

Stop Trying to be Perfect and Start Being Remarkable



THE BIG MOO is an unprecedented collaboration of 33 of the world's smartest business thinkers, blending their best ideas on how you can remarkableize your organization. This all-star team includes Julie Anixter, Tim Manners, **Malcolm Gladwell**, Dave Balter, Promise Phelon, Heath Row, Amit Gupta, Marc Benioff, Kevin Carroll, **Tom Peters**, Carol Cone, **Randall Rothenberg**, Lynn Gordon, Jay Gouliard, Donna Sturgess, Marcia Hart, Jackie Huba, **Guy Kawasaki**, Polly LaBarre, **Chris Meyer**, Robin Williams Jacqueline Novogratz, Dan Pink, Dean Debiase, Red Maxwell, **Mark Cuban**, Lisa Gansky, April Armstrong, **Tom Kelley**, Robyn Waters, William Godin, **Alan Webber**, and Seth Godin.

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THE POWER OF DUMB IDEAS

This will be the dumbest riff on marketing you will ever read. If you're lucky.

Marketing is overwhelmed by complexity, and marketers' predisposition toward creativity only complicates their job, their companies' operations, and their own lives even more.

Ten years ago, the challenges were *merely*:

- the advance of the five-hundred-channel universe
- reconciling the historic tensions between marketing and sales
- calculating the return on advertising investment
- keeping abreast of fickle public taste

Today, a quick look at Google indicates that we're grappling with an eight-billion-channel world. The distinction between marketing and sales has evaporated in the face of direct-marketing technologies that brand products, take orders, and fulfill them at the same time.

Even worse, there is no more public taste. There are only publics' tastes, which are ever more atomized, specific, and hard to fathom.

David Ogilvy's contention that "it takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers and get them to buy your product" no longer applies. His fellow advertising guru Bill Bernbach's belief that, in marketing, "not to be different is virtually suicidal" today itself may be suicidal in and of itself.

The solution to marketing's current ills is not more creativity. It's less.

Novelty for the sake of novelty is not only risky, it's more often than not a recipe for irrelevance. A study of 1,300 publicly traded U.S. companies in fifty-five industries by Chuck Lucier, senior vice president emeritus at Booz Allen Hamilton, found that only four broad ideas, copied over and over again in one sector after another, accounted for 80 percent of the breakout businesses created between 1965 and 1995: power retailing, megabrands, focus/simplify/standardize, and the value chain bypass. True, the big-box store may not be the most original concept on Earth—which is exactly the point! Originality hasn't mattered a whit to the customers, employees, and shareholders who have enjoyed its application in consumer electronics (Circuit City), home improvement (Home Depot), and office supplies (Staples).

So what is the simple, dumb truth?

Imitation Across Industries Is More Efficient and Effective Than Blue-Sky Creativity and Innovation If you accept that one million monkeys pounding on keyboards for one thousand years will eventually, accidentally produce a ton of gibberish and one Shakespearean sonnet, you must also accept the converse: that a lone creative individual racking her brain will produce much less gibberish, and nothing profound. Appropriating existing marketing concepts is cheaper—and certainly quicker to implement—than developing new ones. The secret is bringing a great idea from another market or industry to your market or your industry.

The Energy Isn't in the Idea; it's in the Execution Every manager, from the middle on up, knows that the secret to success lies not in strategy, but in galvanizing a team to implement the strategy. Lucier's research on breakout businesses also showed that the winning companies in each market were those that put together a winning business system around the unoriginal ideas. The hard work of marketing lies not in developing a groundbreaking product or the communications scheme for it, but in coordinating the efforts of R&D, manufacturing, finance, communications, sales, or some set of subunits. Do this once, and you've created a cross-functional team that knows how to do it over and over again, and whose enthusiasm itself communicates volumes.

You Must Create True Believers Before You Can Win New Converts I once asked the president of a major U.S. auto company whether any studies had been done to determine which factors

distinguished superior salespeople from average salespeople. He responded that the only research he'd ever seen found no differences in age, education, sex, race, or family background, but did reveal one distinct variable: the number of times the individual went back and attempted to close the sale. Faith in yourself and in your colleagues is a necessary predisposition for marketers; the best ones convey that faith outward, eventually subsuming their customers and clients. The most powerful marketing ideas create and reinforce that kind of faith.

It's Your Context That Counts The big idea doesn't have to be the brand-new idea. Something common to the world at large may be very new to you and your organization. This is more than enough to galvanize the team, create faith, and build the world's greatest marketing department.

Three Dumb Ideas:

This may be a dumb idea, but what if we take our company's private annual review and turn it into a full-blown, beautifully designed, public annual report? Surely, it would communicate our changes and strengths to the outside world—and it would also create immense new pride inside our globally dispersed company, more understanding of our strategy, and greater consistency in our numerous marketing efforts.

This may be a dumb idea, but what if we publish a book of our research and writing on enterprise resilience—not with a mainstream publisher who'll take a year to get from manuscript

to finished product, but by ourselves? Using existing vendors in graphic design, print-on-demand production, and online sales, we could complete the book in six weeks, stirring the members on the team to personally take it to their clients, discuss its contents, and build their business. In two years, we could publish six books, create our own imprint, sell thousands of copies, distribute tens of thousands more, garner major-media reviews, and create a publishing capability in a nonpublishing company.

This may be a dumb idea, but what if we create a diagnostic tool that uses principles of organizational economics to measure the effectiveness of large companies, then put it on the Web so that individuals can assess their own firms' abilities? Less than a year later, there could be a 60,000-profile database, segmentable by country, sector, and function—and a thriving global practice in “Org DNA.”

An annual report. A book. An online survey. We did it well, and we did it together, knitting our internal communities and our external markets into a quilt that may be patchwork, but is exquisitely patterned nonetheless. This is the simplicity on the other side of marketing's complexity.

Dumb enough for you?