

JUSTIN  
BASINI

# WHY SHOULD ANYONE BUY FROM YOU?



Prentice Hall  
FINANCIAL TIMES

# Praise for *Why Should Anyone Buy From You?*

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From You?**



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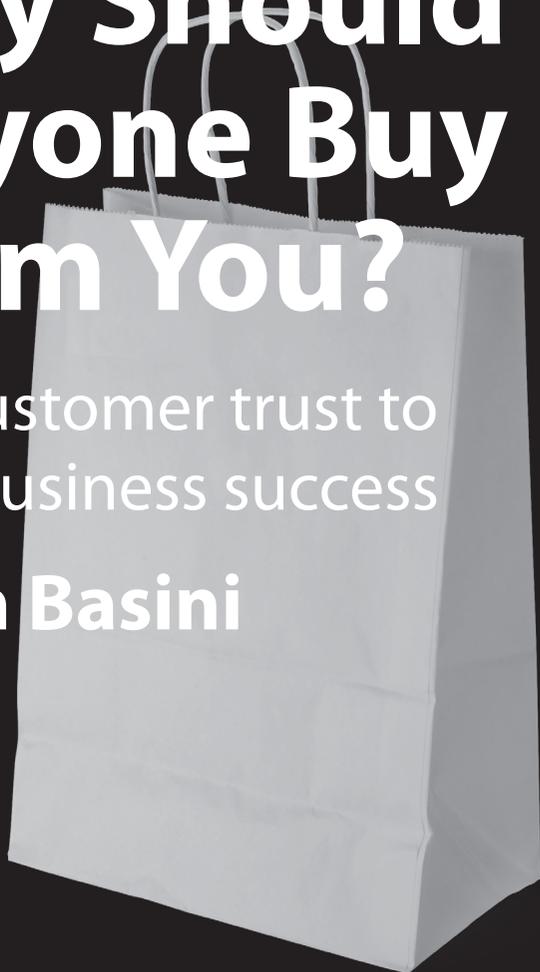
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# Why Should Anyone Buy From You?

Earn customer trust to  
drive business success

**Justin Basini**



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*To Victoria who, every day, shows me how to love and trust*

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# Acknowledgements

My legs turned to jelly and I threw up as I entered the tunnel on the Embankment in London, just as you go under Blackfriars Bridge. The road was littered with vomit, urine, empty water bottles and a few bodies, either lying prostrate or leaning against the walls, desperately trying to get a break from the pain. I was stripped bare of all my belief and resolve. Despite having come so far, I couldn't go on.

The dark, dank recesses of this bridge were a private hell which I was sharing with hundreds of others. People streamed past, some looking healthy, some looking awful – each individual enduring their own test of brain over body.

I looked up and saw the brightness ahead of me, the crowds, the river of humanity battling through sweat and tears to achieve a goal. I steadied myself for the last push. Gently, tentatively, I stretched my over-used legs – every movement was excruciating. One leaden foot in front of another, I started the final push to the end. As I gathered pace, I left the darkness behind and was warmed by the rays of the sun and cheers of the crowd lining the banks of the River Thames, seemingly imploring me individually to go on to glory.

Every step of that last one and half miles through Parliament Square, St James's Park and the Mall to the end of the 2006 London Marathon was exhausted pain. Even as I could see the finish it didn't get any easier. I never got a second wind, a final burst of energy – it was just me, my feet, my brain and a goal.

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Justin Basini

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# Introduction

## WHY TRUST MAKES YOU MONEY

*Trust is the bedrock of the economy, your business and your brand. Without trust, your interactions with your customers, your suppliers, the media, the regulator, your colleagues, even your boss, become impossibly difficult and expensive. Win trust and you can turbo-charge your success, but the question is, how? People are more cynical, more empowered and less trusting than ever before, but you can learn how to create a trusted business and brand.*

## What are you doing right now?

Are you in a bookshop, browsing in your lunch break or on your way home after a hard day? Perhaps you are in an airport, looking for a distraction for a few hours as you jet off. Are you at your computer, browsing through the pages of Amazon?

Now try a thought experiment. Imagine your day without the trust you place in people, things and your own experiences. Could you handle the complex myriad of decisions you make, big and small, without trust?

Would you have eaten that bowl of cereal if you couldn't trust what was in it?

Would you have got in that train or car if you didn't trust its mechanics?

Will you get on that plane without trusting in the ground staff, the fuel, the plane itself, the pilot or even your fellow passengers?

Do you believe your partner when he or she says, 'I love you?'

It may be obvious, but trust is a vital ingredient in all of our daily lives. We are programmed, through our very physiology, our psychology and our life experiences, to trust. Trust makes our lives so much easier that, without it, the sheer effort of living would become far too great. People with larger networks of trusting friends and family live longer and are healthier. Despite what our somewhat cynical age might have us believe, to trust is far from naïve, but a skill learned, refined and practised by the more intelligent.

Our economy and the markets they are built on rely on trust. When markets fail, as they have so painfully recently, it is generally because, somewhere, trust has failed. Every MBA student and economist in the world will have been asked to read Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) – more commonly known as simply *The Wealth of Nations* (although how many read the whole work is questionable!) – but most will never read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* – the book Smith published in 1759, 17 years before his more famous work. Smith knew that markets couldn't operate without a framework – a moral one in his mind – to create predictable and rational behaviour between market participants. In the language of the economist, trust reduces transaction costs, allowing commerce to happen.

All great businesses know that getting customers to trust them is vital if they are to sell their products or services. Marketers and brand-builders have long played the trust-building game to influence our decisions. From Josiah Wedgwood in 1772, placing his name on every piece of china he shipped, to BP today, reeling from their polluting disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, all are making promises and giving us signals about how much we can trust their quality, performance and value. Enron, Tyco,

Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Facebook, Google, BP and Toyota are just some of the businesses that have suffered crises in trust, often wiping billions from their stock market valuations or even causing their collapse.

## **We forget trust at our peril**

Despite the essential nature of trust to our society, economy and well-being as individuals, it is easy to forget and perhaps take for granted. It is only when our faith in something is shaken or we are placed in an unfamiliar environment that we suddenly wake up to the possibility our decisions to trust might be wrong – or, at least, worth a second look.

In the developed world, product quality and performance is generally so high nowadays and the systems to ensure safety so advanced, that rarely do we question whether or not we should trust. Yet, go to a foreign country – especially a developing one – and look at the shelves and you will find yourself searching for those signals of a recognised brand or corporation in which to trust as you more consciously evaluate your purchases. Those signals are helping you decide whether or not the beer you are drinking, the cereal you are eating or the washing powder you are using will harm you or have the desired effect.

We only need remember the feelings we had as we witnessed the global financial meltdown of the past few years to realise that, without trust, panic can set in. Thousands queuing outside Northern Rock in 2006 as the fear of its collapse gripped the UK or the forlorn Lehman Brothers employee with a cardboard box in her arms as she left the office to look for another job are painful examples of the serious impact that a collapse of trust can have on our lives. The recent and current examples are many, from Lehman Brothers to BP to Toyota to British politicians' expenses to global warming science – all have suffered from serious, sometimes catastrophic, collapses in trust. Without trust, life becomes significantly more difficult. Remove trust and we need more legal frameworks, more regulation and tighter controls on how businesses and individuals operate.

# Collapsing trust

Collapsing trust seems to be a very modern malaise, exploded by the Internet, the 24-hour news cycle and the changing social landscape. From neighbours not knowing each other, all the way to Islamic terrorism, the past few years have been awash with stories, analysis and opinion on how trust is changing. The subject has deserved many magazine covers, from the *Harvard Business Review* to *Wired* magazine. Every business leader, politician and pundit seems to be proclaiming that trust needs to be rebuilt.

It is easy to believe that there is a crisis in trust. Any study of the data, of which there are lots, and almost none that is really good, shows trust is changing. Trust in business, bankers, politicians and journalists is low and declining, whereas trust in doctors, the police, even the Church is increasing.

The changing landscape of trust is a complex one, though, because it is embedded in a web of inputs and outputs. We have so much more information, knowledge and communications to deal with than in the past. Combine this with fundamental shifts in our capability to process complexity and changing attitudes to fear and risk and it is no wonder that trust is a dynamic, not a static, property.

## What is really going on with trust?

Do we no longer trust our system, our leaders, our neighbours, even ourselves? If we really don't trust the banks, why do we leave our money in them? If we really don't trust our politicians or political system, then why do the majority of us in developed democracies continue to put crosses on little pieces of paper? How is the exponential rise in access to information, and each other, changing our decisions to trust? Are these challenges mainly global, national or local?

What I think is clear is that these questions have a profound effect on many aspects of life and especially on businesses and brands. Whether it is

a financial institution trying to reclaim customers' loyalty or the leadership of Toyota dealing with a global belief that their cars are unsafe or you and your marketing team putting together the latest campaign to sell the latest proposition, all are intrinsically aiming to make an appeal for the customer to trust.

The understanding of trust in business, however, despite its seeming importance, is low. The way that trust is measured is poor, only scratching the surface as to what is really going on. Banks are a good example. According to the data, everyone distrusts and 'hates' bankers – they now rate lower than even politicians – the banking system has near collapsed and they continue to pay their executives extremely large bonuses, yet we use the banking system every day, depositing our salaries and savings, spending with our debit and credit cards. Why aren't we hiding our money under the mattress?

Clearly, the diagnosis that banks aren't trusted is incorrect. Our behaviours and actions manifestly demonstrate that, at some level, we *do* trust banks (or at least the banking system), despite all the evidence to the contrary, to be stable and perform its function. Of course, at another level, it is true to say that we *don't* trust banks or bankers and we certainly don't like them. There must be more to trust than meets the eye or is captured by a simple market research question.

Fortunately, there has been a huge amount of analysis and experimentation done into trust by psychologists and sociologists. They have many theories and models of trust, but the extension of these into the business world has been limited, apart from one or two notable examples. Part of the purpose of this book is to explain this thinking and reapply some of these models to brands and business in order to build a deeper understanding of how trust affects the decisions that people make in order to do business.

# Trust and brands as a source of social capital

Trust is a powerful source of social capital, where social capital is those assets that exist in our societies and between people – a wealth of sorts, which can be put to work in the pursuit of goals. Social capital and trust-building on a societal level has a lot to do with the ability of people to come together in formal or informal groups that are bound by reciprocal relationships and codes of behaviour. Whether it is a church, a Rotary Club or a trade body, these bonds build trust that helps transactions flow. As we will discover, people and societies that have a greater reserve of and capability to create trust do better economically, especially in the application of capitalism and modern democracy. Why have America, Germany and Japan done so well in the post-war period? It's a lot to do with the high levels of trust and social capital they can employ in creating wealth.

Brands exist as a store of trust. The economic purpose of brands is to reduce transaction costs between buyer and seller. Instead of having to assess the attributes of the 150 different ways of washing my clothes, I can choose my normal brand that I trust will perform in the way it always has and is at a price that I believe represents reasonable value. A decision that could have taken half an hour, reduced to seconds. Brands are a convenient way to make choices in our crowded world and even more overloaded minds.

Unfortunately, brand and marketing folks can never agree on a definition for a brand, but most will come back to words like promise, expectations, preference, delivery, guiding idea, symbols and signals. My personal favourite is one I picked up from Bill McDonald, a mentor of mine: 'A brand is a promise that, when kept, creates preference.' At their core, brands work by setting expectations of performance against a set of needs that the buyer has and packaging this up in an easy-to-remember form. Once formed, we then take on trust that those promises will be delivered. Brands are a form of trust.

If trust as a form of social capital is well accepted, there is much more reticence about calling *brands* social capital. Reticence from the academic world because, perhaps, it cheapens the concept of social capital and from the business world for fear that yet another somewhat fuzzy, but also complex, concept is attributed to brands and branding. I will explore this tension later in this book because I think it is *essential* that we start to see brands as a source of social capital. I think this for two reasons:

- it recognises that brands and their marketing have a powerful effect on our society, effects that are permanent and, in some cases, change the way that we think
- because placing brands within a broader social framework means those organisations and teams that build brands are confronted with a greater responsibility for the impact of their actions on society and our store of social capital.

Stepping up to these responsibilities could seem like a threat, but I believe they are perhaps the biggest opportunity for business and brand-building ever.

## Why they buy

‘On-boarding’, as the company calls it, is very well done at Procter & Gamble – it’s not for nothing that this giant has earned its reputation for graduate training. As part of this training you are introduced to ‘the consumer’ – someone who is going to have a very great influence on your career as, at P&G, ‘the consumer is boss’.

In the mid-1990s’ a new discipline was evolving called consumer psychology. Departments and professors were popping up in American universities and consultancies were selling new techniques and frameworks. Of course, as you would expect, P&G was at the forefront of many of these efforts to understand consumers more deeply – this had always been the beating heart of the company even from its earliest days. So, everyone from the ‘Class of 1996’ was given a book

called *Why They Buy? American consumers inside and out* (Settle and Alreck, 1986).

I have come back to this book recently and its central premise is that, by understanding what consumers want and giving it to them, a business can grow and succeed. Many companies are well advanced in their ability to do this – P&G, Coca-Cola, GE, Apple, succeed by fulfilling this premise by the promises they make. Other businesses, such as banks, are only coming to terms with this idea now and struggling with it.

Even as some succeed and others struggle, however, I believe this central premise is changing and needs to change. The relevant question now – given the challenges that we are facing in a hypercompetitive, globalised world, with the threats overconsumption pose to our environment, our communities and us as individuals – is, ‘Why should anyone buy from you?’

## ***Why should anyone buy from you?***

Free markets and capitalism have worked. In the developed democracies, standards of living have never been higher. Consumption as a growth engine, ensuring demand outstrips supply – the core purpose of marketing – has been the greatest feat of human engineering in history. All this consumption has created a society, a world and even an image of us that, in many respects, is unrecognisable from what it was just 300 years ago. As is widely being recognised, the consumption trajectory we are on is unsustainable: there just aren’t enough resources to go round billions more consuming as the West does today.

The challenges of sustainability that dominate much of the current debate in business come at an interesting time in the evolution of human communication. In the developed – and, increasingly, the developing – world the democratisation of communication through the internet is wreaking profound changes on the way that we gather, process and understand information about our world. We now have access to more easily accessible information than ever before. This is causing what has

been called a revolution in transparency. There are fewer places to hide and, consequently, it is harder and harder to maintain brands that are not built on the mission and vision of the businesses that deliver them. Customers are more and more demanding and sophisticated in judging what is spin from that which is tangible. They are asking deeper and more searching questions of the brands and businesses that want their money.

It has been said that we are just starting a 'great transition,' from one type of world to another, as we battle and hopefully resolve the challenges that face us as a global community. As with any transition, there is a range of potential outcomes and paths that can be taken. The question 'Why *should* they buy from you?' creates new landscapes that recognise the impact businesses have as a route to wealth creation, both economic and social. This is incredibly exciting as we create trust through our brands and marketing that is not just built narrowly on product performance and price, but on a broader basis that competes on social outcomes as well as commercial, where we see fewer 'consumers' to sell to and more 'people' whom we can serve.

This question must not be only a corporate one but also an individual challenge to each of us working today. Having run a large marketing team and budget, I know the tunnel vision that is so easily adopted when the pressure mounts and the business demands growth. There will be aspects of our working lives about which we will not be proud. While at Capital One, I was responsible for sending millions of envelopes of junk mail, most of which will have ended up in landfill. If you work in a marketing team, especially if you lead one, you have a tremendous opportunity to release energy and satisfaction by considering how you create a business that is trusted and trustworthy.

## **Navigating this book**

The basis for this book is that there is a set of profound changes, both short- and long-term ones, that we are experiencing and will significantly change business and the brands and marketing they employ. These

changes are causing trust to be challenged as new questions are asked and the answers are far from clear. Understanding these new questions and starting to formulate answers as to where they will take us will be important for business and brands as they capture the hearts and minds of people and build the trust that is so important for businesses to succeed and help deliver economic prosperity.

In the first part of the book, I lay a foundation for understanding trust more deeply. This is based on months spent poring over academic research. I propose some quite simple frameworks for analysing and measuring trust that I hope are both insightful and practical. They form the basis for the exploration of how to build trust in the following chapters.

The main part of the book presents a series of insights around strategy, brands, marketing and communications that will help create businesses and their brands which can command higher levels of trust. These are important because I think that, as individual and community relationships change, brands have the potential to support the available store of social capital and this is a good thing for business and society. I recognise that others may not share this view. These insights are based on my research and thinking, combined with emergent best practice and interviews with brand and marketing practitioners and thought leaders in trust.

Each chapter shares some insight, often some data and stories along the way, and discusses some ideas for building trust. Through the Action boxes – one at the end of chapter – I've tried to make the concepts practical. Where appropriate and illuminating, I've also included vignettes of the interviews that were completed as research for this book. Much of what this book discusses is strategically challenging, built from emergent trends and requires vision. What I hope is that the process of thinking about trust and strategies to create it will lead you on a journey where you can draw some conclusions for your own business and brand.

I close the book with a more forward-looking description of what I believe can be the twenty-first-century mission for business – the (re)humanisation of business. Many, if not most corporations, especially if

they are listed, have focused far too much on the short term at the expense of long-term sustainable advantage. In this pursuit, they have adopted a mono-dimensional approach that places numbers, often only financial, as the operating system of their company. Some of our greatest economists and business leaders are now questioning this, including notable names such as economist Professor Tim Jackson, Jack Welch, ex-CEO of GE, and Sir Stephen Green, ex-CEO and chairman of HSBC.

Creating a more balanced approach that looks after the interests of both the shareholder and all stakeholders, in the past, present and future, will, I hope, be a fundamentally more balanced, sustainable and, ultimately, more trustworthy approach for business going forward. I think marketing has a huge amount to contribute to this change, given that its skill is in understanding and capturing value from human needs and wants. Brand-builders have an enviable set of tools and thinking to achieve this outcome and can be a powerful ally as business embarks on this journey towards balance. This is what excites me about the potential future role for business, brand-building and marketers.

There is no doubt that many of the themes in this book are idealistic and, in some cases, aspirational. I hope that I have combined this with more practical thinking about how the ideas can be put into action, but I make no apology for the vision outlined here. There are hundreds of books published on the 'how to' of marketing and many more about the practical issues and challenges that brands and marketers face, but what we need more of in business are people who challenge the strategic status quo and, through this, demonstrate their passion and leadership, not just for the customer but also for the role that business can play in society on a sustainable basis. I hope this book speaks, in some small way, to those change agents.

One of the causes of the worst recession since the Great Depression was business becoming mono-dimensional, valuing only the numbers and often on a frighteningly short-term basis. This needs to change, for the good of our businesses, customers and world. It's our intent, as businesses, that forms the basis for commanding peoples' trust. What I hope is that

this book can contribute to the emergent view that sustainable business – and, therefore, brand success over the long term – is best achieved through this rebalancing of what we in business prioritise and value. I believe achieving this balance can be the mission of marketing and marketers and, with it, give a new leadership vision for the profession that will command a following which can help you rise to the top and fulfil your potential and your team's, your customers', your business' and your brand's.





# Trust in marketing?

*Are brands and marketing to blame for the mess we are in? Brands and the millions spent on messages to get people to consume have created the consumer society we live in. Adverts dressed up as independent evidence play on the destruction of our ability to think and resist. Our customers increasingly see through the half-truths and they often don't like what they see.*

Helicopters and news crews descended on the mansion. Outside its impressive gates, photographers were pointing their lenses to try and get a peek at the life lived inside. The house and its owners clearly live the good life – manicured lawns and woodlands surrounded the many bedroomed house of pretty light grey brick.

As the couple inside paced in their kitchen, the tension was rising. Why were these news scavengers hounding them? They had done nothing wrong, nothing illegal. What right did people have to pry into their private lives? They had given over 30 years to public service and this was what they got in return. The anger and frustration at the seeming injustice of this invasion was boiling over. Action needed to be taken. He turned to the door and opened it.

Trudging across the driveway, several thoughts ran through his head. What will I say? How do I defend myself? Is this all worth it? The journalists descended and the pack started baying for answers.

He began his defence: 'I think I have behaved, if I may say so, impeccably and, what's more, I've done nothing criminal. And do you know what it is about? Jealousy – I've got a very, very large house – some people say it looks like Balmoral ... As far as I am concerned, I, to this day, don't know what the fuss is about.'

The shouting and flashes from the photographers' cameras increased. He drew breath. 'This was a failure on my part. We have a wretched Government, which has mucked up the system and caused the resignation of me and many others. It was this Government which introduced the Freedom of Information Act and insisted on these things which have caught me on the wrong foot, which, if I had been cleverer, I wouldn't have done.'

'So you don't think any of the information should have been released', jumped in an eager young reporter. 'No,' came the reply. 'What right does the public have to interfere in my private life? None.'

That very afternoon, Anthony Steen's comments were on news broadcasts up and down the country, posted and pilloried on YouTube, the subject of hundreds of hours of analysis.

What was Anthony Steen's misdemeanour? Claiming £87,729 in expenses from the British taxpayer as a British Member of Parliament (MP), including payments for keeping his mansion and extensive grounds maintained.

## From deference to reference

**the British  
MPs' expenses  
scandal ...  
will be seen as  
a watershed  
moment**

The British MPs' expenses scandal has had, and will continue to have, a profound impact on the way that British democracy works. It is my belief that it will be seen as a watershed moment, symptomatic of a change in the way British society works.

The former British prime minister Tony Blair, in his political memoirs, *A Journey* (2010), has expressed a certain regret over the introduction in 2000 of the Freedom of Information Act. At the time, the Labour government hailed this as a powerful force for truth and transparency in society. They didn't foresee its ramifications. The Act has been used by citizens, including journalists, to get access to a wide range of information, from

government expenditure and MPs' expenses to internal documents on a whole range of policy issues. These new freedoms to demand information combine with mass communications and the Internet to exponentially increase not just access but also the magnification of ideas and stories into the public consciousness.

The result is a profound shift in our assumptions of trust and our placing of faith. Whereas before people assumed a sort of blind faith or trust in people like MPs by wont of their position, this has now gone. Many have called this a move from an age of deference to the age of reference.

In the past, we would have chosen the path of least effort by deferring to those in positions of authority or power. Now, we often arm ourselves with information about their performance, their credentials and learn about the details of a particular issue. Doctors frequently bemoan the fact that patients come armed with information gleaned from the Internet on their range of real and imagined health problems. Something has changed.

## **Blink or think?**

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Blink* (2005), glorifies our human ability to process many, many pieces of information, to divine a 'gut feel' almost instantly that is usually accurate and can be trusted. Over thousands of years of evolution, we have developed the ability to process a wide range of social signals that we are swimming in to guide our judgements. Often these are snap decisions about what and who to trust.

The trouble with these 'blink' decisions is that they can be easily manipulated. Manipulators deliberately employ psychological and social tricks to effect one outcome or another. Marketing is founded on these abilities and uses them to get us to change our behaviour and buy. Almost the first thing you are taught as a young marketer is the power of the 'single-minded benefit' and that this must be focused into advertising that has one idea running through it. There is little room for complexity or nuance. The well-crafted 30-second TV advert works to get us to buy

because it employs emotional and rational cues behind a single idea and drives it home through repetition. Marketing teaches us to accept the surface and not dig any further.

This, in turn, has been both exploited and further compounded by the increasing pace and demand for news. The 30- or 60-second segment on the news channels is now the regular feature. Complicated and often difficult issues are reduced down to the most gratuitous aspects of the story. What gets magnified in this approach is often that which appeals to our baser instincts, hard-wired into our blink responses. Disengage higher-order brain and engage what Seth Godin (2010) calls the 'lizard brain.' No wonder, then, that our modern world is seemingly mired in things like sex, murder, corruption and threat around every corner.

Gladwell's *Blink* provoked a response from Michael R. LeGault, a former columnist from *The Washington Times*. In his book, *Think: Why crucial decisions can't be made in the blink of an eye* (2006), the central premise is that a wide range of forces are combining to degrade our ability to apply critical thinking and reason to problems and this is leading to poorer outcomes. He blames marketing partially for this race to the bottom, for

**a wide range of forces are combining to degrade our ability to apply critical thinking and reason to problems**

its part in helping to create a culture where we blindly accept our role as consumers and give in to the marketing messages, taking them at face value. Critical thinking becomes the preserve of the few. This results in a 'loss of the ability of reason to influence people, policy, and institutions that is leading to a decline of good outcomes in America and Western civilization as a whole. It is *the* central challenge of our time to change this mindset.'

## From deference to preference

It's my belief that, because of this compromise in our ability to think critically, we have moved from an age of deference to *preference*, rather

than reference. The choices we make today are mostly based on a blinking gut feel about what we prefer. We are given a set of simple stimuli that operate on many psychological levels to help us choose what we prefer.

Take the great myth of choice. Most research says that, contrary to the widely held view in marketing that more is better, choice is stressful and difficult; that's why default options are so powerful. What choice does is move our attention away from the fundamental questions, such as, 'Should I buy this', to surface questions about what colour or features or brand do I prefer.

If we *had* truly seen a change from deference to reference, wouldn't we see much more deep inquiry, more analysis, more thinking about the choices we make? No, what we have today is a world where we are satiated by what we prefer. Even the analysis that does get done moves our attention away from true interrogation. For example, in the UK, all schools publish the results of standardised tests taken at the ages of 9, 11 and 14. These are pored over by the press and parents alike. While useful as an *extra* piece of evidence, these results are now the *main* focus when parents are choosing which school to send their child to. The responsibility of the parent to think critically about the type of *child* they have and what type of *education* they want for that child, in an attempt to find a suitable school based on both qualitative and quantitative inputs, is replaced by a rating or percentage achievement rate.

The age of preference is not just led by marketing. Changing educational focus, consumerism, declining standards in public life, an aggressive and unrelenting media and the sheer enormity of many of today's problems all cause people to switch off and turn to simple answers. It is these simple answers that brands tend to provide.

Marketing exploits the process of critical thinking. The classical presentation of an insight, benefit and reason-to-believe uses shallowness presented as evidence to get people to prefer one choice over another. This is its power. Good advertising works on an

**good advertising works on an emotional and rational level, not to shout and bluster, but persuade us to prefer**

emotional and rational level, not to shout and bluster, but persuade us to prefer. We are left with a world where spin and presentation in the drive for preference is what wins out. For businesses and their brands, this means that we build the basis for trust not on the true performance, quality or drives of our businesses, but on the surface power of our marketing and brands to spin.

Often this isn't the marketers' fault. 'We are the best house on a bad street' is a metaphor used to justify why our product or service, with all its faults, is still the best choice. Businesses are often unwilling to take the increase in costs or wait the time it will take to really create a good product that can honestly sell its virtues. Other options are rarely explored. What if the right thing to do was *not* sell a substandard product or highlight other areas of pride over and above the product, such as company culture, contribution to community or sustainability? (See Box 3.1)

**Box 3.1** 'Trust is created over years, not via a 30-second ad'  
*An interview with Mike Hughes, director-general of ISBA – The Voice of British Advertisers*

You might expect the guy whose job it is to be the defender of the advertisers to be one of the black shirt brigade – not a Mussolini supporter but, rather, one of those Charlotte Street advertising and media types. Actually, Mike Hughes is an extremely down-to-earth marketer and general manager who holds distinctly practical views on the role of marketing and advertising.

'People have become more savvy about advertising, and ways of avoiding it if they don't want it, but advertising clearly does have an important role to play in helping those people form connections with brands that are increasingly expected to show leadership beyond their functional delivery.'

Leadership is a theme that Mike comes back to again and again. 'Smart marketers are realising that brands need to have a social philosophy'. This is especially important as government takes a

step back from seeking to direct peoples' lives. Businesses, via their brands, need to recognise their role as major 'change agents' in the way that society develops.

'The business and brand leaders that I talk to in my role accept the need to be sensitive to a broader set of needs across their different stakeholders. This is an important component of winning and retaining the trust that is vital to create great brands. The conversation at the top of business is changing.'

I butt in, perhaps a little too forcefully, 'But the data shows that people don't trust advertising and it's getting worse.'

'The fact is that politicians and parts of the media are over-fond of laying the blame for deep-seated social issues at the door of "advertising", which is not helpful. Consumers are not dumb; they know that advertising is about presenting a brand in its best light – they will then decide, based on brand delivery (or not), whether the brand merits their continued trust. Dove, Ariel, Lloyds TSB, HSBC – all these brands know that achieving and retaining trust is about delivery and consistency above everything else. Advertising, while important, can only provide the stimulus – after that, its down to the consumer.'

The conversation flows and we move towards the increasing sophistication of marketing and advertising to change our minds and influence our behaviour. 'What responsibilities do we have?'; I ask.

'Businesses and brands have clear responsibilities, in two senses. Firstly, to consumers, where the responsibility is to not mislead, and the UK's proven system of self-regulation takes care of that aspect very well. However, brands also have a real sense of responsibility *to themselves* not to blow the trust established over time, via either inappropriate advertising, or, more importantly, non delivery. Trust is created over years, not via a 30-second ad', concludes Mike.

# Programmed to want

We are programmed, through messages, to want the new. From our iPhones to our ideals, we have largely replaced our role as citizen with the role of

**we have largely replaced our role as citizen with the role of consumer**

consumer. Jon Alexander, a young radical and founding contributor to Conservation-Economy ([www.conservation-economy.org](http://www.conservation-economy.org)) who turned away from being an ad man, puts it like this:

*Consumerism takes the act of consumption and turns it into the defining act of our role as social beings, rather than one expression of that role. We all consume, but in a healthy society, we should also participate to an equally significant extent in social groups and relationships that are beyond consumption. We should produce, and we should be citizens. But in a Consumerist society, these other roles fade into the background. And this is dangerous, because with our roles as producers and as citizens (among others, perhaps) go balance and perspective in our societies. As Consumers, we become the centre of the universe. We have an inflated sense of our own importance. We have no real responsibility to anyone other than ourselves – we must look after our own interests first and foremost.*

These points are most poignantly underlined by the response of the then President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair to the 9/11 attacks, when they told us that all we needed to do in response to the disaster, in effect, was go shopping, though Bush maintains he did not use that exact phrase.

## Convenient truths

Brands and the trillions spent over the years on marketing to propel them into people's minds have operated on some convenient truths that make our lives as marketers and the impact of our work easier to bear.

The first is that all advertising does is enable choice and doesn't make us buy more stuff. Common sense and our day-to-day experiences surely challenge this myth. The weight of advertising today is truly astounding and people constantly complain of overload. Globally, hundreds of billions of dollars are spent trying to flog us stuff. To claim that this doesn't have an effect on overall consumption is absurd.

The second myth is that advertising doesn't work on a subliminal level – all we do is present cogent arguments and evidence to aid people's rational decision making. *All* advertising and marketing works on a subliminal level – full stop. To be clear, I don't believe that this is a consequence of any Machiavellian plots by the 'mad men' (and women) of advertising, but a consequence of which we are fully aware, of the way that human beings process information. We judge adverts, brands and products on an emotional and a rational level and good advertising appeals to the heart and the mind. The science of persuasion has become so sophisticated that it works on many levels to effect changes in our behaviour. Sociology, psychology and now neuroscience have been exploited by marketing to effect the outcome marketing wants, which is for people to consume.

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In isolation, a single marketing campaign probably doesn't make much of a difference to our impetus to consume or change what we think or feel, but to deny the effect, in aggregate, of hundreds of billions of dollars spent on these messages is nonsensical, and, I believe, irresponsible. Marketing and its tools, in conjunction with the mass media, have created the consumer society.

There is a powerful symbiosis between mass marketing and mass media that surrounds each of us with messages programming us to consume. We are told that if we have newer, sexier, better stuff, we will be happier

and more is always better. Although there are many underlying themes to this matrix of messages, one of the constants is fear and one of the consequences of this is increasing hysteria, unhappiness and mistrust. Unlikely as it may be, Marilyn Manson described it well in the Michael Moore film *Bowling for Columbine* (2002): 'keep everyone afraid, and they'll consume.'

Responding to media is trained into us from the earliest of ages. I opened the door of my living-room recently to be confronted by my four-year-old son, Daniel, 'praying' to the television. He was watching a programme on children's BBC called *Yoga Babies*. The fawn-coloured, massive-headed character on the screen was demonstrating a cross-legged exercise where you move your head towards the floor. Daniel was following and, in so doing, gave the impression that he was worshipping the TV. Even though he wasn't, this was a powerful metaphor for me about just how powerful the television is in so many lives and from the youngest ages. According to Dr Aric Sigman in *Remotely Controlled* (2005), more than half of all three-year-olds in America have a TV in their rooms, rising to two-thirds by six, with the average hours watched daily as high as five. From ADHD to our changing values, television has had a significant effect on all our lives and marketing paid for it.

The values that marketing and advertising portray have changed the way we think and feel about ourselves, our lives and what is important. As

**people, with greater access to information than ever before, are starting to see behind the messages and, often, they don't like what they see**

marketers, we play with and change what is trusted and distrusted in our attempts to try and persuade consumers to buy from us.

The trouble is that people, with greater access to information than ever before, are starting to see behind the messages and, often, they don't like what they see. They are becoming more empowered, more demanding and raising the bar. People are increasingly concluding that they can't trust businesses and their brands, their advertising and their motivations. Despite

the thousands of good people working for businesses, we are less trusting and more cynical of them. This will either result in increasing costs as we have to try ever harder to persuade, reduced prices as everything commoditises or zero loyalty as consumers assume that all businesses and brands are as bad as each other. This is a scenario that we would do well to avoid.

The challenge now facing our brands, our businesses and ourselves is how to move towards a more sustainable, better model where we can feel better about what we do, commit our brands to building positive social capital and regain the trust of people. We start to look at this in the next chapter.

## TAKE ACTION TO SEE HOW TRUST IS CHANGING YOUR BRAND AND BUSINESS

### Step 1: Ask yourself the hard questions

- How does the consumption of your brand help:
  - customers
  - shareholders
  - the environment
  - employees
  - society?
- If you stopped selling your brand tomorrow, who would benefit?
- If you stopped selling your brand tomorrow, who would be harmed?

### Step 2: Become a conscious marketer

- What assessments do you use to assess your role's impact on the world?
  - How do you stack up?
- How much does your brand increase or decrease the store of trust and social capital in society?
  - Does your brand use fear or greed to sell? Is this right?
  - Is your brand virtuous in its actions?
- What is your macro-marketing scorecard?

- What is the effect on people when they experience your marketing?
- What effects would your marketing have if it was the only thing that people saw?
- How does what you do reflect the positive contributions of your company?



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