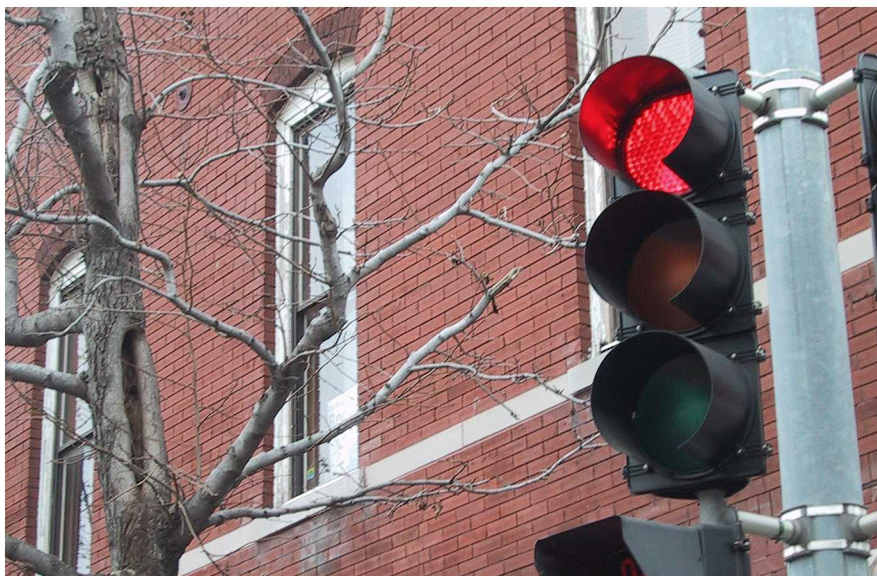


Thoughts on marketing, tech & work



Right on Red

Mike McCamon

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Random Thoughts on
Marketing, Technology & Work

Mike McCamon

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“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

- Gandhi

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To my many friends from the Innovative Software days. You gave me my first shot at a career in the computer industry.

Introduction

Over the past three years I have been writing my Random Thoughts on marketing, technology, work and life. Sometimes frequently, other times less. This book is a compilation of those Thoughts.

Some of my recipients have very much misunderstood my intentions for my musings for the objective has been quite innocent. Socrates was quoted as saying, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” My objective was to reflect on my skills and how to improve them.

I think we should learn to have this same discipline in our work life. I try very hard to always “live outside the box.” Question .. *most* everything. Just because we did something one way yesterday if a better way exists today, change.

This idea was the concept behind the title, “Right on Red.” In America, a country whose most likely sole contribution to the history of humankind is its pragmatism, someone once asked a simple question: “If while I’m driving a car, parked at a red stop light preparing to make a right hand turn and the way is

clear, why not let me just go?” And so it was put into law a driver can make a right on red.

It is this questioning of “why not?” that I think is sorely missing in today’s large (and American) corporations. Group-think is going strong and to question something is too great a risk. So everyone just goes along agreeing with one another, does things the Company-way showing up to continue collecting a paycheck.

The only way things change is when people change how they do them. If we get up tomorrow morning and do the same thing we did today, we are only one day older and the world hasn’t been improved one bit.

If it’s broke, fix it. If it’s not broke, ask what would make it better? Focus on fixing something for 80% of the people and handle the exceptions as exceptions. As someone once said, “common sense isn’t so common.”

Marketing

The Rainmaker

For years I have developed, managed and executed marketing programs that were designed to influence the demand for new products. Everything from retail programs to sales programs to online marketing to public relations. Some worked better than others. Yet after all these years I am still searching for a “rain making” way to influence the market. Let me explain.

Suppose you are a company with an expertise in swim-wear. You can make them different colors, different shapes, prints .. many different variations designed to capture many different market segments. You could then put together a fine retail distribution plan and hire an international sales force to sell your products into a collection of wonderful channel partners. You could even do market analysis to identify those geographies that had weather most appealing for the beach lifestyle and do special programs in those markets. I suppose Florida is blanketed with these types of programs.

But what if it always rained? Worse yet, what if your biggest strategic competitor - the umbrella industry (since few of us enjoy swimming in the rain) could make it never be sunny again. No one would ever buy another swim-suit. If you worked at the largest umbrella company on earth and could do this you would be a “rainmaker.” So where does this fit with high tech?

Suppose those press and analysts we visit with whom so often get self-serving product pitches were told by an independent credible source that wireless would be the next internet in driving demand for PCs? Or alternatively suppose that same source instead told that same audience that wireless would forever end demand for PCs. This would be the task of a rainmaker.

So what is the rain maker’s job description in high tech? Influence the influencers. Cultivate the imagination of customers needs two to five years out. Create demand for capital investments. Sell the dream. Simply put: influence the business climate of an industry.

Don’t think its possible? Think of the fashion industry. Does anyone really need \$150 tennis shoes

or \$100 baggy jeans? In many ways the fashion industry is a rain making machine.

We have style magazines and in the U.S an unbelievable number of television shows covering what this and that famous actor or actress is wearing to that next award show. And my wife thinks I waste time watching football.

While I'm not exactly sure how to do it I know this is were we want to be. What do I want to be when I grow up? A Rainmaker.

Early Solvers

One of the more common models us marketers use when developing plans to introduce new products is the technology adoption life-cycle. A recent twist to this model was popularized in the computing industry by Geoffrey Moore's "Crossing the Chasm". His view was that there exists "a chasm" of increased sales between early adopters and the early majority of customers.

While the technology adoption life-cycle is frequently quoted I suspect relatively few in Santa Clara Valley really know the humble roots of the research that guides most new product introduction planning and budgets. Iowa. Yes, Iowa. The roots of this research are documented in "The Diffusion of Innovation" by Everett M. Rogers. Researchers in the 1930s wanted to understand the communication network that drove of the adoption of hybrid corn seed by rural farmers. Over the decades we have built on this research looking at the rate of adoption of technology, the factors that influence it, the demographics of the types of adopters and the efficiencies of human communication networks.

In an effort to target our new product “innovations”, volumes of research claim to now profile who are the most likely to be the earliest of adopters including among other things occupation, income, education, gender and age. I recently saw a horrifying statistic. It seems I am now too old to be in that most likely to early adopt new technologies. What happened? Did they find out I canceled my subscription to Wired magazine?

So I began to question decades of this research and concluded maybe THEY were wrong and came to several conclusions of my own: (1) despite my denial, I am getting older, (2) I still love playing with and buying new products, (3) I don't understand the baggy pants thing (is there some sort of denim surplus?) and (4) maybe people just buy products because they want to solve a problem - not because they are of a particular occupation, income, education, gender and age. Rather than calling them “early adopters” I like to call them “early solvers”

In fact if we chose to only track the “early adopter” research, new products like Lifeline (9-1-1 autodialing for the elderly), wheelchairs or walking canes would have never made it past those earliest adopters - wrong demographics. Lest we forget, the first

personal computers were bought by accountants because of VisiCalc not for some bizarre love for change and certainly not because IT supported it.

When we build our launch plans we need to look hard for (1) what problem are we trying to solve, (2) who actually benefits from the solution and (3) how is the decision to change made.

In my view, the “early solvers” are the key to the adoption of innovations. I guess it’s okay now to admit it: as a native Kansan, I never really much cared for Iowa anyway.

Vision, Value and Vigilance

We have all heard the five “P”s of marketing. We are told and taught that if we follow this true and tested formula we will have success. My experience is telling me that takes a whole lot more than this to have really successful products. Introducing the three “V”s of marketing: Vision, Value and Vigilance.

Vision. You have to know where you’re going and be able to convince both your customers and your team it’s the right direction. This vision can’t be as trite as “we will become the market leader of market segment x”. It needs to be big enough to captivate customers and motivate teams when the times are tough. You may end up being wrong - but no one will mistake your colors.

Value. Price doesn’t matter. Let me repeat, it doesn’t matter - not one bit. If any product pulls in better than a couple of points of margin you have an example of value winning out over price. The value of a product is what customers are willing to pay to not switch to a competitor or do nothing at all. It has little to do with cost or pricing. The value of a

product can also change over time. A timely example of this is airline fares. I'm not talking about how prices go up the later you book your flight but rather that the value of an airline trip compared to just phoning into a meeting has changed. Another example would be the Macintosh. Apple could drop the price of an iMac to \$99 and they still wouldn't get most Windows shops to switch .. see price doesn't matter. Marketing is responsible for creating the value of product in the eyes of the market. This can be done by many means - brand marketing, distribution channels, advertising, PR, etc.

Vigilance. Steve Capps was recently quoted as saying; "Vision without the ability to execute is probably a hallucination." Product teams must be vigilant to get a products done on schedule, built to specification, adequately tested, effectively sold and marketed to be successful. It's hard. Maybe that's why there are relatively few really successful products or companies in the high tech world.

We so often get seduced into this one ad or that this one promotion (price reductions too often I might add) will make it all happen. They don't. You have to do everything right – every ad, every promotion, every press release, every customer meeting,

everything. And after each one you should examine how you could do it even better the next time.

It's funny but I have rarely ever heard terms like ROI, Six Sigma and Operational Excellence discussed as tools for marketing - maybe it's time we take a look.

With all this said, there is no magic formula to success in high tech. No silver bullet. People make products successful - not companies. People choose to buy or not buy products. Our job as marketers is to captivate customers with our vision and to spark their imagination to see the value in change.

Addition vs. Multiplication

What is the difference between addition and multiplication? Most grade school students know the answer to this question yet sometimes I wonder if those of us in marketing get it.

When we craft our annual marketing plans I feel we often fall into the trap of only approving those programs and activities that can be directly measured against percentage gains in market share/awareness/preference – typically within the timeframe of a year. While I will always argue we must focus on doing these detailed programs right; with our focus I am afraid we are missing a huge opportunity.

Suppose your engineering team only worked on the products that were shipping this year. Assume you had no Advanced R&D occurring, no Fellows or Ph.D. scientist-types trying to find that next big breakthrough advancement. Sounds silly, right? You wouldn't do this because we know new markets are defined by breakthrough research not iterative development. We must have these ongoing efforts to

pave the way for the long-term future of our businesses.

When I take what we all understand works in the context of engineering and overlay it onto many of the marketing teams I have worked on I see no similarities. Do you have a group (or individual) working on “Advanced Marketing”

Why would this make sense? It’s simple. By doing Advanced Marketing we could prepare the market (years in advance) for the products we expect to be shipping in that timeframe versus scrambling after the products ship to get 5% more market share.

Advanced Marketing would focus on creating the “need in the customer’s mind” long before the technology is ready. I have always believed that people buy products to solve problems – let’s help them identify the problem in their mind before the product ships for a change.

By the way, you can’t leave this effort to engineering or the scientists. While they can invent incredible products they don’t necessary understand the tools of the marketing trade.

So why the comparison between multiplication and addition? Marketing teams today focus on the “cumulative” or “additive” programs that increment market shares a percentage point at time. If we add the Advanced Marketing function we could then also include the “multiplier” effect of new markets and breakthrough businesses to significantly grow our businesses over the long term. I like to call them the 10x plans. How do we make our business ten times bigger than it is today?

Lastly I must point out you need both additive and multiplier programs to be successful. You can't go out and hype the long term future without doing the details like collateral, sales training programs, yearly business plans and the like. Focus on addition and multiplication and hopefully you won't have to learn about subtraction.

What's an iPod?

Recently I visited our local Apple Store. After about five minutes my wife decided to wait outside for me to finish looking around. The most amazing thing happened to us when we left. I walked out the front door and started heading down the sidewalk and two women in their early 40s were staring at the window display. One said, “iPod? What’s that?”

I walked away laughing. My first reaction would be to sarcastically ask “what rock have you been living under?!?” After that I thought of it being another example of living in the midwest. But after a few minutes I caught myself and started to think, how do you answer that question? It’s almost like so many of us in tech take all these things for granted, that people will just get it.

What’s a rainbow? Why does it thunder? How does a refrigerator work? What grade of oil do you put in your car? How do you wire a three-way light switch? Why do you always need both a credit and a debit? How much feed does a milk cow need each day? You see there is much even us tech folks can’t explain...

And amazingly for those in these industries, all of the above questions would seem as quite foolishly ridiculous as “what’s and iPod?”

When us marketing folks try to sell a new product to someone (especially an expensive one) do you answer with, “it’s a really big, well small .. you know what I mean .. portable hard drive with a music player” or maybe instead with “Imagine listening to all the music you own anywhere you go.” What’s the difference? Pretty obvious to me. The first is a rational benefit the other the emotional benefit.

I guess this is the beauty of a product like the iPod. It, unlike so much else today in the computing industry, can really deliver a genuine emotional benefit to someone outside of tech-land while at the same time having the good fortune of being made by an company that understands what this means when trying to sell it.

Rational benefit appeals to the scientist in us all. It is logical, concise, measured and cold. Emotional benefit appeals to the heart, is irrational and can be fickle. Seems like the difference between what I often try to explain to my kids as the difference between “I want” and “I need.”

So what can we take from these observations? Maybe as marketers in tech we need to ask that completely ridiculous and fresh question: “What is it?” It seems to me there are millions upon millions of people who know how to wire three-way switches, how much to feed a cow, what oil to put in their car, can explain thunder or rainbows that probably don’t give a hoot about your product. And guess what? They are the elusive and coveted mainstream.

“What’s an iPod?” Damn good question.

Who are the Freaks?

Some time ago I was visiting with an editor on the west coast about why I chose to move back to the midwest after a stint in Southern California. We went over the usual litany of reasons and regrets of moving to Kansas. “Why would anyone want to leave the Mecca of high-tech and go live with the cows?” I was asked.

I feared what was hidden in this discussion was the occasionally arrogant stereotype that people outside of Silicon Valley are .. well, basically idiots. The logic goes, everyone in the Valley is in tech. You know the story. How many places can you live where you can have a discussion with the person in line behind you at Starbucks about your favorite blogger? Come on, if you leave here you will wilt into one of “those” people that just don’t “get it.”

I played a little game with my editor that day. I asked, “How many people live in the Bay area?” Then we estimated how many worked in tech, how many of those actually knew what they were doing and from that those that genuinely are at the front of the

adoption cycle. Then I dropped the bombshell. “I wonder..” I pondered and then “hmm” indicating I wanted to say something but didn’t think it was appropriate or just right. Actually it was an act because I knew where I was going from the start.

“I wonder, who are the freaks? The 10,000 or so people out here that get it like us or the six or so billion other people on the planet?”

The best thing about living out here in fly-over country is that there are real people out here. People just doing their little jobs living their little lives .. just like you and me. If they need to drive a nail into a piece of lumber they go to Home Depot and buy a hammer. If they calculate their taxes in a spreadsheet they go out and buy a computer. Most out here don’t know what a blogger does and I am quite certain they don’t really care either.

Why is this so wonderful? The rest of the world is just like this. So when I work on my core messaging, a marketing plan, a news release, a website launch, a new product design, whatever; I have to do one very important thing: try to explain it to my neighbor. And usually the discussion goes straight to “what’s it gonna

do for me?” Never had to tell him it has a 40GB hard drive, DRAM, etc. Simply, what it did for him.

Us folks living out here in fly-over country aren't the freaks. No sir, I'm afraid it's far worse. We're the customer. Good morning, how's the coffee?

My Reality

It has been said that perception is reality. How someone perceives a situation is the only reality that matters. Even when confronted with factual evidence disputing a person's perception the reality doesn't change.

Around ten years ago when Apple introduced the QuickTake (a digital camera) I had an opportunity to experience the "my reality" issue first hand. As an account manager for CompUSA I would occasionally work demos on the show floor just to see what the real world was like in regards to our products.

I was busily snapping photos and transferring them to my computer talking about the benefits of digital photography when a gentleman approach my station. I asked him what was his profession and eagerly started another demo when I learned he was a real estate appraiser. He agreed that this kind of thing would change the way he does his work but apologized for not being able to buy one.

"Why?" I asked. He then told me that he didn't own a Macintosh and this Apple product wouldn't work

with his Windows 3.1 PC. I assured him we also had a connectivity kit that worked with the PC and therefore his problem was solved yet he repeated “I know all that, but Apple won’t work with IBM.”

Frustrated I asked him what brand of PC did he own. He replied a Dell. Then I asked what brand of printer he owned - it was an HP. Well there I said, just like Dell and HP are not the same brand but could be used together so too could the Apple camera and his PC. He was unable to change his perception.

One other story involves an experience we had following the opening of the Bluetooth SIG office in Kansas City. A sales team from a local mobile phone retailer cold called on us a few weeks ago to sell us new mobile phones. We didn’t need any but before these folks left we had a short discussion that again demonstrates this fact. They vaguely knew what Bluetooth was and asked, was this a regional office? I replied “No, this is the headquarters of the SIG.” He asked again slightly changing it as if I didn’t understand, “so .. this is some sort of regional sales office right?”

You see, the perception of too many people (and regrettably many of those living in Kansas City) is

that it would be impossible to believe the Bluetooth SIG would have their headquarters in Kansas. If this same meeting would have taken place in San Diego I subscribe there would have been no question. It's amazing even now how I am treated by strangers when I travel now that I live in Kansas as opposed to California. You see, in reality I am no different - it is only their perception of me that has.

At the end of day it seems that all of us have closed minds about the realities we face each day. You believe those driving a Mercedes are rich, those living in Kansas are farmers, those living in California liking to eat salad, Europeans smoke and on and on.

While these may only be someone's own perception of a situation - they are their reality. The implication of this for marketers is quite obvious: we must strive to mold perception and then very carefully build plans and products that work to influence a consumer to change their reality.

Why I'm often Wrong

For the past several months I have tried to understand why I so often incorrectly predict the future of our industry. And it's not only that, but why does it seem that customers can't pick the right products that seem so obvious to me. Why am I often wrong about these things?

I am beginning to think that perhaps my expectations of the customer are too high. I think the customer will get it - that our messaging will be right on, the correct programs will be in place, the pricing will be right, etc. I think to myself, "C'mon it's so obvious XYZ will make your life better." Perhaps what is happening is that customers cannot even fit what I am trying to tell them into their own personal "technology roadmap" that resides in their head. I wonder...

How does expectations play into consumer decisions? In many ways it could be argued that perhaps expectations alone is the most important factor in a customer purchase decision. Think about it. If I drive a 10-year old car that rarely starts and has no

air condition ANY brand of new car will seem like a REALLY nice car. If I already have become accustomed to a late-model Mercedes E-Class my expectations for my next car are going to likely be higher.

In fact some research I looked at years ago regarding consumer focus group testing provided an additional insight: customers were happier with products that moderately surpassed their expectation when compared to products that vastly exceeded their expectations. So in the above old car example, if this is true, the customer might actually be happier with a new Accord than a new BMW.

So what does all this ultimately tell us about marketing high tech products? Know your customer. Too often I see us trying to productize technology simply because we have it. It's sort of a "Field of Dreams" mentality - if you build it they will come. It doesn't work like that in the real world. Each customer makes choices based on their own expectations with whatever information you put in their hands. Just because you've had this wonderful engineering breakthrough doesn't mean every potential customer will get why they should buy it. The list of "Field of Dream" or "FOD" technologies

is long and I suppose I should be proud to have product managed of few of them myself.

I am getting worried we may be facing this same issue with wireless. Do customers really want wireless access from their notebook PC? Do they expect to connect to the internet anywhere? What do they expect to do when they are connected? Will it really change how they use their notebook?

If we don't set the customers' expectations correctly we miss either high or low - thereby assuring our failure with "that latest great technology" becoming a Field of Dreams casualty. But then again, this might be another time when I was wrong...

WindowsXP, Inc.

Every time a new film from Disney is released I am absolutely amazed. Several years ago during one week we saw the release of WindowsXP from Microsoft and Monsters, Inc. from Pixar/Disney. For all the hoopla and noise us marketers in the computer industry try to make around “that most incredible new product we all must have,” we should feel shameful when compared to the likes of those Disney folks.

Let me make my case. It's opening day for Monsters and it is “in the channel” – ready to for the first showing on screens nationwide. There were no crashes during its unveiling. Every Disney retail store not only carries Monsters toys on the first day but has also refreshed show windows that have been redesigned for the occasion. My children can get a little toy in their McDonald's Happy Meal and all weekend long it seems that E! and others are running Billy Crystal and John Goodman through the paces. Oh, and I have been seeing trailers for months and a national print and TV campaign is also underway.

Let's not forget those little pieces of plastic in that "only reason kids want to go to McDonald's" Happy Meals. They are made way off shore, hand painted, shipped across an ocean, put into a distribution system to now land in my welcoming children's hands in my home town - and all of this before the opening day of the movie. In fact, every single McDonald's nationwide has this stuff. Amazing.

Ask yourself: on your last product introduction was the channel completely full, merchandising in-place, product tie-in promotions complete and press as good as Monster? Well I will come clean. No .. maybe not ever. In fact, I have been on programs that my channel team couldn't even tell me if the collateral and merchandising had even arrived at channel locations little less if was in place and in use. PR? Don't even get me started.

I also can look back when "Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace" was released here in the States. There was absolutely no way to escape it. The local television station even played the trailer during their evening news program. Wow. But please, no free Bill Gates beanie babies.

Blame Marketing

Over the past few months I have pondered, “Why do so many cool and useful products fail in the market?” If you give it some thought there are countless more who underachieve their potential viability in the market and after much neglect quietly get discontinued .. probably hundreds per month. Have you ever really asked this question? Seems like a natural question, yet I would imagine many of us haven’t asked.

Of all the reasons I could come up with why a product becomes a tragedy I could only find one accomplice - it was marketing. Let me make my case.

Do engineers build a product that simply doesn’t work as planned? Not usually. I have worked with many talented engineers and while it seemed they never got done quickly enough, I have to say the normally built what we’ve ask. Oh I’m sure we could come up with quality defects that have doomed products over the years but the success of Windows seems to dispute the notion that imperfect products are assured to fail in the market.

Can you blame the customer? No, I can't make that argument either. This is like blaming the guest at a restaurant for a burned cake - sorry it doesn't stick.

Can you blame operations, senior management, accounting, quality assurance, manufacturing, your channel partners, market conditions, or sun spots? Sorry, none of these folks come even close. even though I'm one of them I say, "Blame marketing."

While marketing is an easy target and we are certainly soft around the middle let me make my case. If product development works they way it is suppose to, literally every decision that matters in the success or failure of a product should be made by marketing. Starting with identifying the target customer continuing through pricing and channels to messaging and communications, it is marketing that invents "a thing" to sell the market.

When identifying your target customer, ask yourself how do you verify your assumptions? What will it take for them to take the initiative to even learn you even exist? What else do they spend their money on, how do they live their lives? What's important to them and what's not?

Next, what features will the customer need to make a buying decision at the price you set when the product is ready to sell and deliver to them? What is the problem the customer is trying to solve that your product solves? Will they accept the compromises you have had to make along the way like battery-life or size and even the product's color?

How will the customer find out you have just shipped this wonderful product? I think too often we proudly reflect on our nice "launch coverage" and neglect to keep plugging at the awareness problem. What media is most likely to influence your customer, is your messaging right and is it delivered to the right audience?

Assuming you have passed all the previous gates and the customer goes to find the product to buy do you have it in the right shops, priced, packaged and merchandised in a way that supports the customer's intent to buy.

And finally when they get home does the product actually do everything they've already been sold it will or does it disappoint and under deliver? Mind you, this last test is really more about expectations than the

product itself, and again the finger gets pointed right back at marketing.

After nearly twenty years at this I'm still learning this clever craft of marketing. It's really hard to do it well. Be vigilant in your efforts. Remember, the only thing riding on doing it completely right is everything.

When wysiwyg was a Word

If you pick up the book on high tech marketing, I'm certain you will read a nice long chapter on the importance of trade shows to your plan. My advise to you: skip that chapter. Maybe ten years ago they were relevant, but today they are simply an excuse to spend a grotesque amount of money in less than a week with nothing to show for it, lest a hangover.

The first Comdex shows I attended in the late 80's were something. Maybe I was young and naive, but they seemed to matter. Long taxi lines, booth babes, private parties at the Beach and one or two late nights hosting customers gambling was the norm.

This mid November trek to Vegas was the first time you could see for yourself the latest software and hardware. Keynotes were from smaller companies like Microsoft and Ashton Tate. Funny, Ashton was the publisher of dBase - the most popular software of the day behind 1-2-3 from another dinosaur, Lotus.

We all pretty much used WordPerfect having dumped Wordstar a few years before. Younger folks might like to impress me with their IM-chat cryptic codes .. I

would like to see them try to format a document in WordStar. ^KD, remember? In 1989 WYSIWYG was a word .. far more ubiquitous than today's "yt?"

Two dynamics changed the trade show industry: the internet and 911. 911 is pretty self-explanatory as companies more closely scrutinized their travel budgets (and people weren't so eager to travel) the general downturn in the economy and the bursting of the tech bubble all pretty much occurred within 24 months when tech shows were already showing their age.

The Internet changed trade-shows in ways maybe not so obvious. I think we often forget what it was like trying to learn about new products back in 1989. CRN, ComputerWorld and PCWeek were my bibles. I read those weeklies cover to cover.

Back in those days trade shows were one of the few places you could learn of and see new products. Today, if you watch a site like Gizmodo you normally learn about a product a few months BEFORE it's even announced. Once it is released, in the case of software, you just download it to your computer and try it our yourself. In 1989 if you wanted to know how tall a monitor was, you had to see it in person or

call to get a piece of collateral, today you just Google the name and are presented with more than a dozen sites that include pricing, reviews, specs, etc.

So what to do at trade-shows? The only reason to go to a tech show today is for scheduled meetings with clients, customers and the press. It's a convenient group scheduled reunion of sorts - and even in today's world of instant-internet, sitting down face-to-face with someone can be as refreshing as it can be productive.

Thinking Differently

During the winter holiday season, us here in the U.S. struggle to be inclusive of all religions of the world. This plays out as a dichotomy of political correctness and melting pot madness. Probably one of the reasons why it has become such a secular holiday.

It seems to me one of our biggest problems is that we have all be seduced by the optimism of Disney's "It's a small world" into thinking we are all alike. We're not.

Some of us listen to Country music, others hip-hop. Some drive convertibles, others Excursions. I wear my hair short, others in dread-locks. My pants are getting too tight, others too baggy to stay up. Some are old, others young. Some grumpy, others optimistic. Technical, novice. Travelers, home-bodies. Sports fans, those who detest it. Mexican food, sushi. Reserved, outspoken.

I would argue that while you know people who might remind you of someone else, no two are alike. These differences are driven by genetics, by our country's culture, by our co-workers, our corporate culture, by

our friends, by our families, by our neighbors and from those who we aspire to gain acceptance.

So why when we develop products and marketing campaigns do we often think one size fits all? I know it's cheaper but does one message appeal to every audience?

My favorite example is during the height of the "Think Different" campaign by Apple several years back. I was on a subway in Tokyo and I noticed one of those black and white photos in the train.

What struck me was this: (1) thinking differently is not necessarily the positive personality trait found in the West and (2) did something think using Albert Einstein was such a good idea? He did help invent weapons of mass destruction that were used twice on this country 45 years ago. Hello?

What is so wonderful about this world is that we are all different. Even in this day of mass media, my next door neighbor is as different from me as the homeless of Cambodia. If you don't think so, I don't think you've looked hard enough. This is a beautiful thing: it gives the world character and makes every new encounter interesting.

Look hard to find the similarities during the holiday season but also focus on celebrating the differences. In that you may just find the meaning of the holidays after all. And “Have a .. Merry December!”

Branding the “Free State”

I’ve had it - they need to re-brand the State of Kansas. The “product” has high customer awareness but low brand equity. The tag-line of the state, “The Sunflower State” is highly outdated and isn’t true to the progressiveness of the eastern metropolitan areas. Now about that flag .. man it really sucks.

Just so you don’t throw me out of my home state for my lack of loyalty to heritage, know that my family homestead here in the mid-nineteenth century on a plat of land unsuitable for even the rocks. Each generation since then has been born in this state, less two of my children. My family migrated from the homestead and for two generations worked the Santa Fe railroad that helped grow the state. For goodness sake, I have moved away four times each time to choose to return, so I can’t be all that bad.

So where to start? I say with the motto. Many don’t know it (bad marketing on our part) but Kansas was at the front of the slavery debate as it entered statehood. For those who don’t recall high school history, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was the last

compromise in Congress before the Civil War regarding the slavery issue. Kansas was to be admitted as either a free or slave state depending on local referendum - the settlers were to decide. For the next decade scores of immigrants entered the state violently ready to defend their stance on this issue. In fact the Missouri-Kansas border during this period was a very dangerous place with raids from across both state lines attempting to “influence” the vote. In 1861 three months prior to the outbreak of the War, with many of the southern congressman already missing from Congress, Kansas was admitted as a free state.

What should the motto be? “The Free State.” In fact, Kansas later played another significant role in the civil rights movement on the separate but equal policies popular in the 1950’s when *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* went to the Supreme Court. Again, the residents of the state spoke louder than the bureaucrats.

Now onto that flag. About two dozen states have absolutely horrible flags. Kansas has the name in big yellow letters with the state seal which includes (yes) a wagon and a person hewing a field with an oxen. Haven’t seen this in a while. You see, flags, as any

brand, needs staying power. A brand should capture the values of the product while being a memorable ambassador for the product. Something to outlive the generation and be able to change its meaning over time.

Great flags? Easy, Texas and Arizona are at the top of my list. What makes a good design besides staying power? Simplicity, easily reproducible, memorable and a clear focus on “that state’s individuality” typically identified by “their” star. I’m not a designer but I know they’ve got to loose the oxen.

We may not achieve the brand recognition of a McDonald’s or Coca-Cola but it’s worth a try.

That Wonderful Wizard

Change is hard. I like to joke that one reason why people don't change their lives in major ways is simply because it's so easy to just get up tomorrow morning and keep doing the same thing you did yesterday. After a lifetime of this, things might be easy but it certainly would be boring.

As marketeers, change is our business. Every day we ask customers to change their life in some minor, others major, way to keep the factory building one more widget. Buy this one thing and your life will be transformed.

Recently I moved back to my home-state of Kansas. I cannot tell you the absolute amazement by both my arrival and departure locations people are by this decision. "Why would you do that?!" is the most commonly heard comment.

So just to give you a real challenge to see how hard it is to change, try this: "Kansas is a better place to live than California." Am I crazy? First ask yourself: Have you ever "test drove" living in both states? Have you even visited both places? What data are you using to

make this judgment and how did you get it? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say “Kansas”? What about the same for California? How did you form these views? What could happen to make you change them?

Like most I ask, regrettably the “first thing you think of”-Kansas question is answered with either “Dorothy” (look I don’t even need to give her name context) or some line from that movie made over eighty years ago. Most common one of course relates to “I don’t think we’re in...”.

As marketers we expect the market to find our message, read it, understand it, process it, believe it and then act upon it. It’s quite a lot to expect. No wonder that one great ad just doesn’t do it. Worse yet, particularly if you have a social conscience that has existed for literally generations, the challenge could be insurmountable. Then again, getting up tomorrow morning believing what I believed yesterday is pretty easy.

Technology

The PC Industry is Dead

Twenty-five years ago a small company wanted to build a computer for the rest of us. I was part of that journey having worked at Apple in the late eighties and early nineties. Even then with the launch of Windows95 it looked like there was still hope. Today there is none.

Forcedly tied to their historical roots, personal computers today are slow, unreliable, user hostile and often frustratingly useless. The bloated egos of our marketeers can only be matched by the amount of memory and hard drive space required for our bloated operating systems and office applications.

Just as it was done then, eventually someone will have the courage to reinvent personal productivity tools.

What do we need? Tools that work when and how we do. Deciding whether or not it's a desktop or a mobile computer is futile – it's both. Deciding if it's wireless or wired is futile – it's both. Deciding if it's used for business, personal, educational, or creative applications is futile – it's for all of them. We should

be able to create anything we want and easily share it with anyone we meet or know anywhere, anytime.

I can carry it, hold it, drop it and even be comfortable with my five year old using it. No longer should we be proud “that my mother can use it” because if she couldn’t, we wouldn’t build it. I can forget to charge it and still use it all day long. I can use it sitting, standing and lying in my kitchen, office, classroom or car.

The fact that it would be nearly impossible to invent such a device only makes it more important. Some days I wonder if anyone in the industry has the courage to undertake this incredible challenge and I am personally ashamed that I have spent nearly twenty years becoming an accomplice to this fatality.

We still need computers for the rest of us. The market is not saturated, only our limited expectations.

Cigarettes & Cell Phones

Several years ago my family took a once in a lifetime holiday in Egypt. We visited the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo, the Pyramids in Giza, the Valley of the Kings and cruised down (up?) the Nile from Aswan to Luxor. It's hard on a trip like this to not to do self-analysis of the staying power of your own daily activities - the Pyramids have been there more than four millennia.

On about the third day I started to have computer withdrawal. You know the symptoms: you begin asking yourself "what's in my in-box?" and "how are my stocks doing?". For the next four days I caught myself trying to find computers.

Guess what? I didn't see many. In fact I didn't see hardly any at all. Oh sure at the hotel front desk there was a dumb terminal for check-in, but everywhere else I went I didn't see any. Notebooks - not a chance. For those of us with kids it was sort of a "Green Eggs and Ham" experience - not on a train, not in a house .. you know the rest.

What did I see? Cigarettes and cell phones. Everywhere. Even walking through the Valley of the Kings on the fringe of the Sahara desert I saw them. Even on a cruise with only 20 meters of green life on either side of the Nile I saw them. And even in the impoverished villages where us tourists shopped for souvenirs I saw them.

In hindsight, this should have not come as a surprise to me. The notebook market is trending around 50 million units a year and the cell phone industry is around 500 million a year. Guess I never stopped to really see it.

When I worked at Apple I thought most everyone had a Macintosh. When I left, I discovered that was not true. Wonder what I would notice if I ever left high tech? Would everyone have a computer? I doubt it. I do know this, they'll have a cell phone

Flushable Water Access Points

There sure are a lot of people these days ranting about a coming age of ubiquitous free always available wireless access for computers. You have heard the story: people will set up 802.11x (Wi-Fi) access points everywhere and we will all connect over unlicensed wireless frequencies - some have even claimed it will be free. Get real.

As we rush to build products and services for this unrealistic utopia let's first ground our expectations with our own real-life experiences.

If you have a child you've heard a little voice saying "I need to go pee." In fact, even if you don't have a child this need may have crossed your mind. When your child is between the ages of three and seven this can quickly become the most important activity of the moment - requiring your immediate attention. Typically this event, when not in the car in the middle of no where, happens while you are casually out running errands, shopping at the mall or otherwise. Now you know the rest of routine - frantically trying

to stop whatever you're doing, locate and arrive (with proper gender) at a "flushable water access point."

Over the past week of thinking about public flushable water access points I began to observe a few things: (1) in public and business areas they aren't always that easy to find, (2) they are typically not closer than 100m to you or even to one another, (3) flushable water access points serve a very large market segment of the population which would indicate strong user demand, (4) in many countries use of such access points is required by law, (5) some require keys and (6) they are frequently dirty and unkept.

Where on earth am I going with this? If public restrooms are so difficult to find - why ever on earth would we subscribe to the assertion that there will be "ubiquitous always available free wireless access for computers"? Do different rules apply to the technology industry that don't apply to the real world? Yes for a while and then ultimately no.

Will there be large numbers of free public access points for short-range wireless products? Yes. If we could get the same market penetration as public restrooms within a decade I'll be surprised. Oops gotta go, my son needs to go pee again.

Butts in Seats

If there is one thing I have learned over the years in high tech it is this: the best technology doesn't always win. What matters most? Butts in seats.

When we get into our time machine and travel back to the early nineties the computer industry was in the height of the operating system wars. Windows 3.1 was finally beginning to catch on but there were several other operating systems that (arguably) were better: MS-DOS, OS/2 and Macintosh System 7.0.

MS-DOS was better because .. well it had been around since CP/M died off and was familiar to computer users of the day. Well, okay maybe it wasn't better. OS/2: wow, preemptive multitasking, protected memory, integrated file and program managers and well those were the days where "no one got fired for buying IBM."

Macintosh System 7.0 with arguably the best user interface on any personal computer (imitation is the best form of flattery), digital video with QuickTime and many other features that didn't arrive to x86 platforms until Windows95. In fact when "Chicago"

shipped one of the more popular jokes going around Apple was “What’s another name for Windows95? Macintosh 1989.”

So what happened? Too much to even possibly list. What’s weird is looking back on it things seemed to have happened really quickly – like in the scope of only a few short years and poof. By the time Windows98 rolled out OS/2 was essentially gone, Apple was well into retreat and MS-DOS was no longer in sight (actually still there just now hidden).

For all the architectural advantages, technical superiority, all the great features, clever marketing tactics and brash evangelical egos –whatever, the one that won was ultimately measured by market size alone.

Today we are entering a period when there will be much debate over short-range wireless protocols. I know many of these technologies are complimentary solutions for different problems but ultimately one alone will emerge as the dominant standard. Who will it be? I can’t really predict the outcome of this today but I know one thing for sure in high tech, butts in seats wins.

Designing Metro Stations

How do different cultures view a quality design?

Well, actually quite differently. I like to look at metro station platforms as an example.

In France, typically the steps on the train do not normally align with the platform. At one station the step is over a foot, at others only a few inches. It's sort of a "c'est la vie" attitude – if you trip and fall, well that's life. In Tokyo it is amazing. Trains whisk into a station stopping on a dime and nearly always perfectly aligned with the platform. I can imagine the "damage to the family" name if it wasn't perfect and I would expect the station to be demolished and rebuilt if there were a design flaw.

Regrettably the English are much like us Americans in this story. It seems that our most common solution for bad design is to put a sign on it. The classic example is the "Mind the gap" signs (and announcements) at tube stations throughout London. I suppose paint and intercom systems are cheaper than better designs. In America the warning sign of bad design is "Push Here."

One last example about product design is from my experience with developing a mobile storage product. We tested our design in world markets to see if potential customers would view the product as “small.” Focus group testing went well here in the States. Europe went well too. Japan not so great.

The best way I can summarize my takeaway was that in general westerners viewed the overall size of a product by the sum of x and y dimensions. Yet my colleagues in Japan added the z-axis (how thick the product was) in determining if the overall product was “small” or “big.”

Needless to say I am over generalizing a very in-depth topic but regrettably I see too many of us here in the States designing products assuming they will just work in foreign markets. We can't do that. Localizing a product is more than just translating the manuals.

Does a gas guzzling monstrous Ford Expedition make any sense on small village roads and the car parks of Geneva? No, so why don't we understand this in the computer industry?

We must consider local biases and ways of living in designing our products, interfaces and packaging.

The Next Wave

As we enter the 21st century, I have been wondering, “what is going to be next big wave in computing?”

There have been several interesting products that have come along that I have found of interest: internet appliances and handheld computing, digital music and digital photography to name a few. But in the end they were busts, litigated to death or under delivered.

Let me give you a context for what I search. In the early eighties growth for the PC industry was driven by a standardized operating platform - MS-DOS, 8086 and the IBM XT. We were on a growth curve and lots of products helped us along the way like 1-2-3, dBase, Wordstar and WordPerfect.

The next wave hit when we entered the home market with graphical user interfaces. Arguably Chicago was an imitation of what we saw ten years earlier on the Macintosh but it delivered a whole new world to most PC users when Windows95 shipped that Fall. This “innovation” pushed the desktop application market into chaos. Remember Lotus first decided to not

support Windows95? We even had people drawing lines in the sand with OS/2 R2.

Just about the time that market began to slow the next wave hit: the internet. It took three factors to drive this growth: browser, infrastructure and content. It could be argued that one reason the market has again slowed is because this wave of adoption has crested.

So what's the next big wave for the PC? Wireless.

I won't get religious on which flavor will become mainstream (you already know my bias) but regardless of the end market, wireless can be the next big wave for the PC industry - that is if we choose to allow it.

You see, all the previous innovations alone would not have had the impact on industry if we had not allowed it to change our behaviors, businesses, product designs, plans and activities. In fact it is pretty scary looking back to note that the companies that successfully rode these big waves dominated the market.

Desktop applications today are written ASSUMING a connecting to the internet. Products were designed SPECIFICALLY to take advantage of a graphical user interface - in fact it is easy to see many software tools that would have never existed if not for these interfaces. We will have arrived when products are designed ASSUMING a wireless connection.

So our challenge is to now ride the big wave. What will be different in your next product?

The State of Wireless

As nearly all of you know I have been working on personal wireless technologies for the past five years or so. While at Intel I was involved with Wi-Fi and mobile phones. Spent the last few years heavily involved in Bluetooth and now and tipping my toes into Ultra-Wideband.

You know what? Things aren't getting better, it would seem they're getting worse. There are about a half a dozen variants of the 802.11 standard in different stages of completion and market acceptance. We have Zigbee, Wi-Max and don't even get me started on the deadlock in the IEEE 802.15.3 (Ultra-wideband) efforts. Bluetooth is adrift unable to fulfill it's promise. Around the wireless industry it would seem as if everyone is trying to build a unique radio to do that one thing .. forgetting this strategy will force many device manufacturers to support more than one.

The other day it occurred to me that I have seen this before: 1989. For those short of memory, back in those days we were arguing over WIRED network

standards. NetBIOS, Netware, AppleTalk, DECNet, SNA, ATM and cables like coax, TokenRing, LocalTalk, twisted pair Ethernet among a host of others. Every “standard” had it’s benefits.

What’s so funny to me about the state of things in the PC industry of 1989 is that few were betting on this thing called TCP-IP from the university market. My how far we’ve come in the wired space since then. Few electronic products today ship without the IP protocol.

It seems ominous that it took nearly a decade once all the players suited up and took the field before the standards battle was finally over. I suppose then the prognosis should be that we will have to wait until no earlier than 2010 before this whole mess clears up. Between now and then there will be a lot of work to do. Companies will rise and fall. Money will be made. Customers will be orphaned by bad technology choices. Casualties have already occurred .. seems Intel once backed a technology called HomeRF.

This is the messy part. This is the fun part: where we the engineer, marketeer, business manager, editor, analyst and customer all get to decide the future of wireless.

What's News?

Quite often I fire up my browser or e-mail software to find out the answer to this question: What's new? Whether it be from my friends, co-workers, family or matters of my industry we all seem to crave finding out something we didn't already know. Maybe in some way I can accept the many fallacies of email for at least in a small way it can satisfy this craving.

Yet in our quest to know what's new the tools of the internet begin to impact our own point of view. The internet continues to accelerate the trend of narrow-casting. If you are unfamiliar with this term it is the antithesis of broadcasting - one message for one broad market. Think of what television was like here in the States back in the 70's. Four channels - pretty easy to achieve large viewer-ship compared to today's hundreds of channels. On the web, now-a-days you can keep up with an endless variety of topics and interests with little effort.

While I don't fully embrace the nuances of today's implementations, I think blogging will continue to change not only the landscape of narrow-casting but

also how we need to market products to end users. A few of my favorite sites are Gizmodo and iPod Lounge. That's right, a complete blog dedicated to iPod news and rumors. In fact, both of these sites regularly scoop the big mainstream press on new products.

I should clarify one thing. Many have hailed the arrival of blogging as giving "the people a voice." While I agree with this assertion, I actually believe a potential negative impact of blogging on us is our ability to individually customize what we want to only hear. There are several implications of this: (1) with so much content on the net it is far too easy to ignore blogs that disagree with our point of view, (2) the size of a trend or fad can be exaggerated in small audiences who lose perspective on the whole picture, (3) which can result in a person becoming empowered that their fringe view is mainstream.

Another growing trend that I have been following of late are RSS newsfeeds. For those who don't know, basically it's an easy way to present content from a website in an XML format - viewable by most any browser on most any device. You may see the "XML" or "RSS" links on the page and have wondered what

these are. Most sites today use them to serve up their latest content without all the fancy formatting.

What's all this mean to marketing and public relations? A lot. It means there are a growing number of your customers that aren't listening to your message. It means customers are now conversing amongst themselves without you as the broker and it happens long before you even know it. What can you do? Embrace the new reality and let the customer into your world - to see it honestly as you do and not as the carefully worded press releases like to portray. If you don't, I'm afraid eventually the bloggers will let you have it .. you'll no-longer have credibility and will quickly be on the way to becoming yesterday's news.

Work

Show up and be Present

Some time ago it was suggested I attend an executive B-school program on leadership. During that time in my career I must honestly say it was more therapy than learning and I am sad to report that it only strengthened my resolve that I was quite aware of my strengths and weaknesses as a leader.

One of the sessions that was both at the same time least educational as it was memorable was a professor trying to get us to avert the common place condition of many a corporate worker-bees .. becoming a member of the living dead.

What was he talking about? Too often in work (and perhaps in everyday life) we are constantly trying to do two or three things at once. It can be argued that often when we do this we regularly don't do any of the parallel tasks well. Perhaps the human brain hasn't caught up with ability of today's world to present several things to do at the same time.

The professor's recommendation was to "show up and be present." Don't just show up at work everyday, but really be there. Care about what you doing right

now and give the task at hand your full and complete attention. Right about now I am sure you are saying to yourself, “I always do that” or “that doesn’t pertain to me, I can do two things at once.” Really?

Let me localize this postulate. When you’re in a meeting are you doing your email? As you read this, what else is going on - are you in a meeting right now? On a conference call while you whittle away at the inbox? When you present at a meeting how many people have their notebooks open “taking notes.” I know, I’ve done it.

Next time you’re on a conference call or sitting in a meeting, try this. Turn off your computer and participate - fully. Show up. Be present. Otherwise you’ll likely never know what you’re missing.

Courage & Conviction

Several years ago a friend of mine asked me to write about what I thought made some people great leaders. Gandhi, Hitler and Lombardi. Couldn't think of three more far fetched people that arguably were incredible leaders in their time in their world. But come to think of it you can be a leader of thought or innovation much the same way you can be of people. Orville Wright, Albert Einstein and the Dali Lama.

After much thought I have come the conclusion a person only needs to possess two simple attributes to join this list: courage and conviction.

Among the human population, I think this first attribute is far more common than the latter. I am mindful of the millions of persons involved in the wars and mass killings of the 20th century and I can only imagine the courage needed by those who perished and those who endured these events. And in quite another form of courage I can see strong people choosing a more difficult profession as a teacher or care giver - fully knowing how it will impact their

lifestyle and earnings over their lifetime. Yet while having strong courage is certainly incredible it seems to me conviction might be even more rare.

How strongly do you really believe in something? How strong are your convictions? Really. In your marriage, your relationships, your work, your neighbors, your actions and in your beliefs. How often do you change your mind? Would you walk from your job if management transgressed one of your values? When you say you're going to do something, do you really mean it?

In 1901 you were crazy to have the conviction man would certainly fly a heavier than air craft. In 1920 the likelihood of a free India was beyond comprehension. Do you believe your ethnicity is so grand you must purge others from the Earth? In fact it seems that only when someone finally succeeds in their vision does it seem to transcend delusion .. ever mindful some visions never make that final leap.

What have I taken from this exercise? It seems only crazy people can become a leader. They must be willing to risk everything to achieve their vision of the world. I only wish I could aspire to their level of courage and conviction.

E-Mail is not Work

It seems today the badge of courage in business is defined by how many emails you get in a single day. “Why I get over a hundred e-mails a day” you can often overhear busy executives brag. Even more humorous are the complainers trying to make a competitive sport of the whole thing. “Only a hundred, I get nearly two hundred.” Don’t even get me started on Blackberry addicts. Some day they will diagnose a illness for those poor folks.

Of course the irony of email is that in our effort to stay informed we have invented a way to increase the volume of the noise to a point where now we are unable to stay informed. Email reflectors, CC lists, corporate mailing lists and all the other ways to assure you have plenty of email are the culprits. And now to solve this problem we all create inbox Rules to assure we often miss the most important messages.

Some time ago I read a book that noted Thomas Jefferson was one of the most prolific writers and recipients of mail in his day. He wrote a voluminous 600 mails in a typical year - discussing the affairs of

State, the Colonial man and of his life. And to think many of us surpass this in a week never really approaching topics of such importance as the author of the Declaration of Independence .. and perhaps of no real sustaining importance at all.

Regrettably it seems we have entered a phase where we all actually think reading and writing mail is actually work. Bad news, it isn't - it is by-product of work, not the work itself.

Every so often I have the courage to not open my email program an entire business day. Instead I make a list of things I want to get done and just work. Write that plan, tend to that spreadsheet and visit (in person or on the phone) with people that I need to collaborate to get things done. It's hard, but makes for a very interesting and I've found quite productive day. If you ever get a chance, give it a try.

It's a Matter of Trust

Lately I've been reflecting on why so many companies have so much unnecessary bureaucracy when it comes to getting things done. You know the drill: To get on a plane, begin a project, end a project, hire a contractor, buy something, take something home, invite a visitor into the office, whatever, it seems you must fill out a form.

So if everyone hates this stuff, why do we still have it? My guess is that companies simply don't trust us. Some will try to masquerade these processes as controls or checks and balances but in the end, they are designed around the core assumption that someone will cheat the company if given a chance. One thing for certain, no system is infallible - if someone wants to cheat it, they will.

It would seem that if we held people accountable for doing the right thing, they just might surprise us by taking responsibility to actually do so; and along the way the company not only gets a better result but also likely saves money.

For instance, take travel requests. I have been down the road of filling out travel requests and trip reports. I have forecasted my group's travel expenses for a year in advance and all the other hoops you have to go through in most companies.

When I was finally put in charge of defining my own policy I thought long and hard to settle on: if you need to go just go and we'll reimburse reasonable travel expenses. No travel requests, just an email to your co-workers that you're going to be out of town. Concerning choice of travel brands and expenses? No preferred hotel nor airline list, no per diems, no limits .. just the "reasonable" test.

We never really ever had a real problem. Yes I regularly looked over each Expense Report, audited them on occasion but only twice found an expense that I thought pushed the limit. In those cases I simply went to the offender and told them I thought it didn't meet the test and dealt with that problem.

I can acknowledge it likely wasn't perfect, but I cannot believe any system is. Require people to fly a certain airline and they will first research flight schedules of their favorite and the recommended one trying to find an arrival time, itinerary or airport that

only works for their preference. Offer a per diem and people eat at McDonald's pocketing the cash.

Another good example of trust in the workplace is start time, time off and other "at your desk" types of metrics. My policy: get your work done on time.

While it's probably a good idea to be at your desk during typical business hours there shouldn't be a time clock. We'll set your goals and you let us know if you need something.

It is a "move that mountain 50 meters to right, let me know when you're done or need help" way of working. Some struggled with the lack of structure - most flourished.

Finally for this way of work to be successful, trust must flow both ways. People must be able to trust management to defend them or help them when they ask. Organizational transparency is needed so there are no secrets assuring honesty in reporting and performance management along with a real demonstrable history of blowing up your own sacred cow policies if they don't work.

I've been criticized for playing things too loose, not having enough controls and not always being able to

achieve perfect results. Sadly I must report no set of controls or policies would have assured anything better. Despite some of my recent experiences, if I'm forced to put money on getting results at work I'll bet on people I trust long before I'll wager on a set of policies and procedures.

Twenty

Twenty. I counted them: twenty in the last fifteen years. What is amazing is that I can actually name nineteen of them - that one out of Dallas I remember his face, just not his name.

It's sad to think about it but over my career in high tech marketing, sales and product management I have worked for twenty managers in fifteen years. There was even a one-year stretch where I was moved through five of them. I guess that hurt the average.

While I understand in today's business environment change is the rule, but how in this kind of instability is one to make a lasting impact on the market? Any market? In fact as I look back I can see a direct correlation to my own productivity and the stability of my management. Even when there was chaos above, when direct management isolated me from the madness allowing me to focus and get things done.

What does it take to be good at managing high tech marketeers? Since I'm honest and see all my own faults I will only take those attributes from those I have worked for to provide a short list in no particular

order: (1) Respecting my ideas, values and time, (2) giving me autonomy, (3) letting me make mistakes, (4) mentoring me to improve my skills, (5) rewarding me for a job well done, (6) being honest with me, and (7) having an ability laugh with me.

It seems to me that all this disruption at the end of the day wastes your company's capital: human and fiscal. Think about it. In most jobs it normally takes two months to sync up and get your feet on the ground. After that it takes about two months to really get traction and finally two more months to get rolling. Given my average, it is just about this time I get a new manager and we start this all over again. It's a miracle that anything ever got done.

For those I've known, truly great marketing (and engineering) professionals are often creative, confrontational, opinionated, passionate, thoughtful and loyal - solely focused on helping the company build and sell great products. I didn't say they were irrational, but they can often be mistaken as such. You could argue they are very difficult to manage. You know what, they are. Why so often does management forget this?

What can you do? Find shared goals, give them plenty of leash, expect brilliance and demand they continue to think out of the box. If you don't you will likely win the power struggle but in the end you and the company will lose.

Creative people need leeway, opinionated people need respect and passionate people need a voice. I am beginning to believe that really great people are a rarity and managers a mere dime a dozen. Looks like after four more I'll be on my way to a quarter.

My Next Office

I've been wondering what my office would look like if I could set it up myself. What would yours look like? I'm not talking about your physical office, I'm talking about the suite of software you use everyday.

But before we do that, how about a fun exercise - let's start by defining the customer problem. Why do I use a computer? Have you ever thought about it? I have. In my view simply put I use a computer because "I want to share my ideas with others."

Back in the dark ages of computing software designers created electronic versions of the tools we already used: columnar sheets, electronic typewriters, 35mm slides and in-boxes. Problem is we didn't look at the technology to see how we could change and improve the ways we share ideas with others we just created electronic versions of what we already had. Man we suck.

So I fire up my favorite electronic typewriter emulator, type some words, do some cool formatting, change the font and make sure my spelling is right. Looks pretty good when I print it on a piece of paper

.. all-in-all pretty neat huh? So now assume I want to share this idea with someone who speaks Finnish, lives in GMT+2 timezone, uses a device with a really small screen and doesn't use the same software vendor as I do. Oops, can't share my ideas with that person.

Am I being unrealistic? Wake up. While we can thank the Brits for improving the numbers through colonization, less than 6% of the world's population speaks English as their native tongue (BTW, Mandarin Chinese alone has nearly three times more speakers). Hundreds of millions on the way to a billion customers do not stare at 1024x768 pixel displays all day long and not only are we separated by over 24 different timezones each of us have our own work habits and time to review ideas from others. While I know most couldn't care less what I think, there are over six billion people on earth.

What would we need to solve the customer problem? I would need to be able to create an object that could include all types of content that is stored where others could retrieve it. It would have to be in a format that could be viewed by others on a device and in the language of their choice whenever and wherever they would prefer. Today we use file

formats to restrict idea sharing and increase software market share. Today only people of like-tongues can share. In all honesty, today we have barely gotten past the printing press in our efforts to share ideas. So what if the bits can get there in a millisecond? If you can't be understood what's the use? And this only focuses on the software part of the problem.

You see we have been focusing on building a better mousetrap when instead we should have started with the simple concept of sharing ideas with others. When this new office ships, I'll be the first in line.

I'll Send You the Foils

I absolutely hate PowerPoint. Not the program. The software is actually quite nice. My rub is with how so many of us use this piece of software to share our ideas with others. While I would like to not believe it, I hear that in some circles PowerPoint is replacing Word as the sole resting place of marketing plans and programs. In fact I am beginning to believe that some of our lost productivity as marketers is that we use a slide instead of a simple paragraph to explain what we are trying to accomplish in our marketing efforts.

With this said, let me break down the my four biggest issues with how we use PowerPoint.

Slides were designed to summarize content. This may not sound like it needs to be said, but it does. Headlines and bullets should not word wrap. In fact more than five bullets and you know you have a problem. Do a word count: if you find more than 50 words on a slide you are way over the limit.

Every time it's different. So let's suppose I have this really important marketing plan I am shopping

around the company. By the nature of “presenting” slides to different audiences each time the plan will be different. Also dependent on the questions that are raised, the amount time allowed to complete the “preso” and the venue (large room darkened with one person standing at the front) the message can change. This is extremely problematic.

In our effort to sell the plan we could actually commit different “plans” to different audiences. This is cause for great alarm as it’s hard to finally measure the success or failure of a plan.

Curb appeal. Let’s face it, ugly slides get in the way of good content. Hmm, and this might also mean that pretty slides get in the way of bad content. A beautifully done set of foils can go a long way to **SELLING** an idea, but regrettably it doesn’t assure that it is a good one. While I know this is an issue with any way you share your idea I think it is exaggerated with tools like PowerPoint.

So next time you try to sell a marketing plan try this: open up a word processor and type one paragraph that alone could stand on a summary page so that anyone could read it and readily understand your

entire plan - think of it as the mission statement. You will be surprised just how hard this can actually be.

Now follow this with a three to five page document that describes in detail the many wonderful aspects of your program like top-line objectives, target audiences, an overview of the tasks with a schedule, measures and next steps. Be forewarned, this might take you a few days.

Once you've done all this, create a few simple slides that give a brief overview of your plan - think of it as your "top three messages" to sell it to others. When you do get the audience send both files to prepare for the meeting. By the way, you will likely need to bring extra printed copies of the original plan - this might be new for those in the audience as well.

If they complain about your methods explain to them that the slides were designed to give any audience a quick overview of your plan but you felt it was also important to fully develop the detail as well.

You have nothing to lose. In fact you might be surprised, they just might appreciate the effort.

We're Lying Liars

Every time I have been in job hunt mode while living in Kansas I have encountered the same issue: despite all our talk about how mobile computing will change the workplace I am mindful how much it hasn't. You see, we lied.

We all know the benefits of our connected mobile age. I can contact just about anyone on the planet at any time from where ever I might be. I can connect to the net and collect my mail, choosing to read it at my kid's soccer game or over a espresso at Starbucks. Wow isn't this great. I can do this on a variety of screen sizes - some I can hold in one hand and others I must rest on my lap.

Unfortunately, the only thing still disconnected in today's work is the work-place. You see the work-place is the brick and mortar collection of atoms you drive your car to every morning. There's a fax machine in the lobby, snack machines in the lunch room, lots of cubes with a smattering of corner offices and a fair number of conference rooms.

But the work-place exists in only one place. It has an address, a big parking lot and ceiling tiles. And for most of us, you have to be there every day to be connected.

The lie we've perpetuated on the public is that technology would change this and it hasn't. Once our wealth was to be defined by how far away we lived from our cities and factories. We would be connected to the office with data and video conferencing - commercial real estate would be the fools' gold of the twentieth century.

Ironically the technology exists today to enable this far out dream yet we resist embracing it. If you want to work for a Silicon Valley company you must live in Silicon Valley or be prepared to abandon your family five days a week to breath the air of that work-place office building instead of typing that email in your home office two time-zones away. And what is more ridiculous is that the recipient of the mail would never know the difference.

Thinking happens where people think. Our diverse daily experiences increase our perspective and help usher along new ideas. Increasing that diversity

would seem to logically increase the number of new ideas.

Let's stop living the lie: connect the workplace with the rest of the world and deliver on the promise of mobile technology.



“Keep after the bozos, don’t let up!”
Silicon Valley Evangelist

“This is soooooo true.”
Telecom Executive

About Right on Red

Right on Red is for those rationale followers of the tech market that crave for things to be better. Kick-start your own fresh perspective as **Right on Red** pushes you to see things how they really are and how far the industry needs to go to fulfill it’s potential in the eyes of normal people. Along the way we find out who are the freaks, what’s a rainmaker, the connection between cigarettes and cell phones, the three V’s of marketing, the design of metro stations and no less on how to be a great leader.

“Stop making me look in the mirror”
Silicon Valley Product Manager

“Warn me before I’m a victim”
Founder



About the author

Mike McCamon is brave enough to acknowledge his many faults nurtured over the past two decades in the tech industry. He has done everything from write dBase code for a living to managing the creation of a \$25 billion industry. Having worked at innovators such as Apple, Sybase and Intel, he fought valiantly for Informix and Iomega only then to become a prognosticator in the wireless industry as the leader of the Bluetooth SIG.

Having dragged his family through no less than a dozen moves over the same number of years including work abroad and in far-off places like Kansas, Mike rarely leaves a stone unturned. Readers will find his perspective fresh, honest, humorous and insightful. And don’t be fooled by the suit, he hasn’t worn it since.

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