each post makes it much harder to convert that attention into sales.

Of course, there are many other social platforms to consider, like Snapchat, Discord, Reddit, etc. But I'd recommend one of the ones from the list above as a starting point.

Eventually, as you grow, you may get to the point where you can justify hiring full-time marketing staff to create and push content on multiple platforms. But in the beginning, if you're following my advice, it's just you, and you have a business to run. So pick one platform to focus on⁹.

Once you've picked a platform, the usual advice is to follow a lot of successful people and copy what they're

⁹ There are tools out there that will allow you to repost your content on multiple platforms, and I highly recommend them. It's outside of the scope of this book to show you how to use them, but be sure to optimize your content for your most valuable and targeted platform first. Treat the others as bonus platforms.

doing. I don't like copying, because that's unremarkable.

Instead, I suggest trying a wide array of things and seeing what sticks. Sure, try some of the ideas you see others doing, but give it your own spin. Make it yours. Make it original.

Do it every day, and don't be discouraged when any given post doesn't knock it out of the park. If you do this daily, you'll quickly discover what connects with your chosen audience.

Start a Newsletter

There are few tactics that I would recommend for everyone. Most tactics need to be decided on with care, to figure out what aligns with both your interests and those of your customers.

Not so when it comes to an email newsletter.

The benefits of newsletters are so profound, and the costs so little, that if you don't have one, you should make creating one your absolute top priority.

In the beginning, the benefits are slow. That's because you have no subscribers at first. So it'll feel like you're writing to no one at all. That's ok.

Over time, as long as you make it easy for people to know about and sign up for your newsletter, you'll find your subscribers to be the best customers you could ever hope for. After all, they care enough about what you're selling that they're willing to let you fill up their inbox with potentially more spam.

Here's a statistic that should jolt you out of your seat: **As of 2020, email marketing has a return on investment (ROI) of \$35.41 for every \$1 spent¹⁰.**

Can you name *anything* else that has an ROI of 35X? If I gave you a machine that magically multiplied \$1 into \$35 everytime you used it, would you bother doing anything else?

There's a catch, though. The reason email marketing has such a large ROI is that it costs almost nothing to send an email. For example, an "essentials" package with Mailchimp allows you to send up to 5,000 emails

¹⁰ Source: The Data & Marketing Association: <https://bit.ly/3ohr3MD>

per month for just \$18.02USD. That's \$0.00364 per email. (You can also send up to 1,000 emails per month for free, resulting in a technically infinite ROI.)

In the beginning, when you have almost no subscribers, you're putting in an awful lot of effort to talk to almost nobody. But over time, as your list grows, the effort required does not. It takes just as much effort to email 1 person as it does 5,000 or 50,000.

So start a newsletter, and include the sign-up form on your homepage.

Gather Social Proof

If there's one thing all marketers agree on, from insurgents to big businesses alike, it's this: Nothing sells like social proof.

Testimonials and customer reviews will do more for your business than literally anything else in this or any other marketing book.

The reason is simple and obvious: You're not a trustworthy person on the topic of you. You can't be objective about yourself. So anything you say is immediately circumspect.

However, a customer has no reason to say good things about you other than if they're genuinely and remarkably pleased with you.

Social proof is also the easiest marketing idea in the world to embrace:

1. **Wow your customers by consistently meeting their expectations.** Make promises and deliver on them. Never promise more than you can deliver. Err on the side of overdelivering

on your promises. Do so consistently and you'll win over the hardest of hearts.

2. **Ask for the review.** Encourage your customers to leave honest reviews on sites like Google and Yelp. If you're wowing them, the positive reviews should far outweigh the negatives.
3. **Ask your most positive reviewers for a testimonial.** When you see someone has really taken the time to write a thoughtful and positive review about you, there's no harm in asking if they'd be willing to go on camera and say a few words about you. Edit a few of these together and you have a testimonials reel for your website.

That's all there is to it.

One word of caution, however: do not incentivize people to leave positive reviews. As soon as people discover you're incentivizing your reviews, they will immediately stop trusting all of them. It won't matter if the majority of the reviews were "legitimate", they will all be dismissed as inauthentic. Good luck getting yourself out of that corner.

Tickling the Muse: Creativity on Demand

“The most powerful element in advertising is the truth. Rules are what the artist breaks; the memorable never emerged from a formula.”

– Bill Bernbach

“Tell the truth, but make the truth fascinating. You cannot bore the consumer into buying your product, you can only interest her into buying it.”

– David Ogilvy

The most powerful ideas in the world are truths told in a provocative way.

When Gandhi wanted to pressure the British to leave, his big idea was that Indians should be self-sufficient and avoid imported goods. He symbolized this with the spinning wheel, by both personally spinning all of his own cloth, and by recommending it as the national symbol.

When Martin Luther King Jr. wanted to capture the American public's attention, he knew he needed a symbol for the brutality being faced by black Americans¹¹. He found two powerful symbols in Rosa Parks and the attack on a 17-year-old boy by police dogs in Birmingham, Alabama.

Symbols embody ideas, and ideas are the only thing in the world that will get a person to act against their own self-interest.

For example, some people believe in paying taxes. They may have a problem with how those taxes are used, but they believe in paying for social services, even when they're not directly benefiting from them. Some might call this a socialist idea.

Inversely, a Libertarian might reject the very same social services that they'd benefit from on the principle that if they're opposed to paying it for others, they should be opposed to allowing others to pay it for them.

¹¹ I used the term "black Americans" instead of "African Americans", because not all black Americans originated from Africa. A truth symbolized by Malcom X when he chose his last name, to represent the fact that the descendants of slavery generally have no idea where their ancestors came from.

In both cases, idealism prevails. They're willing to go against their naked self-interest in order to adhere to their beliefs. They're just very different beliefs.

Ideas and symbols can also unite one group while alienating others.

As a rather dark but powerful example, during World War II, the so-called Axis of Evil (a symbol created by the Allies) all used nationalist symbols to whip up support from their populations: the Nazis embraced the swastika (previously a good luck charm), the Fascists embraced the fasces (a bundle of sticks with an axe, representing strength through unity), and Japan embraced the Emperor himself.

By contrast, the Allies embraced symbols like Rosie the Riveter to represent the basic idea of freedom itself.

Your job as an insurgent is to first know who you want to align yourself with, and then find an idea that resonates with them. If you've been following along and doing your homework, you should be able to find an idea that resonates strongly with you, and be relatively confident that it will resonate with your

audience, too. You're trying to attract people who are like you.

Let me say that again, because it's really important.

Your job is to connect people who are like one another. This is infinitely easier if you're looking for people like yourself. It makes it natural for you to identify ideas that will resonate with them, because they resonate with you.

Idea Generation

As an insurgent, you don't have the time or resources to appeal to people you don't understand.

Let's go back to our imaginary optometrist, Dr. Eye Saur. In *Think Like a Correspondent*, we ended with a fairly straight-forward message. Here's a refresher:

Get the Look Good Guarantee™.

At Eye Saur Optometry, we guarantee you're going to love your look. We're so confident in our team of optometrists and stylists that if you're unsatisfied

with your new eyewear, exchange it within 30 days for a free new pair of glasses, no questions asks.

To book your no-wait appointment, visit eyesauropical.com.

Eye Saur Optometry
123 ABC Street, AnyTown

P.S. Are your funds a little tight? Appointments on the first Monday of every month are FREE on a first-come first-served basis. Doors open at 8am.

Hopefully you agree that this is a good start. There's only one problem: It's kinda boring.

The key to creativity is to generate a lot of ideas. Don't settle on the first decent one.

The great news is that this is easier than ever today, thanks to advances in artificial intelligence (AI). I used to have a wide array of tricks to help me come up with new ideas. Now, I leverage AI to generate a bunch of ideas, and then I riff on what I'm seeing.

At the time of this writing, AI technology is evolving so quickly that anything I say about it is likely to be obsolete in short order. So I won't go into the nitty

gritty here. Instead, I want to focus, in principle, on how to use these tools to unleash the creative genius within.

First, I asked an AI to generate 3 different versions of the ad above. And I have to say, the results are pretty good right out of the gate:

Attempt #1:

**Say Goodbye to Boring Eyewear
with Eye Saur Optometry**

Looking for eyewear that's both functional and fashionable? Eye Saur Optometry is here to help.

Our team of expert optometrists and stylists work together to create personalized glasses that fit your unique style. And with our Look Good Guarantee, you can feel confident that you'll love your new look. If you're not satisfied with your new glasses within 30 days, exchange them for a free new pair.

Book your appointment now at eyesaueroptical.com.

Attempt #2:

Upgrade Your Vision and Your Style with Eye Saur Optometry

Your vision is important, but so is your sense of style. At Eye Saur Optometry, we believe you shouldn't have to sacrifice one for the other.

That's why we offer personalized eyewear that not only helps you see better, but also makes you look great. And with our Look Good Guarantee, you can be sure that you'll love your new glasses. If not, exchange them within 30 days for a free new pair.

Visit eyesauropoptical.com to book your appointment today.

Attempt #3:

Love Your Look or Get a New Pair - Guaranteed

At Eye Saur Optometry, we don't just want you to see better, we want you to look better too.

Our team of optometrists and stylists work together to create personalized eyewear that fits your unique style. And with our Look Good Guarantee, you can

feel confident that you'll love your new glasses. If you're not completely satisfied within 30 days, exchange them for a free new pair, no questions asked.

Book your appointment now at eyesauptical.com and love your look.

Other than formatting, I made no edits to the examples above.

There are three great uses for this:

1. Generate a bunch of ideas, and pick and choose from those to create ideas of your own.
2. Generate a bunch of ideas to stimulate your own creativity, using what the AI spits out as a mere starting point. In other words, use AI as your brainstorming partner.
3. Generate a bunch of ideas for saying the same thing in different ways, allowing you to create lots of content without boring your audience.

It's important to understand how AI, in general, does what it does. It's a bit of a magic trick, but when you

understand what it's doing, the "gotchas" become much more apparent.

Text-generating AI today uses statistical analysis to predict what it should say next. You may ask yourself: what did it statistically analyze?

AI is trained on all the content you and I create online every day.

In other words, what AI is really great at doing right now is echoing our own voices back to us.

Because of this, you have to watch out for a couple of things:

1. Whatever it spits out has likely been said before, or at least pieces of it were combined from other sources. Plagiarism aside, it pays to say things in ways no one has ever said them before.
2. Do not trust it to give you accurate facts. It's trained on the Internet. Only fools trust everything they read online.
3. The less you ask of it, the more generic the results will be. It needs to be given good prompts to generate good results.

Again, going into what constitutes a “good prompt” is outside of the scope of this book, because any advice I give on this front may be obsolete by the time you read this. But the general principles are likely to hold up for some time.

That’s why I still like to write my first piece of communication on my own, and then feed that into the AI to come up with more ideas.

Qualities of Good Content

As a marketer, the mark of good content isn’t whether you or other people like it. Too often, people judge content on the basis of whether it pleases them. Pleasing people is not the job of good content. Moving them to action is.

This is why I still follow the tried-and-true AIDA method:

- Does it grab your Attention?** If you saw this on your Facebook feed, would it make you stop scrolling for a moment?

- **Does it hold your Interest?** Would you read/listen/watch the entire message, or do you lose interest at some point?
- **Does it increase your Desire for the product?** Assuming your audience “reads” your whole message, do they come away wanting what you’re selling?
- **Does it make it clear what Action is required to get the goods?** In other words, do you ask for the sale? Do you provide a next step – a call-to-action?

As the great Wayne Gretski likes to say: You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take. Likewise, you lose every sale you don’t ask for.

Another incredibly useful framework is PAS:

1. **Problem:** Identify the problem you’re solving. This naturally grabs the attention of anyone with that problem.
2. **Agitation:** Dramatize the problem. Really drive it home with plenty of examples.
3. **Solution:** Slide your product in there like a kind of chalomine lotion.

I like to start with AIDA, and then rework the idea with PAS to help build it out and make sure I'm making the most of the communication.

If this is all starting to sound like an awful lot of work, good. You're paying attention. They say 80% of success is showing up. So show up. Do the work. Most of your competitors won't.

Going Big: Scaling Up for Revolution

All insurgencies start small. In fact, they start as nothing more than an idea. But eventually, you're going to need ammunition. You're going to need cash. The revolution must be funded.

Profits, Profits, Profits

I can't emphasize this point enough: Successful insurgencies need healthy profit margins. You cannot take down the Amazons and Walmarts of the world by competing on price. They won that battle a long time ago.

As a general rule of thumb, if your margins are less than 25%, you're in trouble¹². If your margins are 50% or more, you're on Easy Street.

¹² Ironically, the exception to the rule is software businesses. Software scales so ridiculously well that you can get away with much thinner margins in the beginning. The irony is that software businesses generally have the highest profit margins, or would if they didn't continuously reinvest all of it into more growth.

By focusing on being profitable above all else, you get freedom in return. Profits mean you don't owe anyone a damn thing. You're free to do anything you like, making you far more nimble than your incumbent competition.

According to the founders of 37 Signals, perhaps best known for creating the project management app Basecamp¹³, here are just a few of the benefits of placing profits before growth:

- “No one ever went broke taking a profit.”
- “Profit buys you time and flexibility.”
- “Profit is the ultimate shield against bullshit.” It prevents you from playing games with numbers.
- “Profit protects you from your ego.” It requires you to focus on what matters most today, rather than risk the company chasing tomorrow's growth.
- Profit means, “All we owe is our best effort.” Being profitable and debt-free means you're not beholden to anyone.

¹³ At the time of this writing, their full thoughts can be read here: <https://37signals.com/why-we-choose-profit/>. Should that page ever go down, this archive link should work: <https://archive.is/wip/LEvOO>.

- “\$1 in profit is the ultimate FU money.” When you have any amount of money left over after paying yourself, your employees, your suppliers, and the tax man, you now have true FU money. Where others are willing to sell pieces of themselves for millions, they’re beholden to their lenders and investors. But you, Mr. or Mrs. Profitable, can literally tell them to fuck off, because you’re profitable.
- “Profits provide insulation.” Publicly traded and/or indebted companies live at the mercy of the markets and interest rates. Profitable companies get to ignore all of that.



Further Reading:

Rework

By Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson

If you want an ideas of what an insurgent business looks like beyond marketing, pick up a copy of Rework. You won’t regret it.



Buy on
Amazon¹⁴

¹⁴ Buy it on Amazon: <https://bit.ly/3Mjp16k>

The 20% Budget Rule

Much like personal savings or weight loss, it's easier to build up to a goal than it is to make a massive change in one go. The same applies to the Insurgent Marketer's 20% Budget Rule.

The rule is simple:

Whatever you're earning today, establish that as your baseline. Commit 20% of anything above that baseline to marketing.

20% is steep. I'm not going to lie. Most marketing books suggest 5%. That's cute.

But here's the flipside:

1. "Marketing" is not the same as advertising. Your marketing budget is to be invested in anything that helps you grow your marketshare. More on this later.
2. Your marketing is going to literally fund itself. There's no risk, because you're only taking 20% of anything *new*. On day 1, you'll be spending maybe \$0. When you've made an additional

\$100, you'll be re-investing \$20 of it into marketing. When you've increased your business by \$100,000, you'll be re-investing \$20,000 of it.

3. If 20% sounds like it'll eat into your profit margins too much, you're probably selling a *need* instead of a *want*. Insurgents focus on desire, not needs, for maximum profit margins. For example, if you sell a \$100 widget that costs you \$50 to produce, sell, and deliver, that leaves you with \$10 to reinvest in marketing and \$40 to take out as profit.
4. You'll only be investing in things that have a positive return on investment. In other words, I won't ask you to spend \$20,000 unless it's going to lead to more than \$20,000 in incremental *profit* (not revenue).

Let's illustrate the point with a fictional business owner named Joanie:

At the beginning of Joanie's insurgent journey, her side hustle was earning her \$10,000 a year.

Using the advice in this book, she's increased her earnings to \$20,000 a year without spending any money (just her time), for a \$10,000 increase.

Joanie's products have a 50% profit margin, before taking marketing into account, for a profit of \$10,000.

Joanie keeps 80% (\$8,000) of that profit to either invest in other areas of the business or to give herself a raise. It's her money, after all, and she can do whatever she wants with it.

She then earmarks the other 20% (\$2,000) for marketing.

A year later, her business has doubled again, for a total increase of \$30,000 and a total pre-marketing profit of \$15,000. Her marketing budget is now \$3,000, but it paid for itself. She never had to go into debt or make any risky financial decisions to get here. She just needed the discipline to stick to the plan.

The 2X Rule

You hear a lot about 10X in business these days. Everyone wants to unlock their ability for exponential growth. The irony is that by constantly looking for massive wins, most marketers miss out on all the little wins along the way.

If you can 2X your results 3 times in a row, you'll have increased your results by 800%. 2X it one more time, and you've increased it by 1600%, or 16X. Doesn't that feel both more exciting and more realistic than shooting for 10X right out of the gate?

The Insurgent Marketer's 2X Rule is simple as well:

Never invest in anything unless you're likely to double your money.

Will you always double your money? Of course not. Some of your investments will fail. Others will only increase your money by 50%, or even 25%.

But by adhering to the 2X rule, you eliminate wasting your time chasing overly risky or insufficiently profitable ideas. Your time is limited, and it's your most

valuable asset. Don't waste it chasing 5% gains. That way leads towards damnation.

“When you reach for the stars, you may not quite get them, but you won't come up with a handful of mud either.”

– Leo Burnett, founder of the Leo Burnett Worldwide advertising agency.

Going back to Joanie:

Joanie's marketing budget is now \$3,000/year. It's not a lot, so she has to use it wisely.

She could invest it in a more professionally designed logo, a cutting-edge website, or a splashy radio campaign, but none of these are likely to double her results.

Instead, Joanie takes her budget and allocates \$250 to targeted search ads. Joanie sells a niche product, so she casts her geographic net wide while using her customer database to train Google on who she's trying to reach.

As a result, she gets about 500 clicks per month (at an average cost-per-click of \$0.50), and sells to 5 new customers she wouldn't have had otherwise.

Her average sale is worth \$200, for total new revenue of \$1,000 and a pre-marketing profit of \$500. Subtracting the marketing investment, we get a profit of \$250.

Since Google Ads doubled her money, Joanie continues to increase her investment by earmarking 20% of new profit to the initiative.

Great! Success. But let's continue.

Within a few cycles of reinvestment, Joanie's business has grown to an additional \$250,000 per year, above and beyond what she was earning prior to her insurgent journey. Following the 20% rule, her marketing budget has grown to \$50,000 per year.

Joanie decides to invest \$25,000 in a video ad.

The ads result in an additional 25,000 clicks, and initially, Joanie's excited. However, she realizes that this particular campaign cost her \$1 per click, twice what she was paying through search ads.

With 1% of all clicks leading to a sale, this leads to only \$50,000 in revenue. With a 50% pre-marketing profit margin, Joanie realizes she neither made nor lost money with these ads. They certainly did not double her money, and now her budget has been cut in half. There's no additional profit to draw more marketing dollars from.

Joanie's not discouraged, however, as she knows that this is part of the experimentation process.

She wisely stops running those ads and takes note that it was not an effective channel for her. Next time, she will try something new or invest more in search ads, since those have been working well for her.

What works for you will be different than what works for someone else. Keeping the 2X rule in mind, you can avoid squandering your resources on ineffective marketing or chasing trends.

Keep what works. Throw away what doesn't. Rinse and repeat.

What It Means to Invest in Marketing

I've said a number of times that marketing does not equate to advertising. Advertising is only one form of marketing.

By my definition, marketing is anything that increases your marketshare. So let's take a look at a few ways you can invest in your marketing. And yes, it includes advertising.

Advertising

Let's get the obvious one out of the way first. I *love* advertising. This catches some people by surprise, because I'm always talking about how advertising should be a measure of last resort.

Here's the thing: **Advertising is a results multiplier.**

When you have a great product that people love to buy at a premium price, advertising is almost a no-brainer. It's like printing money.

Let's illustrate:

1. You have a product that sells for \$80 and costs you \$40 to produce, sell, and deliver. Yay! 50% profit margin.
2. Through social media, earned media, and word-of-mouth, you've discovered people really want what you have to sell. What's more, you have the capacity to produce much more than you currently are. The only limit is getting the word out.
3. So you start advertising. Your marketing costs go up, but you find you can sell via advertising and still have \$20 in profit per sale. Although this is less profit per sale, the increase in volume leads to a greater overall profit.

Let me be clear, the above scenario is very optimistic. Advertising is not responsible for the initial 50% profit

margin. You have to do a bunch of other things right in order to achieve that.

But once you achieve it, advertising multiplies your results. Let me illustrate this further.

- In one scenario, you do no advertising. You're able to make an average of 100 sales per month, for \$8,000 in revenue and \$4,000 in profit. At the end of the year, you have \$48,000 in profit. Not bad!
- In the second scenario, you invest 20% of your profits directly into advertising:

	Units sold	Unit Price	Revenue	Profit %	Profits	Re-invested in Ads	Cost per sale via ads
Month 1	100	\$80	\$8,000	50%	\$4,000	\$800	\$40
Month 2	120	\$80	\$9,600	50%	\$4,800	\$960	\$40
Month 3	144	\$80	\$11,520	50%	\$5,760	\$1,152	\$40
Month 4	173	\$80	\$13,824	50%	\$6,912	\$1,382	\$40
Month 5	207	\$80	\$16,589	50%	\$8,294	\$1,659	\$40
Month 6	249	\$80	\$19,907	50%	\$9,953	\$1,991	\$40
Month 7	299	\$80	\$23,888	50%	\$11,944	\$2,389	\$40
Month 8	358	\$80	\$28,665	50%	\$14,333	\$2,867	\$40
Month 9	430	\$80	\$34,399	50%	\$17,199	\$3,440	\$40

Month 10	516	\$80	\$41,278	50%	\$20,639	\$4,128	\$40
Month 11	619	\$80	\$49,534	50%	\$24,767	\$4,953	\$40
Month 12	743	\$80	\$59,441	50%	\$29,720	\$5,944	\$40
TOTAL	3,958	\$80	\$316,644	50%	\$158,322	\$31,664	\$40

On month 1, advertising looks like an expensive proposition. \$40 per sale on an \$80 unit would seem to eat your entire profit margin. But as you're only taking 20% of your profits to reinvest in ads, you're relatively safe.

By the end of the year, however, these modest increases multiplied your sales by nearly 40x, as did your revenue and your profits. In fact, what may have started as a side hustle in January would generate enough income for most people to quit their day jobs and focus on their business full-time.

Advertising is a results multiplier. It does not create success on its own, and it will help a bad product fail faster too.

So before you invest a penny in advertising, make sure the rest of your business is running right, and that your offers are selling at a healthy margin. The math doesn't work if your margins are too thin. Get the business

running efficiently, and then use advertising to speed up your growth.

Whatever you do, do *not* rely on advertising to make you successful in the first place. If your business isn't working, it'll simply work even less when you add advertising to the mix. But once you have everything else dialed in, advertising can be like pouring gas on a fire.

Product Development

It may surprise you to hear that I consider product development part of marketing. Why? Because I consider anything that increases your marketshare to be marketing, and nothing increases marketshare better than a killer product.

One thing you can do with your marketing budget is to invest it in making your products better. It's hard to give generic advice on this front, since I don't know what you're selling and product development will vary wildly depending on what it is.

However, here are a few tips that generally apply:

1. You're not looking to increase the per-unit production cost of your product. Making it better should increase the value of the product without increasing your cost. As a client once said to me: "If I just wanted to make people happy, I could buy them all \$50 steaks."
2. It's perfectly OK to invest in product improvements that go nowhere. You have to be willing to experiment, and many of those experiments will turn out to be duds. Just keep an eye on your costs and make sure you don't spend more than the portion of your marketing budget that you've allotted to this.
3. View product development as an investment that will pay off by increasing the value, or at least the perceived value, of your product. This will allow you to either raise the price and increase your profit margin, or increase your marketshare by selling your product at substantially less than the perceived value.
4. Get customer feedback early and often. Ideally, identify your passionate customers and invite them into your process. Show them what you're

working on before it's ready for the market. (For example, I did this with this book by reaching out to my biggest supporters for early feedback and reviews prior to publication.)

Events

Events can be one of your most powerful marketing tools. They can also be incredibly risky.

A great event will attract loads of people who may not otherwise get exposure to your brand or your product. They can be a great way to build relationships with your chosen community of customers.

But, beware of the costs. In general, it's better to be the one throwing the event than it is to be a vendor renting a booth at said event.

As the event organizer, you take on more risk, but you also have radically more potential reward:

- You can attract other vendors and charge a fee for participation, offloading your cost to others.

- You can attract sponsors who pay a premium to have their brand prominently associated with your event.
- Ideally, you want to be able to at least break even based purely on vendor and sponsor fees.
- You can sell tickets and actually make a profit from the event itself, turning a marketing *cost* into a direct *profit*, a rare trick in the marketing world.

RedBull is famous for this. The biggest aspect of their marketing machine is events. They regularly hold extreme sporting events, and sell tickets and sponsorships to them. In turn, they make themselves the title sponsor.

From extreme stunts like Felix Baumgartner's stratospheric freefall, to Levi LaVallee's world-record-breaking snowmobile jump, to the near endless list of sporting tournaments bearing their name, RedBull has perfected the art of using event marketing as a self-perpetuating marketing machine. It pays for itself, like all good insurgent tactics should.

Looking for an idea for an event? Here are 16 ideas as a starting point:

1. Product launch parties
2. Pop-up shops
3. Exclusive previews or early access events
4. Influencer meet-and-greets
5. Customer appreciation events
6. Industry conferences or trade shows
7. Collaborative events with allied brands
8. Networking events
9. Educational workshops or seminars
10. Company anniversary celebrations
11. Product or service demonstrations at festivals or fairs
12. Webinars or live streaming events
13. VIP customer events
14. Launching a podcast or video series
15. Hosting a roundtable discussion with industry leaders
16. Host a fundraising event for a local charity

Loyalty Programs

Loyalty programs are a great way to build relationships with customers and increase customer retention. By offering rewards and incentives for repeat purchases, you can encourage customers to return and make additional purchases. This can lead to increased customer lifetime value, which is the total value of a customer over the course of their relationship with you. By increasing customer lifetime value, you can generate more revenue from existing customers and reduce the need to acquire new customers.

Loyalty programs can also drive customer engagement. By providing rewards and incentives for certain behaviors, you can encourage customers to become more engaged with your brand. This can lead to increased social media interactions, referrals, and overall brand advocacy.

What's more, loyalty programs can help you collect valuable customer data that can be used to inform your marketing strategies. By tracking customer behavior

and preferences, you can gain insights into what truly matters to your customers.

Tips for success with loyalty programs:

1. **Understand your customers.** Go back to “Who” in the chapter *Think Like a War Correspondent* for more on this. Not all customers want the same things from loyalty programs. It’s important to understand what makes your customers tick.
2. **Keep it simple.** One of the keys to a successful loyalty program is simplicity. Customers should be able to understand the program and the rewards they can earn without confusion. A complicated or confusing loyalty program can turn off customers and lead to lower engagement.
3. **Offer meaningful rewards.** To incentivize customers to participate in a loyalty program, you need to offer meaningful rewards. Rewards should be valuable enough to encourage customers to continue making purchases, but

not so valuable that they undermine the profitability of the business.

4. **Create a sense of urgency.** To encourage customers to take action, you need to introduce an aspect of scarcity. This can be accomplished by offering limited-time promotions or rewards that expire after a certain period of time. By creating a sense of urgency, you can encourage customers to take action and make purchases sooner rather than later.
5. **Promote it.** To maximize the effectiveness of a loyalty program, you must promote it effectively. This can include email campaigns, social media posts, in-store signage, and other forms of marketing. By promoting the loyalty program, you can increase awareness and encourage more customers to participate.
6. **Track and analyze the results.** This can include tracking customer behavior, measuring the ROI of the program, and analyzing customer feedback. By tracking and analyzing results, you can make data-driven decisions about how to

optimize your loyalty program for maximum effectiveness.

Remember: It's always cheaper to get repeat sales from existing customers than it is to get new customers. Too many businesses are obsessed with making new sales to new people, abandoning the ones they've already won over. Don't let that be you.

Case Study: Guilty Pleasures Bakeshop

In my hometown of Greater Sudbury, Ontario, there is a small but thriving bakeshop run by Justine Martin. Started in 2016, Guilty Pleasures Bakeshop began as a traditional indie bakeshop and has become a powerhouse in entrepreneurial feminist circles.

In the beginning, Guilty Pleasures followed all the rules: They secured a lease for a storefront in downtown Sudbury, they made adorable cakes and cookies, and business did well.



A few delectable pastries from their Instagram, circa 2016.

But over time, something interesting happened: Justine became bolder. By the time of this writing in 2023, she'd been featured on the Food Network, Huffington Post, Insider, Cake Masters, Bake Magazine, and more. She was also named Rising Star at the inaugural American Cake Awards.

And as for Guilty Pleasure's Instagram?



Something's changed, if I could only put a finger on it...

She was told she couldn't do this. That she would lose customers. That no one would want to partner with her business anymore.

Somewhere along the way, Justine stopped listening to all the business advisors. She ignored everyone who told her she was making mistakes. She embraced her passion

as a feminist and allowed that to both inform and transform how she does business. The results speak for themselves, but I reached out to Justine to get her perspective on why Guilty Pleasures Bakeshop is so successful today.

Would it be fair to say you've been increasingly and openly embracing feminism as a part of your strategy? Or has that been more of an organic evolution?

Justine: I've always been a feminist, but my outward presentation continues to become more bold.

While I was starting up the bakery, I was going through some personal safety issues (a male ex turned stalker) that made me want to be small and always appear polished and poised.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get closure on the issue, as it ended in an acquittal for my ex, based, and I quote, off my reports being considered "he said, she said."

This was a really low point for my mental health, but ultimately, the experience opened my eyes even wider to

the systemic injustice faced by womxn¹⁵ and other persecuted groups (lgbtq, BIPOC, disabled, etc.) and spurred me to become louder in my activism.

I started healing through the creation of feminist centered art in my business, without care for how it would be received. I also started sharing my own feminist perspective and amplifying that of others louder and louder with each passing week.

I think it was an act of angsty rebellion. My business is truly an extension of my person, especially as an autistic adult with a special interest in both cake artistry and small business. I wanted to be free to present my true and authentic self through my business, even if that meant possibly losing my business.

I stopped listening to business and social media advisors, who at the time were touting professionalism and placation. I stopped listening to other sweets professionals who said you could never get brand deals or TV contracts if you had “vulgar” products posted online.

¹⁵ Not a typo. This is Justine’s preferred spelling, preserved here out of respect.

This could've been the end of the bakery, and my ability to independently support myself financially. Instead, it was the beginning of a breakthrough.

Would you say there was an event or catalyst that got you to say "fuck it" to all the advisors?

Justine: The more I embraced myself and my values, the more I was flooded with support, both for myself and my business.

Since this shift in public image, I've taught internationally, become a food network champion, lectured at and hosted some of the world's largest industry conferences, been featured in major media, like Huffington Post, and shipped my products around the world.

More importantly, I truly found my community, and better yet, found myself in a position to be able to make significant contributions towards it.

Did it happen slowly over time?

Totally, it did. Not intentionally, even, but I just became more bold over time. Just this Wednesday (*Ed.*

note: March 8, 2023), I was honoured at an International Women's Day event and someone asked me what my best tip for success was. My honest answer was, "do whatever the fuck you want".

Life's too short to try to please. There's always going to be haters, regardless what you do, so you might as well have some fun. Trust me, there are other weirdos out there who will embrace you with open arms.

I've had a surprising number of people, mostly women, tell me they were "inspired" by my boldness, be that my sexy cake smash shoot, my willingness to put ANYTHING on a cookie or my most recent decision to shave my head completely. It's fucking weird because I feel like no one in the world has their shit together less than I do.

I know the target is other women, but for what its worth, it inspires me too. I'm sure I'm not the only cis-gendered male who's inspired and motivated to do better, to be more real.

Really it's for anyone.... Provided they are genuinely a good person with an interest in growth and

introspection. I'm clearly not into the "make it most palatable for the masses" so I do miss the mark on a lot of cishet men.

I also do not subscribe to "the customer is always right".

Can you elaborate on that?

Unpopular opinion: the customer is almost never right. BUT it's not their job to be right. Most customers have no experience purchasing or ordering from your business, particularly if you specialize in handmade products (like cake) or provide a niche service.

They don't know industry standards, jargon, pricing, or processes so they may be asking questions you perceive as naive or ignorant. This is OK! What's not okay is disrespect, intimidation, or otherwise inappropriate behaviour and attitudes.

How do you go about educating your customers?

It mostly boils down to asking the right questions up front. No one wants to be lectured at.

With my business, we put customer inquiry forms directly on our website. On these forms, we ask all the questions that commonly throw people off, and we're up front about pricing.

For example, we used to ask when the goods were needed, but what we found is people would request them too early. A great cake needs to be served as close to fresh as possible. So now we ask the date and time of the event instead. We ask about budget and any special requests up front.

This way, the customer is half-way educated before they even place their order.

By being up front about who we are, what we believe, what we stand for, what we have to offer, and perhaps most importantly, what we won't do or stand for, our clientele self-filters. We don't spend a lot of time anymore with customers who don't want our unique offer, because we hide nothing.

On our Instagram, for example, I'm open about the radical increase in the cost of supplies and any other challenges we may be facing.

Can you give me an example?

Absolutely. Here's a good one. Everybody fucks up from time to time, right? Most businesses put all of their energy into minimizing those fuck ups, but I'm public about them. When a customer ordered 48 cupcakes and I got the order wrong and only made 12, I posted about it. I shared the struggle with my customers. And then I made it right, by providing that customer with far more value than they paid for or had any reason to expect.

In other words, where other businesses see embarrassing problems, I see opportunities to build trust and earn loyalty.

You can't win everyone over, but I've gained more customers by publicly owning my mistakes than I ever had by tooting my successes.

Famously, you built your business to over \$100K in revenue in less than 6 months with zero advertising. What would you say is key to your success?

It's everything we've been talking about! It's treating my business like a story, always looking for what's interesting to me and amplifying that.

Take feminism, for example. What does that word mean to you? If you believe everyone deserves to be respected and that all labor should be valued equitably, you're a feminist. And that's how I run my business.

My staff know how much I earn. They know when I'm losing money, and when I'm making it. They know it's my business, but I trust them to manage their time and to know what they can and can't put into the business. I avoid micro-managing them as much as possible.

Same goes for my customers. I'm transparent about my pricing and what goes into it. I'm transparent about how the cost of goods has gone up 40% since the pandemic hit – oil went from \$18 to \$75 at one point, for example. I'm transparent about how the business is doing.

Can you give me an example of being transparent about the business?

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, I had a storefront, and we had to close down. I didn't know if this was going to mean the end of my business.

So I put together a quick e-commerce site and listed the goods we already had for sale. I shared that link online with an honest story about not knowing what the future held.

We sold out almost immediately. I sat at my desk and cried. Not just because we made sales, but because of the validation: People wanted us to survive and were sharing the link with everyone they knew, telling them to shop local.

It ended up being a huge game changer for my business. I built an industrial kitchen in my home and run everything based on orders now, with no store-front. Business has never been better.

Let's talk about how you go about getting new customers. Is it really all social media?

Not exactly! We survey our customers regularly to find out how they heard of us, and it's roughly 25% from

news media, 25% social media, and 50% word-of-mouth.

It's all about treating the business as a story. Anything that isn't interesting isn't worth investing in. And if it's interesting, it's newsworthy.

This is why I compete in baking competitions: It puts Guilty Pleasures in the news.

It's one of the reasons why I did my sexy cake smash photoshoot, and why I started making our now-famous vulgar cookies and pussy pops. It gets people talking.

Of course, there's no easier way to create newsworthy products and businesses than to follow your passion. If you're passionate about something, with 8 billion people on an increasingly inter-connected planet, you're bound to find others who share your passion.

You just need to have the nerve to put yourself out there. There will be haters. You will be attacked. But the one thing worse than being attacked is being ignored.

Unlike most businesses, you've taken a cooperative approach to your competition. Why is that?

This happened slowly over time, but when the pandemic hit and I found success with my website, I felt it was my moral duty to help other small business owners in our downtown core.

So, I went to other shops and said: I know you don't have the expertise to switch to e-commerce overnight, but your shops are all closed right now. Why don't we try selling your goods on my site for now?

I didn't even charge a processing or delivery fee. Many customers who purchased from them also purchased from me, so it did act as a sales generator for me. But many orders did not, and I delivered goods from other shops at a loss.

Why was this important to you? You were in a fight for your own survival, why did you feel it was necessary to support other local businesses at the same time?

If what I want is a world where *my* business is supported when it's in need, I need to create a world where everyone is supported when in need

That's about the most insurgent thing I've heard any business person ever say.

That's because most businesses operate from a place of scarcity. They believe the pie is limited, that there's only so much to go around, and that any dollar that finds its way into your pocket is a dollar that isn't in theirs.

I find this morally reprehensible. This scarcity way of looking at things is what leads to so much of the injustice we see in the world, from employees earning less than a living wage, to the pay gap between men and women, to the discrimination felt by women, LGBTQ+ individuals, people of colour, and so much more.

The reality is there's more than enough for everyone. I can have my cake, and so can you.

**You can find Guilty Pleasures Bakeshop online at
www.gpbakeshop.ca.**

Case Study: Fat Wreck Chords

When I was a teenage punk rocker, no one held as much sway in the punk world like Fat Mike from NOFX. I didn't know it at the time, but an awful lot of what I've learned about insurgent marketing has its roots in the work of punk rock label Fat Wreck Chords.

Naturally, I reached out for an interview. Naturally, they did not get back to me. Very punk rock.

But, I wanted to include them anyway, because there's so much for us to unpack by following their example.

First up, their ethos was perhaps best captured by NOFX's *Dinosaurs Will Die*:

I'm gonna make a toast when it falls apart
I'm gonna raise my glass above my heart
Then someone shouts, "That's what they get"
For all the years of hit-and-run
For all the piss broke bands on VH-1
Where did all their money go?

Don't we all know?
Parasitic music industry

As it destroys itself

We'll show them how it's supposed to be.

Whereas most political punk rock bands of the era focused on being anti-capitalist anarchists, Fat Mike carved a path for himself and his favourite bands by going into business for himself.

Some of their most successful bands include:

- Anti-Flag
- The Ataris
- Chixdiggit!
- Frenzal Rhomb
- Lagwagon
- Less Than Jake
- Me First and the Gimme Gimmes
- MxPx
- Nerf Herder
- NOFX
- No Use For A Name
- Propagandi
- Rancid
- Rise Against
- Screeching Weasel

- Subhumans

What's most notable about this list is that outside of the punk rock world, no one knew who these bands were. They never sold out stadiums. But to those in the know, these were punk rock royalty.

Each band managed to make living doing what they loved: rocking out.

At any major record label, these bands would be considered failures. But at Fat Wreck, they were profitable hits. The bands made good money, and the label did too. They still do.

So let's take a look at what they did (and still do) differently:

They Refuse to Be a Part of the RIAA

The Recording Industry Association of America is the industry association for record labels. Everyone's a member. Except for Fat Wreck Chords.

When asked if they were a member, Fat Mike responded:

"Are we a member? Not only no, but FUCK NO! We spent three years having our label's name (which was misspelled) removed from their members list. A year went by, then our name showed up again on their fucking list! Who are these sonsabitches [sic]?! Needless to say, we're in the process of having our name removed again, but they aren't being too cooperative."

They Insist on Fair Labour Practices

As any record label, a big part of their revenue comes from selling merchandise. Unlike most record labels, they refuse to use sweatshops to bring their costs down.

From their FAQ:

Tell me, do you capitalist swine at least have the decency to use sweat-shop-free shirts?

Whoa man, easy! The answer to that question is YES, almost all of the shirts we sell are sweat-shop-free and American made. The change came about when Chris Head of Anti-Flag suggested it to Fat Mike, and he was like, "Sure, dude."

They Have No Filter

I'm sure there are certain topics they'd avoid, but Lord help me, I can't figure out what they would be. What else would you expect from a label run by a guy with albums called *S&M Airlines* and *Heavy Petting Zoo*?

Their willingness to overshare and put themselves out there for the world to judge is what makes them so alluring. People are attracted to confidence, and who's more confident that a group of people sharing their most private kinks for giggles?

They Keep Experimenting

After 40 years in the business, NOFX announced their final tour, insisting there would be no reunion tours in the future. But that's not the end of Fat Wreck Chords.

Fat Mike recently opened the Punk Rock Museum in Las Vegas, saying: "In punk rock, it's a family, a community. Everyone's invited."

In the past few years, they also unveiled a musical, *Home Street Home*. Putting aside my fan-boy love of the

musical, listen to Mike talk about why they did it in the first place (emphasis mine):

It was 2001 when I first saw Hedwig and the Angry Inch. The drummer of my band Smelly saw it in a movie theater and told me I have to go see it cuz it's the first musical he ever liked.

I went to see it the next day by myself. I cried in the theater.

When art is that great.... You have no choice.

It made me feel like I felt when I first bought the Never Mind the Bollocks record and put it on in my bedroom. It was a life changer.

After I saw Hedwig, I pulled out my cassette player and found the two songs from Turks and Caicos and decided to put my band NOFX on the back burner for a few months and write **a musical that would hopefully make some people feel the way that Rocky Horror and Hedwig made me feel..... Like I wasn't alone in the world.... like I could live my life without shame.** I was gonna write a musical

that was unsuccessful and low budget and somewhere in it, there would be a dude in makeup!

Ultimately, this is the secret weapon of every insurgent: A deep need to create things you wish already existed. To connect with people like ourselves. To not be so alone in the world.

To live life without shame.

My Wish For You

Now that you've read this book, put it down and forget everything you read for a little bit. Come back to it later for a second or third reading. The goal isn't to memorize this text, but to internalize the ideas and principles to change how you do business.

The most radical, rebellious, and revolutionary thing anyone can do, as an individual or an organization, is to be themselves.

If you get nothing else out of this book, let it be this: just be you. Truly and authentically you. It's your biggest competitive advantage because no one in human history has ever been or will ever be you.

Cheesy? Maybe. But never the less, true.

Authenticity cannot be copied. Its value is immeasurable. But the cost of being *inauthentic*, of trying to be someone else, is quantifiable in dollars and cents: it's all the business you lose when people either don't trust you or fail to see your unique value.

This is the heart of what it means to be an insurgent: to buck the trends and seek out new territory and new ideas. To solve problems no one's solved yet.

I can't guarantee you'll become a billionaire. But if you take the ideas in this book to heart, I can promise you'll get noticed.

What you do with that newfound spotlight is up to you.

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