

INTRODUCTION

THE BOOK YOU ARE READING

My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can
only be human together.

— DESMOND TUTU

The book you are reading is full of data, proprietary and public. It's rich with case histories of businesses, large and small. It comes complete with step-by-step instructions, like an IKEA bookcase or recipe for spaghetti Bolognese. We like to think it's also rather inspiring. But, at the most basic level, *Can't Buy Me Like* is a book about a simple truth: If you are still selling goods and services by blanketing the world with advertising, trying to persuade or entertain or flatter consumers into submission, you are doing things all wrong. Because the world has changed. A lot.

The old ways belong to a faraway time, kind of like Betamax and Yugoslavia. Whole industries continue to cling to the remnants of the status quo, but their grip gets ever weaker. The digital revolution and societal shifts have brought us to a new period. It is called the Relationship Era.

Don't worry. Confounding as change has been for business, this is a good-news tale. Technology hasn't sent us all plunging into *The*

Matrix or some other nightmarish techno-dystopia. On the contrary, in a happy paradox, we're being transported back to a more humane future. The digital revolution that has been so disruptive to business as usual has not merely multiplied the channels of communication between a consumer and consumer brands; it has launched us all into an era in which human needs, human values and human connections will define success or failure for those brands. The currency of Relationship Era marketing is not awareness, nor even quality; it is authenticity. Trust. Loyalty. Pride. Yes, you've gotta have the goods, but public expectations have changed and those qualities are now *part of* the goods. Commerce can no longer be about manipulating people into purchases. Relationship Era marketers do not see purchasers as conquests to seduce, or even persuade. They see them as friends—members of a community dedicated not only to the same stuff but to the same ideals. And this community is not confined to customers and prospects any more than the world itself is confined to customers and prospects. In the Relationship Era, your essence is transmitted in your relations with all stakeholders: customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, neighbors and the earth itself. In short: Across every function of an enterprise, corporations and their brands now can and must behave with their various constituencies in ways *exactly parallel to human relationships*.

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And no amount of image advertising can paper over the gap between rhetoric and reality. Look around you. Signs of the paradigm shift are everywhere.

Just for Instance

You are no doubt familiar with Flo, the irrepressibly cheerful spokes-character for Progressive Insurance. She's the saleswoman in the heavenly Progressive "store," squeaky with delight at being able to help customers with their insurance needs. It's easy to love Flo, not only for her over-the-top exuberance but for her adorable devotion to her employer—the incandescence of which adoration, *plus \$1 billion in media spending on her since 2008*, invited the public, too, to see Progressive in a flattering white light. All of which was fine, until the public was presented a reason to think differently. That took place in August 2012, when blogger Matt Fisher called out the insurance company for its conduct in the vehicular death of his sister and Progressive policyholder Kaitlynn Fisher. To keep from paying policy benefits, Matt alleged in a blog post, Progressive cheerfully appeared in court on behalf of the man who'd run a red light and killed their own customer.

Social media went predictably ballistic. And who took the brunt of the abuse? Flo, the fictional face of the company, created to distract us from what goes on in the back office behind the shiny store.

13 Aug@StepTo In other news @progressive's behavior has finally cured me of my attraction to Flo.

13 Aug@NickadooLA I wasn't surprised to hear Progressive's Flo killed all those people.

14 Aug@iamledgin The worst Progressive commercial is the one where Flo kills that guy's sister.

14 Aug@EricDSnider I happen to know that Flo chick is also Progressive's CEO, so if you see her, punch her in the face.

And with that, two things happened: Progressive was obliged to pay the Fisher family, and Flo virtually disappeared from view—a billion-dollar investment forced, at least temporarily, into hiding, like a fugitive or a snitch. That backlash was the direct and inevitable result of fabricating a brand image that did not square with reality. In today's world, reality will always catch up, and when it does—if the public feels hoodwinked—the damage will be irreparable. In the Relationship Era, brands can no longer project the image of their choosing. Rather, they must locate their inner selves and make common cause with the outside world. Yes, an entirely new way of doing business; what a nuisance.

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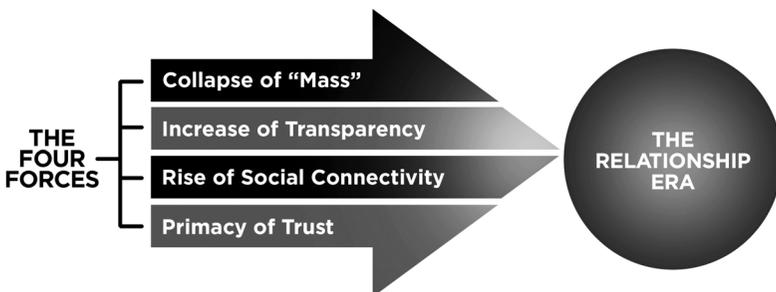
The Four Forces

This is no time, however, to be fretting about change. For one thing, like detours at construction sites, this shift is a temporary inconvenience for a permanent improvement. Whether you are the steward of a single brand, or a small business or a multinational corporation, embracing Relationship Era practices is sustainable in a way that even the most (superficially) efficient mass marketing never was. It also infuses business with meaning and values in a way the old model could never do. It also, as we shall demonstrate, enables you to maintain sales and growth trajectory at less expense. We will repeat that: *less expense*. Your authors are not quants, but we know this: All else being at least equal, reducing advertising costs increases return on investment correspondingly. The savings can then be plowed into more outreach with similar efficiencies or flow directly to the bottom line. Yet the most salient fact in accepting the ascendancy of the Relationship Era paradigm has not to do with its benefits

so much as its inevitability. The universe has made that decision for you.

There are four forces at work, converging momentarily to dictate your future:

1. The ongoing collapse of mass media and the corresponding loss of advertising reach and efficiency have turned the economics of marketing upside down. The cost of reaching consumers with advertising messages and promotional offers is rising unsustainably, even as consumer tolerance for such messaging declines. In the meantime . . .
2. . . . the Internet has torn down the ramparts separating the corridors of business power from the teeming hordes. Once, corporations and brands could operate behind nearly impregnable fortifications. Now there is hardly an event that takes place—especially an ugly one—that doesn't become exposed to one and all, immediately and in perpetuity. Whereupon . . .
3. . . . thanks to the rise of social media, the news becomes conversational currency worldwide. And all of this has happened at a moment in time when . . .
4. . . . the public has decided that it cares not only about goods and services but about the values and conduct of the providers. Trust, at least according to survey data we shall explore, now frequently trumps even quality and price.



This unprecedented disruption in the status quo has left brands an apparent choice between two evils: continue to squeeze costs out of their budgets at the expense of the media and ad agencies living in the same ecosystem, a choice doomed by the law of diminishing returns, or dive headlong into social media, where “Likes” stand in for transactions, and where the huge audiences that have been so basic to mass marketing for centuries are seemingly impossible to attain.

In fact, though, that is not the choice at all. There is a third way—a human way—that happily converges with present reality. Now marketers can and must define their brands not by the ads, press releases, slogans, coupons, sponsorships and even product offerings but by their core purpose. Once defined and internalized, this single *raison d'être* will inform all interactions with customers, employees, shareholders, distributors, the trade, suppliers, neighbors, governments and the press—representing not some contrived “image making” but a starting point for ongoing relationships. These relationships manifest themselves face-to-face, in traditional communications channels, in the crucible of third-party word of mouth and ever more vastly online—where opportunities to meet and greet are endless. What flows from that commitment is the steady building of trust and fellowship, which may sound like Boy Scout pieties but that also build lifetime customer value, lower promotional costs and enhance share price.

It isn't hard to adapt to the Relationship Era. You needn't exactly forswear the hallowed Four Ps of marketing—product, promotion, price and place—but you must complement them with the Relationship Era's Three Cs: credibility, care and congruency. Does the brand engender public trust by delivering on its promises? Does it understand consumer needs and seek to fulfill them? Does its every action resonate with deeply held values?

As we shall see, the last of the Three Cs—congruency—is the one that has upset the assumptions of the traditional, transaction-centric marketing model. Up to this point, it was all about the goods. You were fine if you had the goods. Now there are new questions to be answered: How did the goods get there? Who benefited

and who was harmed? And who, acting in the brand's name, has inspired me or disappointed me? Yes, the running shoes or light bulb or aisle seat is just fine, but excuse me, *Who are you?* As Bank of America, Nike, General Electric and even the vaunted Apple (all companies we will discuss in time) have belatedly discovered, those questions have changed everything. And if your answers fall short, you are very likely screwed. Admit it or not, like it or not, embrace it or not, exploit it or not, your business destiny is not in your hands. It is the hands of seven billion others. This would be a fine time, therefore, for a joining of hands.

For those who have spent careers trying to define their brands with ad slogans and bombast, such a proposition may seem absurd. "Hold *hands*? Why not just toss flower petals?" But even the most entrenched defender of the status quo recognizes that something has changed. The public is already constantly evaluating the brand and comparing notes on Facebook, Yelp and Tumblr. Their friendship, their ideas, their loyalty, their passions, their labor, their evangelism and not incidentally their business hang in the balance. Such goodwill represents incalculable value. Their indifference, distrust and, worst of all, hostility, represent incalculable liability. The question is, Absent now the ability to mesmerize the public on a mass scale, how can you be on the right side of all this teeming humanity?

Step-by-Step

In all humility, we believe we have the answer.

Can't Buy Me Like will offer a unique template for shifting from the rapidly deteriorating Consumer Era of mass marketing to the rapidly emerging Relationship Era—a transition that has stymied the most sophisticated marketers in the world.

Can't Buy Me Like will outline precisely—not in vague generalizations but *precisely*—how businesses can, and must, fundamentally change their relationships with customers, employees, suppliers, investors and all stakeholders, but only after first articulating for themselves exactly why they are in business in the first place.

Can't Buy Me Like will offer data and case histories demonstrating that the answer to the above question is not simply “To make a profit.” Profit is the *consequence* of understanding your reason for being—your core purpose—and we have the growth stories to prove it.

Finally, *Can't Buy Me Like* will direct you safely away from some of the most common marketing malpractices emerging in the digital world. Your colleagues and competitors are doing some mighty foolish things out there. We will show you how not to do the same.

Please note: While the occasion for this book is a historic inflection point, the principles we discuss here are not fundamentally about the digital revolution, social media or technology any more than capitalism is fundamentally about the steam engine. We believe that cultivating relationships—versus unilaterally promulgating messages of seduction and persuasion—would have been a superior way of doing business in 1953, or 1983, as well as 2013. But we are not in 1953, and the option has been taken away from you.

Can't Buy Me Like begins wide to establish context and principles, and then progressively narrows. Our work begins with a survey of the chaotic status quo, a media and marketing symbiosis being pried apart by the forces of digital revolution. There we demonstrate that business as usual is not a sustainable option. From there we move on to the currency of commerce, trust and the new reality, the Relationship Era in which all institutions have suddenly found themselves whether they choose to accept it or not. Fortunately, as we shall demonstrate, new consumer mentalities have further unleashed the power of social connectivity to redefine—and supercharge—interaction between companies and citizens. Much of those interactions will hinge on shared interests, values and goals, none of which can be shared unless brands themselves embrace interests, values and goals beyond selling more freight cars full of YouNameIt. Thus we address the central requirement for all institutions in the Relationship Era to define and internalize a central purpose that influences all activities, internal and external, with all stakeholders.

On this subject we take up the case histories of Patagonia, Krispy Kreme, Secret, Zappos, Panera, Louisville Slugger, Kotex, Seventh

Generation, Method, World Vision, Sovereign Bank and others. These brands don't have customers so much as they have members, and they are your new role models.

These are feel-good sagas, but are we simply dispensing sermons, or pep talks or motivational speeches that send fired-up salespeople out of the hotel ballroom ready to take on the world, only to enter the parking lot and the uninspiring bullshit of day-to-day business reality? No. On the contrary, we demonstrate that Relationship Era thinking alone offers a sustainable means of achieving consumer trust, satisfaction, loyalty, labor, intellectual capital and brand ubiquity. Our Brand Sustainability Map, introduced in Chapter 2, is a visualization of the relationship—and asset value—of trust and success.

Having established that defining relationship of the Relationship Era, we will enumerate the differences between doing business in the Relationship Era *vis-à-vis* the waning Consumer Era. Then we offer “the Shift”: a series of internal protocols for managing the transition, all the while dismissing the common objection that we are “changing the engines in midair.” (As you shall see, it's a terrible analogy.) Nonetheless, that Shift implies a major philosophical and organizational reevaluation, flowing from which will be a major change in the way your brand engages with the world.

Fear not, however. We do not leave you dangling with a what but not a how. We break down a number of specific tactics for the heavy-duty “relating” we prescribe. This advice will range from understanding the significance and dynamics of the simple Facebook “Like” to the methodical leveraging of your stakeholder communities to gain more influence than you ever had from the media you've been paying through the teeth for through your entire careers. Or, put another way: It's better to be admired than ad mired.

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New-ish and Improved

Loyalty. Evangelism. Purpose. You've heard these terms before. Likewise, perhaps you've noticed that none of those converging four forces from the above chart is, in and of itself, breaking news. After years of encroaching chaos, it is finally lost on nobody that the dynamics of business have gone haywire. Every CMO on earth has stood at a lectern before a nervous audience somewhere and mouthed the truism, "The consumer is in control." What has gone unsaid, and largely unnoticed, is the need not for incremental adjustment but radical transformation—a shift in marketing practices, yes, but more important a shift in mentality incorporating the well-documented observations and research of scholars and business leaders at least as capable as us. We have taken, as it were, "prior art" in social science and business, incorporated our own thinking, proprietary data and substantial experience and fashioned a working prototype for the modern consumer marketer. Our immodest goal is to be not merely financially, but something approaching spiritually, transformative.

A fair question at this stage might be, "Why should I listen to you about any of this, especially when you're talking about transforming my spirit? I have clergymen for that, plus, you know, Deepak Chopra." Well, in all humility, you should listen because we have climbed the mountain. We've spent many years exploring these concepts and seen them play out in the real world. We've seen how human beings respond. And, from entirely different starting points, we've made understanding the Relationship Era our life's work. Doug Levy is the founder and CEO of MEplusYOU, a strategic and creative agency based in Dallas and with offices in New York. There is plenty of dope on both of us in the authors' notes at the end of this book, but for now suffice it to say Doug is an active leader in the Conscious Capitalism movement and with his partners has gradually pioneered Relationship Era principles over more than a decade for marketers including, but by no means limited to, Procter & Gamble, TLC Laser Eye Centers, Coca-Cola, Louisville Slugger,

Pfizer, General Mills, and Samsung. Bob Garfield is a journalist and consultant whose Web site bio bashfully introduces “the most prominent commentator and analyst of advertising and marketing who has ever lived.” Famous for a quarter century of ad criticism, he is also the author of books and articles that as early as 2005 foretold the “chaos scenario” now bedeviling marketers around the globe. He’s also responsible for “Listenomics,” a 2005 essay predicting and prescribing a rise in data mining and social listening. At the time, the entrenched powers largely rolled their eyes. Now the same people pay Bob obscene sums to help forge a path out of chaos. This book, synthesizing Bob’s pragmatism and Doug’s evangelism and experience, maps that path.

As such, *Can't Buy Me Like* is a bit of a manual and a bit of a manifesto. Mainly, though, it is a whole new way of imagining business and your role within it. Fueled by nothing less primal than human nature, it will enable a sustainable future for your enterprise, and, not incidentally, make you feel good about what you do each day. No longer will you drag your sorry ass out of bed in the morning to go sell stuff to people. You will wake up feeling connected, driven, and meaningful. In the end, what *Can't Buy Me Like* offers is uplift—for your business, for your stakeholders and for you.