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STANDING UPSIDE DOWN IN THE CUSTOMER'S MIND

For the past 20 years the rules of brand building seemed as unassailable as the 10 Commandments. Then, in just one day, the rules were completely reversed. Although many companies have yet to notice.

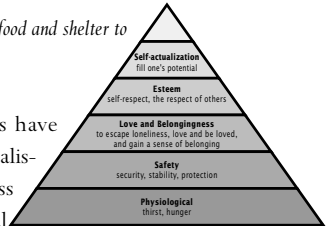
Four Horsemen



In 1961 Behaviorist Albert Maslow created a durable model to describe the process of human progress:

- *Maslow's Pyramid as a picture of human striving*
- *Each individual moving inexorably upward from the basics of food and shelter to and through various levels of spiritual fulfillment.*

Since the 1980's clever advertising agencies have used Maslow's Pyramid as a kind of marketing talisman. They have used it to convince clients less clever than they that marketing is aspirational



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marketing. As a result, brands have become increasingly about emotions, while facts have been pushed to the side.

9/11/01 changed all of that. The haboob inverted Maslow's Pyramid:

- *Where all brands and consumers were once moving up the Pyramid, they are now for the first time ever all moving down.*
- *The 9/11 fallout has resulted in a craving for security. A great need for facts—don't just tell me what you feel like (affinity marketing), tell me what you do (informed marketing).*

What does this mean, what type of consequences does it have for business:

- *The resulting environment dictates that you must figure out what you make, why you make it, why you do it better, and why it is valuable right now.*

The brand must deliver security

The brand must be authentic

The brand must work hard, or rather the people behind the brand must work harder and think better to make sure the brand can be part of people's lives. People have had their basic beliefs shattered—in economic, in religion, in politics and in the primacy of their country.

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THE ANALOG REVOLUTION

Neil Young once remarked that digitizing music was like taking a living, organic thing and pushing it through the metal screen of a storm door. All the bits were exactly shaped and accurately sized, but the curves and turns of the original were eliminated so as they could make their way through the screen. Young wanted us to know that there's a lot of life in the curves and turns of the music, and that the mad rush to digital could lose a lot of valuable sounds on the way.

Look, digital is great. There's more TV to watch. There are more choices for the consumer. The resolution of our phones and TV's are better than ever. Downloading music has made possible not only the umpteenth rebirth of Apple Computer with I-Pod, but also has allowed music from artists with little to no chance in the "system" to record and release their music—and increasingly film—to find appreciative audiences. And find like minded artists, executives and channels to work with.

Digital technology democratizes the opportunity to create and get heard and seen. Now that there are several non-linear editing systems available for music and film that run on any laptop, the chance to express oneself has never been open to more.

Yeah, everything and everyone is going digital. But, does

everyone have a film or a record in them? You may wonder by now, if I had a book in me. Just because we have the technology, just because it's cheap enough and available enough doesn't mean everyone should start recording. There is something factual here, we are not all artists. We do not all possess the talent to make art.

And, that is the point of the analog revolution—in the unending race to the next technology—we forget the most important part of the equation—TALENT.

Les Paul and Leo Fender had little available to them—wood, wire, armatures. Oh, and vision and inventiveness. They created the first electric guitars. Those instruments helped define generations of expression. They played a large role in how history will see society from 1945 on. And those guitars were just about perfect from the start. Sure newer technology created different guitars, but they didn't create better guitars. In fact, our good friend Neil, has played a black 1954 Les Paul since the late seventies. In some ways that sound, that aesthetic has defined a big part of rock and roll.

There is an incredible amount of recording technology, but The Beatles recorded *Sergeant Pepper* on a four track recording deck—it's doubtful one could even get that technology today without hitting e-Bay. Point is, there are recording decks that are infinitely more advanced, but could they make a better *Sergeant Pepper*. No.

Brian Wilson made aural masterpieces, unique in complexity and beauty. He made that work, often in the middle of his living room. He made that work not because of technology.

He made that work because of talent.

What is critical to note today and critical to stay watchful of is the insidious inversion of the value pyramid. Talent is the single most important element.

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In anything.

Without the talent, there would be no business affairs there would be no deal makers, no distribution, no marketing. Without talent we have nothing.

As virtually everything has become financially motivated and driven, administrative types have attempted, often successfully to flip the talent hierarchy, placing finance and admin at the top and commoditizing the talent—"talent we can get anywhere", you can just hear the fine young accounting cannibal saying to his elders as he reveals the latest excel sheets.

Digital devices, advancements in technology, democratization of expression, creation of electronically connected communities are defining our futures. But, don't make the mistake of misreading the value equation. Music, film, writing, design, every creative endeavor is alive and organic. Pushing it all through the screen door, makes it all the same size, but it does not make it better. Because creative is alive, organic, not very easily understood, it scares people, it often flouts conventions of risk aversion, of the braces and belts aesthetic.

Safe is what we want from our administrators and accountants, not from our artists. So, whether it is Six Sigma or Stratocasters, talent, commitment and quality and the things that make the differences.

In the all of all, there is one proprietary technology and that's the human brain.

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HOW TO REVOLUTIONALIZE IT

Hopefully this has been a good, if caustic editorial on some of the reasons that brands have more troubles than ever. However, for every action there's a positive and equal reaction. As we discussed, people still love great content, great talent and will watch and relate to it anywhere.

As discussed, consumers are now too smart about marketing. And, too smart to be conventionally marketed to. Now, born as CMO's they intuitively understand the reasoning behind ad strategies, sponsorship investments, product placement and endorsement deals—therefore there are certain NEW precepts to consider:

- 1 *SELLING IS DEAD—because the society is so marketing savvy, they won't fall for the pitch. They have seen it before. They will accept, but they will not be sold.*
- 2 *DEMOGRAPHICS ARE DEAD—people do not in the main, behave as defined by their age cohort. They look for brands, bands, films, services, whatever that has share of heart and mind with them. The intro of the Mini Cooper was not based on age—many 21 year olds bought as their first car, an equal numbered of 51 year olds bought it as their fourth. Why? It appealed to every group's sense of fun, of cool. Jet Blue doesn't segment by demographic—while its fares are cheap, it's not a poor man's airline.*
- 3 *THE MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY IS AUTHENTICITY. And you can't buy it. The closest you can come is to assemble a portfolio of talent and content that has inde-*

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- pendent, intrinsic value—and allow that authenticity to affiliate with the brand.*
- 4 **SELFDISCOVERY IS THE MOST POWERFUL BRANDING STRATEGY.** *People become most passionate about music, film, books, TV, brands, anything—if they feel they've found it themselves. It become their own. It becomes part of them. There is little in the literature about brand loyalty that can come within haling distance of this level of passion.*
 - 5 **DEFINE THE CULTURE.** *Of where the brand needs to thrive. Culture doesn't mean the opera, or the outback, affluent or poor. It is a group of people who coexist in the world, who share a common interest, passion, community. Cultures are the workforces of any large corporation; they are the common needs of the analysts and fund managers on Wall Street, skateboarders, rappers, sports car fanatics, rebels and conformists. The challenge to marketers is to weave the brand into whichever culture the brand needs to penetrate. And to do so, with relevance, integrity and above all, not as discussed in another chapter, simply appear to have written a check.*
 - 6 **CONTENT. TALENT. AND STRATEGY—***to become a believable part of the culture, you've got to find content with significance and value to that audience. You've got to access and develop the talent who has respect among that audience. Not by simply re-allocating ad dollars into U2 sponsorships. It's not making the millions available to the Matrix team, or working the Cadillac Escalade introduction into the fourth episode of the Apprentice. It is that last word—STRATEGY. Unless the brand strategy is locked, unless there is a group that understands how to bring the brand, content and talent together in a seamless way, all this will become advertising redux.*
 - 7 **UNDERSTAND THE FABRIC—***each of these cultures are a fabric of tastes, emotions, products, services, experiences, knowledge, hopes and disappointments. The brand is [or can become] a thread in this fabric. Woven, not superimposed. Relevant, not a tactic. Credible, not an obvious marketing investment. The brand as thread means it's become a part of that community's world. The brand as a thread means it belongs there. And if the thread is creatively shaded, done with imagination, it adds value to the whole equation.*
 - 8 **CULTURAL BRANDING—***a strategic path to self discovery, to weaving the brand into*

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the fabric of the culture it seeks. Weave the brand in as a thread; it becomes much less vulnerable to sitting on the culture and being washed away by the next wave of whatever.