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FILE: MARKETING



By Alex Wipperfurth

Marketing Without Marketing

BRAND HIJACK

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Welcome to the world of marketing without marketing: the emergence of the hijacked brand. Don't let this seemingly contradictory idea fool you. Far from representing the absence of marketing, this summary describes the most complex sort of marketing possible, as well as the least understood.

In *Brand Hijack*, marketing consultant Alex Wipperfurth offers a practical how-to guide to marketing that finally engages the marketplace. It presents an alternative to convention marketing wisdom, one that addresses familiar industry crises such as media saturation, consumer evolution and the erosion of image marketing. The purpose of this summary is to demystify the modern brand and make the next generation of marketing both practical and actionable.

But be forewarned: Following this summary's advice will require some untraditional — even counterintuitive — practices on the part of modern marketers. This type of marketing is not for everyone. Marketers must be willing to let the market take over. They must be confident enough to stop clamoring for control and learn to be spontaneous. They must also be bold enough to accept a certain degree of uncertainty in the handling of their brands.

Brand hijacking relies on a radical concept — letting go. Although this thought might be frightening to many marketers, with some practice, it can be oddly liberating.

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What You'll Learn In This Summary

- ✓ How to make brand successes appear like serendipitous accidents.
- ✓ How to let go of the fallacy that your brand belongs to you and not to the market.
- ✓ How to co-create your brand by collaborating with your consumers.
- ✓ How to facilitate your most influential and passionate consumers to translate your brand's message to a broader audience.
- ✓ How to inspire true customer loyalty, not just customer retention.
- ✓ How to embrace the value of being surprising and imperfect.
- ✓ How to draw the line between promotion and the ad-busting trinity of manipulation, intrusion and co-option.

BRAND HIJACK

by Alex Wipperfurth

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

PART ONE: MARKETING WITHOUT MARKETING

The ‘No Marketing’ Myth

Corporate America is confused. How else could you explain some pretty weird behavior from the Fortune 500: Nestlé invading blog sites, Sony creating fictitious reviews to promote feature film duds. The past decade’s most successful brand launches — most of which shunned traditional marketing templates — have the big guns taking some rather embarrassing stabs in the dark.

In their search for answers, professional marketers found comfort in their ability to revert back to the *immutable laws of marketing*: Accept branding as the most critical element of commercial success, find a relevant and compelling connection between product performance and a target audience, and create advertising around an aspirational image associated with the brand. These fundamentals had always kept marketers on track.

But a string of recent successes should be forcing marketers to ask whether these laws are becoming obsolete:

- How did Starbucks and eBay build billion-dollar valuations without leading with a quintessential advertising campaign?
- How did Palm and Red Bull ignore what consumers said they wanted, yet create new markets?
- How did Pabst Blue Ribbon become the fastest-growing domestic beer in 2002 when it tastes like backwash and hardly can be said to offer aspirational benefits?

Behind each of these successes is a complex orchestration of activities that only appears inconsequential.

Creating an Illusion

Brands like Starbucks and Red Bull — the leaders of the “no marketing” school of thought — are spending hundreds of millions of dollars in nonadvertising each year, creating the illusion for their passionate user base that success happened serendipitously.

The ultimate irony of this phenomenon is that consumers are in on the joke. Meanwhile, corporate America is desperately trying to copy the new marketing template, and in the process proving over and over again that it just cannot get it right.

Why haven’t Coke, Pepsi and Anheuser-Busch been

able to make a dent in Red Bull’s business, despite their respective distribution omnipresence and deep, deep pockets? Why hasn’t a single Hollywood studio been able to reproduce the go-to-market template and resulting runaway success of *The Blair Witch Project*, despite numerous high-profile attempts?

Introducing the Brand Hijack

When it comes to 21st-century marketing, consumers are more clued in than the professionals. Marketing managers aren’t in charge anymore. Consumers are. Across the globe, millions of insightful, passionate and creative people are helping to optimize and endorse breakthrough products and services, sometimes without the companies’ buy-in.

Call it *brand hijacking*: the act of commandeering a brand from the marketing professionals and driving its evolution. Brand hijacking allows consumers and other stakeholders to shape brand meaning and endorse the brand to others. It’s a way to establish true loyalty, as opposed to mere retention.

We’re not talking about creating hype. We’re talking about a new template for going to market — a complex orchestration of many carefully thought-out activities. In order for your brand to stick, for it to have real impact on our culture, you must be willing to collaborate with a group of people with which you’re not used to collaborating: consumers.

Resist the temptation to assume that consumers are a

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The ‘No Marketing’ Myth

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bunch of suckers. They don’t devote themselves to brands because they want to provide free marketing for a corporation. They do it because some special brands offer up a vision with which people can identify — one with which

they want to involve themselves more deeply.

In the end, market involvement brings about a better, richer, more sustainable product experience. It garners true loyalty from consumers: an investment on their part to build a stronger relationship with the brand on an ongoing basis. At its best, market involvement creates a cultural benefit, offering meaning in an otherwise chaotic modern world. ■

PART TWO: THE HIJACK

Public Property: The Serendipitous Hijack

Hijacked brands do not necessarily have to be great products. It’s all about the killer experience. A serendipitous hijack is the act of consumers seizing control of a brand’s ideology, use and persona. It is most often practiced by brand fanatics within subcultures and is largely unanticipated by — and independent of — the brand’s marketing department.

Consider the case of Napster. Shawn Fanning, the founder of Napster, hadn’t been thinking about revolutionizing the music industry and inventing file sharing along the way. He simply wanted to know how he could get music off the Web with the least amount of hassle.

Fanning was a college freshman frustrated by the many dead links he encountered when scouring the Web for rare music. In the old days, it was a pain to search for music in the first place. But imagine hours of searching and then the link you finally discovered would simply disappear. So Fanning wrote some code to prove that you could create a real-time online index.

Then he used those fateful and seductive words when he e-mailed the beta-program to several friends in the hacker community: “Do NOT share this with anyone. This is still in a test phase.”

So it was that Napster (Fanning’s childhood nickname) was born. Within months, hundreds of thousands of users were forwarded that e-mail and downloaded the software, making Napster one of the fastest growing technologies ever.

Why was Napster so perfect for a takeover by the market? Consider the following five reasons:

- **It provided a blank canvas.** It allowed users to appropriate a neutral infrastructure and make it their own. They created a community spirit ripe with hierarchies, coded communication and etiquette.
- **It offered a nonmaterial incentive to participate.** Napster’s users had a built-in incentive: The larger the community, the more music that was available.
- **It made the community feel needed.** Napster’s value depended on the behavior and visionary ideas of its users.
- **It fostered a sense of belonging.** In fact, Napster

fostered committed solidarity that was strengthened by repeated shutdown attempts by the record companies.

● **It had smart leadership.** Fanning never intended to make money off of his creation. He got out of the way of his own product and allowed it to evolve under the brand leadership of its own community.

It’s unusual for a brand to get hijacked to the point of total control by the market, as Napster was. When this happens, the brand essentially becomes public property: It’s defined and led by its user community. Ironically, this sort of full-throttle hijack is often an accident. Rarely is it the result of initiatives or campaigns coming out of a marketing department. ■

For additional information on brands that have been hijacked, go to: <http://mj.summary.com>

The Marketer’s Guide to the Serendipitous Hijack

Fueling the momentum of a brand driven by its community is one of the most challenging assignments in marketing. It requires walking that finest of lines between safeguarding the integrity of the brand’s soul and keeping its legitimacy within the market community. Success hinges not only on your ability to resist the tremendous urge to do “cool marketing,” but also knowing when to turn the switch to mainstream marketing and brand investment.

Here are three ways to start with the right attitude:

- **Don’t be afraid of your consumers.** Your most passionate users will provide you with critical insights into how to evolve your brand.
- **Don’t be afraid of a little controversy.** Pushing the usual limits of what’s acceptable will serve as a demonstration of how much confidence you have in your brand. Don’t panic about a bit of controversy tainting your brand image. You’ve got more to gain from treating it with a sense of transparency, reality and, above all, humor than from trying to squelch it.
- **Develop a sense of humor about your brand — especially if the market is hijacking it.** Consumers find it endearing when you show that you can laugh at yourself.

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The Marketer's Guide to the Serendipitous Hijack

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Adapt Your Marketing

Figure out why you got hijacked. Too often, brand owners try to identify the drivers behind serendipitous brand hijacks through focus groups, quantitative studies or expensive trend-hunting reports. But these methods simply do not reveal the real causes. It is better to research the origin of the movement and trace its evolution by putting together a timeline. Take the time to study what the hijacked brand does for its users and what social factors are driving the brand's success. Essentially, you will become a cultural anthropologist.

For example, the word on the street was that people loved Pabst Blue Ribbon because it was retro. But the same could be said of several other brands of beer. It seemed clear that being "retro" was only part of the story. Digging into the brand's history revealed many other factors that contributed to PBR's rise in popularity: Its mention in the film *Blue Velvet* gave it credibility, its appearance on the speakeasy revival scene provided visibility, its symbolic value as the anti-microbrew provided meaning, and so on.

Educate the Organization

Establish a code of conduct to stay true to your consumers and your character. Hijacked brands can become extremely fragile if they stray from the core values and belief system of their markets. Invest in educating your entire organization about the hijacked brand's DNA. What values are most important to your hijackers?

Resist the temptation to do marketing. The hijacked brand manager's job is to keep the brand neutral so that the market can fill it with meaning and enrich it with folklore. In a sense, serendipitous brands are built through anti-marketing. Stay away from pompous campaigns that try too hard. Stick with the spirit of the original hijack: Grass roots. Real. Anti-hype. Transparent yet enigmatic. Even a bit imperfect. Truly cool brands should not say, "We are cool." The campaign should feel as though a bunch of normal folks got their hands on a marketing budget. ■

The Co-Created Hijack

A hijack does not have to be serendipitous. It can be planned. But it requires the mind-set of allowing the active involvement of the market to discover, to engage with and to help shape a brand's larger meaning. A co-created hijack is the act of inviting subcultures to co-create a brand's ideology, use and personality, and to pave the road for adoption by the mainstream.

Without exception, a hijacking rewrites the job description of a traditional brand manager. The new job

Conventional Brands Vs. Hijacked Brands

Conventional brands position themselves as providing certain benefits to their consumers. The marketing relies on the creation of an *aspirational* image. The brand owners try to convince you that using or wearing a certain brand will make you seductive or successful.

Hijacked brands, on the other hand, offer consumers something much bigger — meaning within a broad cultural context. As a result, they play a far more *inspirational* role in people's lives.

A co-created brand like Harley-Davidson signifies a way of life. *The Blair Witch Project* invented an urban myth. Apple sells an entire worldview. Starbucks stopped at no less than creating new social norms.

is a facilitator. Successful managers enable an ongoing conversation between an engaged consumer base and a distinctive brand. This requires finesse, patience and a solid understanding of the brand's purpose.

This is done by leading with purpose. ■

Overcoming Conventional Marketing

Many corporations tend to be hindered in their attempts at brand hijacks by the ghosts of conventional marketing. They discover that it's not as easy to commit marketing heresy as they originally thought. Meanwhile, they fall prey to the following mistakes:

- **They misinterpret the reasons for success.** While the initiative should begin with getting an exclusive early market deep into the brand experience through subconscious techniques, the strategy must change over time to draw in the mass market.

- **They rely on proven managers.** Executing a brand hijack requires a whole new skill set. It takes facilitation, an intuitive sense of the early market, a confident patience and a light touch — not the skills taught in business schools or marketing textbooks.

- **They measure success by the wrong standards.** When launching a new brand, most firms typically look at traditional measures such as brand awareness, sales volume and weighted distribution. But these metrics are irrelevant when disseminating a brand idea through early markets.

Letting the market collaborate in the management of your brand may be counterintuitive, especially to conventional brand managers. But the fact is, it builds stronger brands. Instead of communicating — or rather dictating — brand meaning to the market, brand hijacking communes with — or rather guides — the market to a common understanding.

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Overcoming Conventional Marketing

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A brand hijack embraces the consumer as peer rather than as “target.” Consumers of hijacked brands are looking for a meaningful connection to the product — a connection established through a common value system rather than a common demographic denominator. Hijackers establish communities around a brand because they believe the brand believes in them. Marketers therefore need to humanize their targeting efforts. After all, you can’t collaborate with a statistic. You can’t co-create your brand with a “21- to 35-year-old white, suburban, college-educated professional.” Don’t define audience members. Create them. ■

The Next Marketing Era

In the days before mass media, heightened superficiality and consumerism, our social roles were handed down to us from previous generations in the shape of norms and

respected institutions. We each had a clear, predetermined identity and role in society that shaped how we lived.

But then we rebelled and set ourselves free to choose our own lifestyles and our own identities. With this freedom came a hefty price tag. According to sociologist Anthony Giddons, we are now threatened by “dilemmas of the self,” like uncertainty, powerlessness and commodification. We are lost, struggling with a “looming threat of personal meaninglessness.”

And that’s where our consumer culture fits in. Branding has crossed the cultural chasm. In the past, brands served merely as a form of entertainment. In today’s consumer culture, brands provide an answer to our identity crisis. Brands create purpose and give our lives meaning. They help us construct our social world. In other words, in our search for place and purpose in life, consumer culture is replacing tradition. ■

For additional information on how to work with your audience, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

PART THREE: THE HIJACKER

Marketing as a Catalyst for Cultural Development

It should come as no surprise that while consumers are increasingly looking to the marketplace for meaning, the job of the marketer is shifting dramatically. More than ever, marketers have become arbiters of culture and facilitators in the search for identity.

Consumers are demonstrating an increasing immunity to conventional marketing because they distrust marketers and they’re suffering from media overkill. They have experienced the decline of trust in tradition. Some of them are old enough to have lived through Watergate. All of them experienced Enron, 9/11, the end of job security and a high likelihood of growing up with divorced parents. These factors and many others have all but shattered the myth of “middle-class security” — a state of mind that fueled American consumer behavior for decades.

Modern marketing has gone through several stages of evolution during which the relationship between brand owner and consumer has completely flipped.

The Consumer Collective

Today’s consumer no longer acts alone. Brands are not being hijacked by individuals, but by groups. These social groups form in a manner similar to the way ancient tribes used to form — except that whereas *geography* and *survival* were the common threads that bonded ancient communities, modern tribes are bound together by common *hobbies* and *value systems*.

Brand tribes are groups of people who share their interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social

universe ripe with its own values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy. Part of the reason for the emergence of tribes can be traced to a radical change in the social fabric. Trust in mass media and religious and political institutions has eroded. Traditional structures, from job security to marriage, have broken down. Previously rigid institutions have lost their authority.

This lack of stability and a diminished level of social interaction have revived our ancient tribal instincts. We are seeking ways to reconnect with others. This behavior defies conventional wisdom, which tells us that people are becoming more individualistic. Yes, people are becoming more inwardly focused and less concerned with what other people think of them. But underneath this veneer of apparent individualism lies a strong trend toward convergence.

Brand Tribes

Understanding this trend toward tribes as primary social units is crucial for marketers because tribes are now forming around brands. Brand tribes select products differently than individuals. They seek brands for their social, not functional, value. They want brands that can facilitate group rituals and experiences; products that establish connections and define the group identity. Members are constantly on the lookout for symbols and signs that will distinguish them from nonmembers.

Brand tribes do not accept brand meaning as dictated by the brand owner. In fact, they actively seek to reconstruct and appropriate brands for their own symbolic usage.

Take Harley-Davidson, for instance. Threatened by the invasion of superior Japanese motorbikes in the

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Marketing as a Catalyst for Cultural Development

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early 1980s, the company survived bankruptcy with what was, at the time, a technologically inept product. The brand's success was propelled by the sheer will and energy of its community: the HOG (Harley Owner Group), which now claims 400,000 members in about 1,000 chapters. Harley localized the tribe and made it personal. Rides and rallies have become the social glue of the community, a tribe in which riders know each other by name and establish real friendships. ■

Earning Consumer Devotion

Brands with a religious following are not the only ones capable of enchanting tribes of fanatical believers

and inspiring lasting devotion. There are three ways to make consumer groups feel passionate about, and hijack, your brand. They are:

1. Create a discovery. When people believe they have discovered a brand on their own, they feel ownership and want to share it with their friends. They are engaged by either being delighted or by being let in on a secret.

2. Create a commentary. Allow your brand to become either a political or social statement. Once a brand achieves iconic status, it obtains a deeper meaning among its users. Generally, the market appropriates the brand for its own statement.

3. Create a mission. The strongest way to inspire consumer devotion is to develop a brand religion. Brands with clearly defined purposes can develop a cultlike following. And these brand tribes will truly act as if they were on a mission to change the world. ■

PART FOUR: THE BRAND HIJACK ROAD MAP

The Kick-Off: Hijack Ideation

It all starts with an idea that you seed, nurture and grow over time into a new cultural norm: an idea driven by a major social truth. Napster was appropriated by its community as a tool to rebel against the manipulative record industry. Southwest Airlines gave everyday people the opportunity to go places only the rich had been

able to afford. Red Bull became “speed-in-a-can” for today's demanding lifestyle.

The ideation of hijack-able brands has to be bigger than a consumer insight. It needs to hit the sweet spot between product performance and *social* insight. The social truth is what engages consumers at a higher level and motivates them to get deeper into the brand experience.

Uncovering social truths does not lead to mere product innovation. It leads to market innovation. In other words, brands based on social insights make a major leap that dismantles the status quo and changes the rules of the marketplace. ■

New Market Research

A research discipline that uses in-depth cultural analysis to uncover social insights is emerging. This cultural research goes beyond individual behavior. It studies social trends, emerging values or simply how consumers live and act within tribal groups. It is not about hiring “cool hunters.” Nor will focus groups and ethnographic studies serve to unearth the necessary social insights that drive breakthrough brands. It's about diving deep into the cultural context of your early market to identify stable social trends. It's about projects such as:

✓ Analyzing how cults work in order to apply that knowledge to brand tribes.

✓ Researching what values and principles today's consumers share in order to understand why Pabst Blue Ribbon was chosen as the “anti-brand” badge.

✓ Creating a personal image of what your target community looks like by reading the magazines and books they read and watching the TV shows they watch.

Researchers must investigate cultural details and craft compelling narratives from those nuances. They must identify the triggers and hooks that help lead the market to adopt new — and most likely oppositional — social norms. Researchers must become thought-leaders, not mere imitators of pop culture.

Phase I: Tribal Marketing

Innovators and early adopters will be the first to realize the potential of the brand and help lower the barriers of adoption for the main market. They will define the brand by incorporating it into the very fabric of their tribe. The early market is often a subculture made up primarily of unconventional thinkers or opinion leaders. They are motivated primarily by one of two drivers — a quest for authentic products or a desire to display their social knowledge. The following are three specific roles consumers and other stakeholders will play in shaping brands:

● **Product Developer.** You have a virtual army of passionate users ready and waiting to help you optimize your product. And you don't even have to pay for their services. Why not harness their creative energy?

● **Brand Folklore Creator.** Early markets are your best storytellers. They will add meaning to your brand and help translate its message to a larger, more conservative market by creating rituals and myths around it.

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Phase I: Tribal Marketing

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● **Authenticator.** Using peer-to-peer networks to diffuse ideas and brands into the marketplace is extremely powerful because it's organic, authentic and sustainable.

There's a common misconception that early markets must be part of a cool subculture. This is, after all, how many guerrilla marketers make their living — by being gatekeepers to the young, the tragically hip and the beautiful. But it's not that easy. For an idea to take off, you must choose an early market that has the skills, time and tools to appreciate your brand. When evaluating whether a subculture is the suitable early market for your brand, consider the following:

- Is the audience you've selected a credible innovator of this brand initiative? Does the main market look to that audience for innovations?
- Will the seed idea resonate with your subculture?
- Are those in the subculture willing to participate; are they able to sway the main market; and are they socially connected, knowledgeable and articulate?
- Can the brand gain critical mass — either in the user base or cultural influence — for the initiative to succeed within the target audience? ■

The Art of Seeding

The idea behind seeding is to find an emotional hook that will pull the early market deep into the brand experience. The idea should make consumers feel ownership for the brand and encourage them to become shepherds for the initiative. Seeding is not about mass coercion. It's about giving the early market ownership through subconscious techniques. The art of seeding is the art of playing into the nuances of human nature.

The following are four of the major seeding techniques:

- **Declare a new worldview.** Give your initiative greater meaning and authenticity by fostering a belief system, perhaps even visible leadership. IKEA is not just a furniture retailer; it is an ambassador of Swedish values — equality, simplicity and community.
- **Play hard to get.** Make only the early market “in-the-know” with an unusually scarce, deliberate and seductive soft sell. Persuade, don't sell at this phase.
- **Create brand folklore.** Develop specific customs, rituals, vocabulary, relationships and experiences to build a passionate community. Starbucks not only created a new coffee ritual; it introduced an entirely different vocabulary to communicate with its regular customers.
- **Reward insiders.** The social currency of the early market is being part of the Next Big Thing. Keep it exclusive. Don't make it too easy for people to “get in.” ■

Phase II: Co-Creation

Once the early market is hooked, it takes ownership of the brand's message. We generally call that *buzz*: the byproduct of the skillful seeding of an early market. Buzz is a powerful medium that allows the market to discover, engage with and ultimately help shape brand meaning. It occurs when brand owners let the market participate as co-creators voluntarily and enthusiastically, hence persuasively. Going way beyond word-of-mouth, buzz is the sum of all *interpersonal interaction* related to a brand.

Buzz commands our attention because it's fresh and it stands out. Since it works on a subconscious level, we learn from buzz without even being conscious of what we're doing. And personal recommendations are three times more credible than messages from traditional media. When the messenger is a friend, not a manufacturer or marketer, the message is received with more respect. The end result is that the market perceives your brand as authentic. ■

Phase III: Mass Marketing

Once an initiative has hit Next Big Thing status, the main market is ready to adopt it. Hijack marketing is not just about stealth. It does not favor person-to-person interaction over mass media. Instead, it views media sequentially — recognizing the need to use different tactics throughout the phased go-to-market approach.

During the seeding phase, a hijack relies on interpersonal media to seduce the early market and make the brand digestible for the mass market. But as soon as the early market's buzz has reached the mainstream, it is crucial to switch back to conventional, above-the-radar marketing methods in order to build momentum and broaden awareness. In other words, it is time for the brand owner to take back control.

The mass market is conservative. Rather than being revolutionary, it is evolutionary at best and pessimistic at worst. It is skeptical that the Next Big Thing really is the new standard. While the early market is excited to be the first to use a brand, the main market is content to follow the tastemakers. Those in the main market tap into aspiration. They are largely influenced by what others think of them, and so they readily adopt status symbols.

If buzz is the driver of the early market, then momentum is the driver of the mass market. When momentum is maintained, it sends a signal to the mainstream that the initiative is legitimate and sustainable.

Staying True to the Early Market

Successful brands manage to take back control of the message while still giving their early adopters special treatment by building in exclusivity. Opinion leaders are — and remain — the lifeblood of the brand.

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Phase III: Mass Marketing

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Mass market participation introduces a new dimension to brands. Instead of focusing on what the brand *is* (the functional benefit) or what it *does* (the emotional benefit), we turn to the cultural benefit or what the brand *means*. This spiritual component provides the foundation for the most enduring relationships. Conventional brands' benefits are personal, determined by the brand owner after unearthing the right product truths (functional) and consumer truths (emotional). A cultural benefit, on the other hand, is public property. It's co-created with the market and based on a social truth. Red Bull, for instance, became "the legal rush." eBay unexpectedly developed into both a trusted community and socially accepted gambling.

Lowering Resistance

There are several major tactics brand owners can use to reduce the barriers to new habit formation. These include:

- **Make the new habit appear less disruptive by linking it to an existing one.** That way, consumers will see it as a habit replacement rather than a totally new behavior. For instance, eBay provided the necessary link in consumers' minds between the virtual flea market and the real world.

- **Reduce barriers by easing people into the experience.** Then let the marketplace practice the new habit frequently. Again, eBay caught on so quickly because buyers do not have to pay to use the service.

- **Reduce social resistance to the formation of the new habit.** Foster a community to encourage deeper engagement with the brand. eBay encourages users to solve their own problems with a self-policing policy.

- **Positive reinforcement is a key driver in any behavior modification program.** It's a great way to get people to try out new things. Even better, to ensure that they turn a single trial into consistent behavior, delight your consumers by exceeding their expectations. The eBay experience has many built-in rewards such as being able to easily track down hard-to-find items within seconds. ■

The Ultimate Payoff

A brand hijack attempt doesn't give the marketer permission to cross ethical lines. While marketing itself is not evil, some people in the trade have developed bad habits over time. And the current emphasis on nontraditional media and seduction techniques may tempt marketers more than ever to cross that fine line.

Marketing needs to stay bold, brave and surprising. It needs to stay effective not by employing deceptive and underhanded tactics, but by genuinely earning consumer devotion.

Marketers love to talk about "loyalty." Loyalty is their

Holy Grail. It is an objective written into every marketing plan. Every major brand is tracked quantitatively by measuring frequency of use and amount of brand switching.

The problem is that what most marketers think of as "loyalty" is actually "retention." Retention is about consumer behavior; loyalty is an attitude. True loyalty is about something bigger than retention or even the financially driven "lifetime customer value" concept. It is about authenticity. It is about passion. It leads to ambassadorship and activism on behalf of the brand. And ultimately, it leads to off-the-charts brand value scores.

Retention tactics are Machiavellian. They temporarily keep consumers buying the brand, but they do so without developing an up close and personal bond. As soon as a better deal appears, consumers will be gone. Building genuine loyalty is not about gimmicks. Retention, or "pseudo loyalty," is driven by one of the following factors:

- **Boring old habit.** Consumers often choose brands for no reasons other than convenience, laziness or habit. This is something that market leaders strive for, particularly in mature markets. But it is an indefensible position once a challenger enters the market.

- **Bogus bait.** Mileage programs are proven to lock in consumers. But there's no evidence that they inspire true loyalty to a brand. People are not necessarily loyal to United or American Airlines; they are loyal to the free flights, earned perks and increased status. Most frequent flyers are promiscuous — ready to hop into bed with whichever company offers the best deal.

In contrast, flyers demonstrate real loyalty to visionaries in the airline industry such as Virgin Atlantic, Southwest and JetBlue. These airlines don't bribe consumers, but rather thrive on delivering a more pleasurable — and less expensive — travel experience. They do constant analysis of every aspect of their services to ensure that their flyers thoroughly enjoy their flights.

- **High exit barriers.** Lock-ins are only secure until a competitor can figure out a way to reduce the exit barriers or offer value higher than the perceived cost of switching.

The Path to True Loyalty

It all starts with you telling a story, but tailoring that story to exactly the audience you have in mind, and introducing the story to audience members at a time and place where they will be able to remember your story.

It's about telling audience members exactly what they want to hear, but don't know it until they hear it, without giving away any specifics to allow room for interpretation.

It's about making those who hear the story become your storytellers and allowing them to make up and add parts to the story as long as they get the title right and the critical elements within the same ballpark.

It's a hard job with the ultimate payoff: lasting consumer devotion to your brand. ■