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ENGAGING MARKETING MINDS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021



**LETTING GO
OF THE
NEXT
BIG THING**

WHY BRAND
MAINTENANCE
MATTERS MORE
THAN INNOVATION



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EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

Given the overwhelming anxiety and fear that we've felt over the last year and a half, it is no wonder that there is a bit of reticence these days. We have some hesitancy about moving forward, mostly due to an overall fatigue of change. We've simply had so much of our lives altered due to the pandemic. We have homeschooled our kids, Zoomed ourselves senseless, and been socially isolated.

We've given up much of what we held dear and we learned to live in ways we could never have imagined. The changes we have undergone have zapped our energy, but yet we have persevered.

People found new routines and new workarounds. We navigated our way through and have discovered that we have a responsibility to each other and that we care about each other. In turn, we have had the remarkable opportunity to reprioritize and to adopt a new way of thinking with respect to our clients and the corresponding macro-environment.

Regardless of the anxiety that everyone feels, we need a new mindset of living with uncertainty. It is possible that we have been changed forever and that we now find ourselves in a fluid, complex new reality with uncertainty at every turn.

We are essentially walking into the unknown and there is no way around that. And as marketers, we have to embrace uncertainty as part of our brand promise and let our communities know that we are confident in a confusing world and that our relationship with them is what sustains us.

We cannot play it safe and be successful. When we're confronted with the fogginess of an unknown, unmapped reality, all we can do is the next right thing. We have to take the next step again and again. As marketers of successful businesses, we have to acknowledge and embrace the inherent uncertainty in the heart of life. And we have to have a new level of creativity and believe that new possibilities will be found in the darkness.

Enjoy our latest edition, which includes a wonderful cover story entitled "Letting Go of the Next Big Thing." It is a great piece on why brand maintenance matters more than innovation. And while it seems risky not to focus on innovation, embracing risk is where enrichment will be found.

All the best,



Gina M. Danner, CEO



Making Quality Job 1

04



Plan. Build. Dream. Repeat.

08

02 Cover Story..... Letting Go of the Next Big Thing

06 Feature..... Get Real

10 Tactics..... Strategies You Can Use

12 On the Record with..... Chris Bondy, Ph.D.

AS MARKETERS, WE HAVE TO EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY AS PART OF OUR BRAND PROMISE AND LET OUR COMMUNITIES KNOW THAT WE ARE CONFIDENT IN A CONFUSING WORLD.

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WHY BRAND MAINTENANCE MATTERS MORE THAN INNOVATION

LETTING GO OF THE NEXT BIG THING



THERE'S AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH 'DISRUPTION' THAT HAS BEEN CULTIVATED BY THE CHAMPIONS OF INNOVATION AND THAT OBSESSION DESERVES SOME CRITICISM."

—ANDREW RUSSELL,
PROFESSOR/DEAN OF THE
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES,
SUNY POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

WHAT IF OUR OBSESSION with all things innovation is distracting us from the work that matters most? Could it be that finding the next big thing is everything that's wrong with the pursuit for technology, our economy, and the world at large? These are big, powerful questions—ones that Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel are not afraid to say out loud, let alone dare address ways to correct our fixation on them.

Russell and Vinsel, authors of "The Innovation Delusion," say that we are too seduced by the charms of innovation—a seduction that has forced too many companies to chase

disruption instead of brand maintenance. In fact, their book, one that has become a must-read in a time of mass disruption, starts by asking if everyone around you worships the wrong gods. As historians of technology, Russell and Vinsel are not shy about arguing that this bent toward technological perfection is making us poorer, less safe and, if you can believe it, less innovative.

"If we think of innovation as improvement, I believe it's very important, in any number of fields—such as medicine, healthcare and responses to climate change," says Russell, co-founder of The Maintainers, and Professor and Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at SUNY Polytechnic Institute. "But I worry that we devote a lot of attention to innovation, at the expense of the maintenance of existing tools, knowledge and practices. There's an unhealthy obsession with 'disruption' that has been cultivated by the champions of innovation and that obsession deserves some criticism."

This outsized attention on innovation and shiny new objects from the mainstream media and advertisers continues to shape consumer behavior. The continual fixation with the rapid adoption of software has put a greater emphasis on novelty and innovation, which has resulted in older technologies and patterns of work being denigrated or ignored altogether. All you have to do is look at the Texas power grid disaster and collapse of the Surfside condos in Florida as examples of infrastructure neglect.

Do infrastructure breakdowns, like the aforementioned ones that made international headlines, mean that innovation is the enemy of maintenance? Russell and Vinsel say it is easiest to answer this question when you think about individual behaviors. If you spent all your time and money buying new things for your home—furniture, decorations, carpet, etc.—would you have enough money for roof repairs, annual inspections of heat and air conditioning systems, and general upkeep?

The same dynamic occurs in companies and in nations. "Whether an organization spends too much time on maintenance is largely determined by how healthy and forward-thinking its maintenance practices are," says Vinsel, co-founder of

The Maintainers and Assistant Professor of Science, Technology and Society at Virginia Tech. "For instance, if a corporation isn't doing enough preventative maintenance, it will 'waste' a great deal of time and money on repairs. Many companies are decades behind on developing good maintenance practices."

Vinsel says there is innovation-in-maintenance and has been for the entire history of industrial culture. What managers must do is keep their eyes on innovations that undermine maintenance. For example, some systems are poorly designed in terms of maintainability. These problems can easily be addressed by asking questions when adopting new systems like, "What is it going to take to maintain this thing down the road?"

Making Quality Job 1

One of Ford Motor Company's most famous taglines is, "Quality is Job 1." The motto encapsulated its intent on building long-lasting, trouble-free vehicles. It is no secret that the automaker has posted a lengthy list of problems related to vehicles within the Ford family of cars, trucks and SUVs. The issues are not the kind a 117-year-old automaker likes to compare next to its decades of industry-wide innovation accomplishments.

Yet, there Ford was, trying to explain why product quality was a reason some customers were hesitant about the Ford brand, especially the infamous introduction of the overhauled Ford Explorer and reincarnated Lincoln Aviator SUVs several years ago. Among the tally of issues were 11 recalls for the Explorer and nine for the Aviator. In addition, the Escape, Bronco Sport, Mustang Mach-E and F-150 all had to have pauses for additional quality checks.

"Wise leadership means always focusing on the bottom-line and long-term value," Vinsel says. "Sometimes that means keeping your eye on the ball with existing products and services; other times it will mean doing something new. The real question is, 'What end are we trying to achieve?' When you have that question in mind, it is obvious that new does not always equal better."

For Ford, it meant doing up-front

homework the right way, the first time, including leveraging vehicle connectivity data to let the product development department understand how Ford drivers use their vehicles. In turn, engineers can do their jobs to better satisfy customers. "There's nothing new or unusual about this; it's simply a matter of committing to continuous improvement and quality," Russell says. "This is the business model of universities, internet service providers, airlines and airplane manufacturers, book publishers, and more. Consumers like reliability and quality, so going for broke on the next big thing is a big gamble that a lot of reputable brands make only rarely."

As for how the digital acceleration of the last decade has led businesses and organizations to neglect maintenance, Vinsel says the verdict still may be out. "One thing we hear over and over is that leaders in firms tend to underestimate how much maintenance hardware and software requires. There's a kind of magical thinking around digital technologies, as if these 'disembodied' systems somehow don't require maintenance, repair and upkeep. In reality, entropy affects them just as it affects everything else. In some cases, it hits digital systems even harder."

When it comes to world-class maintenance, Russell and Vinsel like to point out that Netflix, Google and Amazon Web Services all have developed cutting-edge maintenance offices, while brands like General Electric remain steadfast at chasing the shiny and new objects at the expense of the bottom line.

Does that mean that innovation should not be so much of a priority today? Vinsel says it really depends on your definition of innovation. "If we are talking about the diffusion of new technologies and/or business models, then innovation remains a basic aspect of capitalism as it always has. But there are also big questions about how deep current innovations are going. For example, the sharing economy, including apps like Lyft, Uber, Grubhub, etc., have not been as revolutionary as its boosters imagined."

As history reminds us, it might just be a matter of time. ■



“WHETHER AN ORGANIZATION SPENDS TOO MUCH TIME ON MAINTENANCE IS LARGELY DETERMINED BY HOW HEALTHY AND FORWARD-THINKING ITS MAINTENANCE PRACTICES ARE.”

—LEE VINSEL, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY, VIRGINIA TECH



GET REAL



here is a story Christina Ross likes to tell about the time she and her staff sat down with a client to discuss an upcoming marketing campaign related to a political office he was running for. As a firm that works with myriad companies—from one-man shops, to multi-location medical clinics, and everything in between—this particular campaign would enable Silver Frog Marketing to do a little bit of everything. First up was a series of TV and radio spots.

And then it happened.

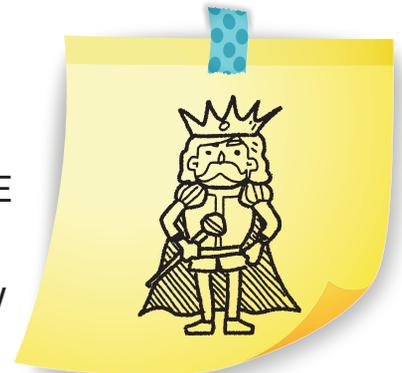
About 10 minutes into the conversation, the gentleman shared what office he was running for. Ross, Silver Frog's president and marketing director, was a bit taken aback. Was he running for mayor? No. State representative? No. Congress? No. He wanted to become the King of the United States.

The Silver Frog adjourned for lunch, had a good laugh, and moved on to the next client on the list.

While the humor in the story is worth sharing, the moral of the story is a bit more precise. It involves understanding

“WHEN WE PLAN ANY MARKETING STRATEGY, WE ALWAYS START BY DETERMINING WHO THE CLIENT'S IDEAL CUSTOMER IS. ONCE WE KNOW THAT, WE CAN THINK ABOUT WHERE AND HOW THOSE PEOPLE CONNECT.”

— CHRISTINA ROSS,
PRESIDENT, SILVER FROG MARKETING



the goal your client wants and why they chose you for the job. In this case, as crazy as the final mission was, the Silver Frog team had conceived an orchestrated attack plan to elevate the person's brand (even if it did end up going off track). "You have to put yourself in your customer's shoes," Ross says. "When we plan any marketing strategy, we always start by determining who the client's ideal customer is. Once we know that, we can think about where and how those people connect."

As simple as it sounds, the easiest and most effective way to make your plan real is to start by sketching out. This can be as simple as opening a Word doc and highlighting your efforts: set attainable

goals; define your target market; establish a clear brand identity and be consistent. A marketing strategy is not a collection of tactics—it is a well-thought out, strategic plan that clarifies your target market and audience, articulates your core messaging, and explains how that messaging will be integrated across channels.

In its simplest form, the art of marketing is about attracting and retaining customers and their audiences. To achieve this, you must build a foundation that connects a brand with its audience. Chris Sizemore, CEO of Creative Mischief, says that means marketing firms must stop selling the same cookie-cutter approach and focus

on providing holistic business solutions. Today, marketing is about having a 360-degree view of all aspects of your client's business. Doing so allows you to deliver relevant and executable marketing strategies that drive direct results to their business.

"The traditional marketing approach of focusing on tactic-driven deliverables is outdated," Sizemore says. "Tactics without a holistic understanding of the client's business needs only provides immediate, short-term results, which are important. However, a tactic-only approach that does not focus on the big picture is a short-term game, when the goal should be building long-term results and relationships." ■



Plan. Build. Dream. Repeat.

“

If we dream it, we can build it.” That’s the motto Sizemore and his Creative Mischief team operate under every day. By taking a business consulting approach to client partnerships, they are better able to understand their clients’ businesses, internal abilities, processes, time, budgets, and how their audiences want to be engaged.

“Taking this approach allows us the ability to provide marketing strategies and plans that have a long-term, intentional approach to drive business results,” he says. “Building this trust not only helps gain trust, but also helps create an emotional connection between the business and their customer.”

Sizemore says that tactics can be predictable, canned and impersonal—things that users recognize immediately. “We want clients to know they can trust us. We are not just a branding, marketing, and communications agency—our belief is that true success lives in the trust others place in us. We will do what is right for our clients, their customers, stakeholders, employees, and their bottom line. It is about the relationships, quality over quantity. We are in the business of building relationships.”

To say that COVID has changed everything would be the mother of all marketing understatements. From where Patricia Royak sits, brands must check in with what their audiences are doing and thinking more than ever before. The CEO of Royak Consulting, a firm specializing in global omnichannel brand strategies, says that researching the consumer base is one of the most critical steps any brand can take.

“The omnichannel has challenged us all to provide a seamless customer experience across channels, countries and mediums,” Royak says. “Even the words used to describe a brand and its products should be internally vetted, ensuring we are not overpaying for them in media. A disjointed or conflicting message about the brand in one channel may cause confusion about the authentic nature of the brand story. Consumers do not want to be sold today, they want brands to educate and have their problems solved.”

The strategy, Royak says, refers to the strategy of specifically sketching out your plan. Know your competitive marketplace and consumer trends. Have an updated profile of your target customer. Inspire them to join your journey and become part of your story. Be authentic, clear and engaging. And be prepared to pivot. “Brands that create an emotional connection with their consumers and surprise them with superior service will win. Taking away the personalized human connection or opportunity to reach out and touch consumers

in a customized approach creates bad publicity. These impressions are lasting. The message is out there for everyone to see.”

One of the most critical pieces of advice is to focus your time and energy on performing at 100 percent, 100 percent of the time. Every brand has multiple opportunities to engage with their customers, but that does not mean every opportunity should be put into play. Consider the people, the process, the time and the budgets to accomplish each opportunity. “If you have four opportunities or channels to engage with your customers, but can only engage at 100 percent on two of those, only execute on those channels or mediums,” Sizemore says. “In looking at data, engagement and time invested into a channel, it is okay to ‘let go’ of mediums that are not easily achieved at 100 percent. Focus on quality over quantity.”

In the end, brands that do this are the ones that succeed and meet their customers where they are. The alternative is to assume you have all the answers. Being real is the straightest path to success.

“**THE TRADITIONAL MARKETING APPROACH OF FOCUSING ON TACTIC-DRIVEN DELIVERABLES IS OUTDATED. TACTICS WITHOUT A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CLIENT’S BUSINESS NEEDS ONLY PROVIDES IMMEDIATE, SHORT-TERM RESULTS, WHICH ARE IMPORTANT.**”

— CHRIS SIZEMORE, CEO, CREATIVE MISCHIEF

TACTICS

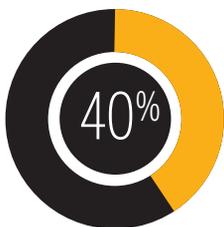


KEEP 'EM COMING

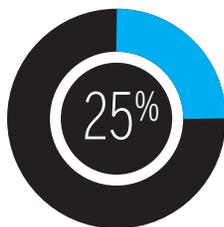
STRATEGIES ON RECRUITING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES

As we move into a hybrid work environment, more and more leaders and employees alike are struggling to use time efficiently. Adobe surveyed 5,500 people across seven global regions, asking respondents where they feel the most time pressure and how it has impacted their work and personal lives. The responses in “The Future of Time” report reveal

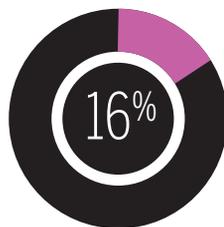
that more than a third of the workforce (and half of Gen Z workers) plan to switch jobs in the next year. Their decisions are driven by the increasing lack of work-life balance, productivity issues and burnout. To keep current employees, and recruit new ones, 63% of small and medium business leaders made the following changes:



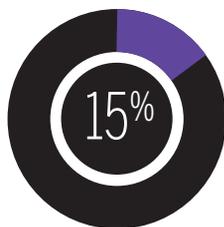
Adopt flexible working hours



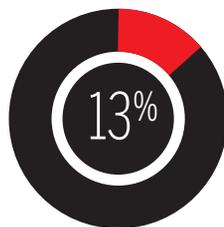
Provide additional benefits



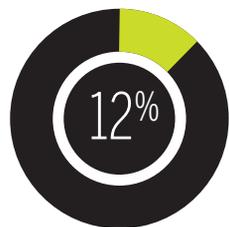
Hire nationwide for remote work



Provide remote work equipment



Launch initiatives for mental health



Adopt new tech to aid HR processes

LIKE, SHARE, SUBSCRIBE

MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Post it, share it, and let the likes and comments flow. Social media in the age of social distancing has been paramount to keeping clients connected and engaged, and being active on the same channels as they are is just as crucial. SageFrog's "2021 B2B Marketing Mix Report" showed that LinkedIn was the standout social media channel for B2B companies. The top five most used channels include:

- 86% LINKEDIN**
- 73% FACEBOOK**
- 63% TWITTER**
- 36% YOUTUBE**
- 31% INSTAGRAM**



“SOME CONTENT MARKETERS THINK THERE IS A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL TEMPLATE OR FRAMEWORK OR APPROACH THAT WILL WORK FOR EVERY COMPANY. BUT THE TRUTH IS, EVERY ORGANIZATION—AND THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE UP THE TEAM—ARE DIFFERENT. DIFFERENT GOALS, STRENGTHS, AND PRIORITIES. AND THEIR CONTENT STRATEGY HAS TO TAKE THAT INTO ACCOUNT.”

— ERIKA HEALD, CONSULTANT AT ERIKA HEALD CONSULTING, ON THINKING OUTSIDE OF THE BOX



36%

OF SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESS OWNERS HAVE STRUGGLED WITH EMPLOYEE BURNOUT OR ATTRITION IN THE LAST YEAR.

SOURCE: ADOBE'S "THE FUTURE OF TIME" REPORT

QA

What are your feelings on things right now?

We all feel this pent-up desire to be with other humans in a normal sense. My wife, who is a psychologist and a social worker, would tell you that it is unhealthy to be constrained as a human. Therefore, what we're feeling is that pent-up need to sort of break the ties and safely venture out. We have built up a very high level of resilience after being limited and I believe good things are on the horizon. It is kind of like an athlete working out with weights. We have adversely stressed our muscles so that we can operate in a more optimum way without the weight. We are in the starting blocks ready to spring into action in a meaningful way.

What do you think brand owners need?

The print industry has really become both a data processing and imaging industry. So, brand owners should look to the partners who have the chops in both of those areas. If a company can own both the data and the imagery, then they can be trusted with the integrity of the brand and deployment of content in any venue. It is kind of interesting that I had my hands in both, and RIT entrusted me to run their health informatics program. So, look to those people who know data and imaging.

Tell us about the kids you are teaching these days.

I've been hanging out with the next generation a lot and it has been a remarkable study in how they're going to take the baton from us. I believe we really need to embrace the

PRINCIPAL, QUEST CONSULTING SOLUTIONS

CHRIS BONDY PH.D.

MARKETING AND TECHNOLOGY EXPERT ON DRIVING THE NEXT GENERATION



Chris Bondy started as a designer and worked his way through the graphic communications supply chain to high level management positions at Xerox, Kodak, InfoTrends, and Rochester Institute of Technology. After realizing he was good at developing stuff, he became an expert design engineer. He went on to earn his master's degree in engineering and recently completed his Ph.D. in computer science. He currently runs the health informatics program at RIT while managing his strategic consulting business for marketing service providers and technology suppliers. He teaches immersion courses in three different areas of computer science along with teaching non-majors programming, data analytics, ethics, and business perspectives of computing. In his spare time, he is an author and beer league hockey player. We sat down with Bondy to talk about his perspective on the current climate, data, print marketing and the next generation.





next generation. Companies must be committed to find a seat for them and dust off the things that they're afraid of and let them try it. My thought is to hire the youth and fail fast. In other words, it is a great time to experiment, and the next generation gives us that platform.

How do you see their future?

They're excited. If you brought in a young person to your business and you really taught them the business model and gave them a serious role in the business, they would see that virtue and think of it as a long-term thing. But if you bring in someone to push buttons and run a copy machine, they'll be there until the next restaurant job opens that they can collect tips on.

Can you speak to the impact of trends these days?

I'm a guest speaker in a trends course and one of my topics is that we have more knowledge about trends than we care to believe. And so, trends typically are cascaded from a consumer experience, to a knowledge worker, to an enterprise. And at the consumer level, we have the most power we've ever had in the history of mankind to vote with our feet and our actions. So, I think when people start trusting their judgment rather than getting caught up in being part of the trend, we can find a better version of ourselves. If I know what the trend is, it doesn't mean I have to be a part of it. But I can also be a part of it and feel

confident that I will be OK in it.

Is there a trend that concerns you at all?

I think we have gotten a bit off the mark with regards to service. Anytime profits started waning, we tended to reduce headcount and focused on optimizing our operations. But there are so many ways to simultaneously streamline while adding holistic "complete" services that are customer centric. Today, getting good service in many aspects of our lives seems to leave a lot to be desired. But that is the opportunity that exists for anyone who wants to stand out and be defined by the service of others.

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