



The Passion Economy

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Introduction

Sean Howard

SAUL KAPLAN WROTE THE ARTICLE (see: <http://tinyurl.com/passionsaul>) that first exposed me to the concept of a “passion economy”. For days after reading his piece the term kept returning to me. It seemed to capture my views on engagement, social responsibility and the potential we all share for a better future.

“Passion-based organizations stop at nothing to accomplish their goals and are able to attract people and resources to their causes. A passion economy can arise that unleashes both a new era of prosperity and solutions for the big issues of our time.”

Saul Kaplan, Founder and Chief Catalyst, BIF (Business Innovation Factory)

My brain was abuzz with this concept. But was I alone? I have the true joy of being connected to wonderful thinkers across many disciplines and I decided I wanted to know what some of these people thought about this concept of a “passion economy”. Does it exist? Can it exist? And if so, what would it mean to the engagement work so many of us have been involved with? What would it mean in the nearer term to the efforts of organizations (and brands) that today

are under increased pressure to innovate and also to change how they engage with their audiences?

And then I had an idea. An idea I borrowed most liberally (read: stole) from the amazing Valeria Maltoni and her *Marketing in 2009* ebook project (see: <http://tinyurl.com/marketing2009>). I asked a number of people if they would write their own piece on “The Passion Economy: opportunity for brands or just a fad?” I would combine these into a single document that could be shared with anyone.

So the project was born. But something was missing. How would this come together into a single unified piece? It was the very day I sent out the email requests that I was meeting with my dear friend Peter Flaschner, deeply engrossed in a conversation around passion and the overlap with action that I realized I was staring at the answer. Peter quickly and enthusiastically agreed to come on board.

The pieces we received touch on many issues, ask many questions and come at the issue from various angles: organizational behaviour, neurology, social media, and economics.

I will close with a final quote from Saul Kaplan: “If your organization is determined to resist change, move out of the way because the wisdom of crowds has learned how to mobilize behind a compelling passion. These new purposeful networks will not be stopped.”

Sean Howard

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Many Thanks to Saul Kaplan (for kicking all this off with his article), Eli McIlveen (for editorial review and support), Peter Flaschner (for his amazing conversations, input and the design vision), and to Valeria Maltoni (for the ebook idea).

And I would also like to thank all the contributors who took the time to participate and share in this project.

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If your organization is determined to resist change, move out of the way because the wisdom of crowds has learned how to mobilize behind a compelling passion. These new purposeful networks will not be stopped.

~Saul Kaplan

Passion requires a heart bypass

Scott Suthren

PASSION IS POWERFUL. Passion is sexy. Passion is contagious. Passion humanizes. Passion is a racing heart, caught up in a swell of emotion.

Yes, but passion is not totally about the heart. If you want to stir passion in a business context you need to focus on the mind.

When people talk about a passion economy they talk about individuals structuring their businesses around what makes them passionate. The theory is that this passion will inspire employees and customers to deeply engage and that this will lead to great success. Having passion at the core allows the leader to stay in their sweet spot as long as is required to achieve their goals.

When someone hits that sweet spot in their passion, the cognitive scientist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1998) says they are in a state of flow, where everything comes together and the person is completely immersed in what they are undertaking. This flow is similar to the resonance that can be experienced when a glass vibrates to a certain sound—the resonant frequency of the sound is aligned with the resonant frequency of the glass.

To generate passion in a business context it is critical to aim for the resonant frequency of your employees and customers. If you get it right, they will occupy that state of flow with you, and be carried along as far as you want to take them.

But stimulating the resonance that you experience in others requires the ability to generate empathy, or the ability for them to experience something from your point of view. Without that, they will have no frame of reference to integrate into their view of the world. Their understanding of your passion will be empty, soulless. It will not resonate.

Unless you are a natural, it actually requires some proactive planning and an understanding of how the mind works in order to consistently generate that empathy across a wide and diverse customer and employee population.

As discussed, when passion stirs others to action, it triggers a response by resonating with something deep inside them. However, knowing what that passionate resonance is happens to be impossible, given that the subjective mind is cognitively closed to us. However, there is a line of thinking in neuroscience that points to

some neurons that may give us some insight into that perspective.

Mirror neurons are neurons that fire when an individual sees another individual experience something. As the theory goes, the neurons that fire are neurons that are related to the same actions in our own mind, but don't actually initiate that action. In essence, we experience what the other person is going through without actually experiencing it ourselves. Cognitive scientists like V.S. Ramachandran (2009) see this as a way that we define our self in relation to others but also potentially one of the components of empathy.

If this thinking is correct, leaders need to be consciously aware of every action they do to ensure that they are triggering an appropriate mirror neuron reaction in the targets. Given how little we know about the brain, this can be a pretty ambitious goal. But because the mind builds a frame of reference from many, many interconnected components, we can attempt to build that empathy by providing as many different experiential references to our passion as possible.

So use artifacts, music, props, images, prose, poetry—any medium you can find to communicate the essence of your passion. And don't just hand them off; critical to building that empathy is to interact with everything—touch, read, listen, cry, yell, whatever—so that you trigger those mirror neurons as richly and as comprehensively as possible.

Think about the actions you are undertaking. Think about the way

Scott Suthren

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you behave. If you want to stir others to your passion, give them empathic waypoints that can get those mirror neurons to fire. Don't use empty rhetoric or try to energize the legions with abstract concepts. Don't be too cerebral. Hit them in the empathic mind, and the heart will follow you anywhere.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1998). *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books.

Ramachandran, V.S. (2009, January 1). "Self Awareness: The Last Frontier." *Edge*. http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/rama08/rama08_index.html

The Passion Economy: Opportunity for Brands or Just a Fad?

Ellen Di Resta

PASSION IS POWERFUL. According to *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, "when any feeling or emotion completely masters the mind, we call it passion... The mind, in such cases, is considered as having lost its self-control, and become the passive instrument of the feeling in question."

Passion is beautiful. People who are united by passion can support great causes, win elections, accomplish the impossible, and achieve greater goals than they ever could on their own. United passion can save the world.

Passion is frightening. People who are united by passion can lose all sense of right and wrong, cause great destruction, and justify atrocities they couldn't fathom on their own. United passion can destroy the world.

Passion is a gift. Everyone is passionate about something, and rather than going to the extremes of good and evil, most people indulge their passion as they immerse themselves in activities that bring joy to their lives. It lives in the games they play, the people

they love, and for the lucky, the work they do. Life without some degree of passion is hardly worth living.

Passion is energy. It sustains us through tough times when we need to go the extra mile. Having passion for the end-goal can bring out qualities that only in hindsight we realize were superhuman. With passion we can transcend the norm.

Passion is exhausting. No one can live in a constant state of being driven by their passions. When fueled by passion, it's important to take time away to maintain perspective and avoid burnout. Using passion as fuel for success requires respect for its power and the ability to channel it responsibly.

Passion is necessary. If passion is so powerful then surely an economy that can capitalize on peoples' passions can achieve great heights. Without it we can live a fairly secure, dull, lifeless, faceless existence. We will seek experiences through people, art and music that tap into our emotions, ignite our souls and make us feel more alive. Between the big, exciting experiences we will look to

little everyday reflections of our values in the choices we make, and through the products and services we choose.

Passion is connection. It's human nature to seek others who share our values, and people are constantly evaluating the subtle cues that hint of such a connection. Brands are the commercial expression of these cues, and trigger an affinity or aversion to the products and services they represent. As consumers become more empowered by the myriad of choices available to them, they also become savvier in evaluating the unspoken messages the brands convey. Brands that connect with people's deepest passions will become market leaders, transcending the norms of consumer preference.

Passion is expressed in brands. Unprecedented economic opportunity is within the reach of those willing to connect their brands to the passion that drives us. If you develop brands, the power to incite equally great or devastating movements is in your hands. Please use it wisely.

passion. (n.d.). *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913 edition). Springfield, Mass.: C&G Merriam Co. Retrieved February 09, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/passion>

Ellen Di Resta

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*Passion is connection.
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others who share our values,
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hint of such a connection.*



The Magical Word

Gavin Heaton

I HAVE A BOOKCASE FULL OF BURNING BOOKS. I keep them behind closed doors to shield myself from their impatience and their fury. And yet, their very existence sounds out the rhythm of my own life.

In the course of my career, I have moved across industries and straddled the silos of large businesses. I was given the impossible projects—and lived with the too-hard-basket on the top of my desk, for years. I took each opportunity as it came—wrapped in flame-proof paper—waiting for the spark which would ignite it. Sometimes these books became a catalyst for my ideas; sometimes we all got burnt in the process.

But clear lessons remained.

Passion wins.

Now, I love a system. I love dealing with the complexity of human behaviour and I love solving large scale issues. But with complexity comes both chaos and drama. Each of these things will place roadblocks in your way. The only way to overcome the inertia of other people's apathy is by mobilising your own passion and stirring the

passions of others—and this means putting yourself on the line. It means participating. It means finding your own magical word.

When I write about “branding”, I am talking about the system of meanings that connect businesses with their stakeholders. But I am also, secretly, talking about the momentary act where an impression is burned into the flesh of our consciousness. I want you to remember every word, every sense—I want to take your breath away. In every personal or professional project that I have worked, success has come only by stepping beyond my fear—by disclosing the magical word.

By now, you may have guessed it.

The importance of the magical word, is that it is both personal and transformational. By speaking it, by living it, it changes both ourselves and the people with whom we come in contact. It does not come to us, however, without fear or violence. Consequently, searching for the the magical word is not for everybody. It is personal, but it is also professional.

Take a look around the room where you sit, now. Look into the

eyes of others. We have a knowing glint, you and I—we who know the magical word—and smile. Think about your project teams. You know, you know.

The magical word is stronger than us. It can carry the hopes of many and it can connect us with the lives and the stories of others. Importantly, it can be shared, transferred, carried by others. Sometimes the heat of another's magical word kindles our own.

In a world where business, marketing and yes, even advertising, has desaturated language of all meaning, the magical word can restore our purpose—and in so doing—transform our private and professional lives. Can't find your own? It's there waiting on your bookshelf. Go on. Look. It's waiting for you.

Gavin Heaton

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A Few Steps Toward The Passion Economy

Mike Wagner

I WANT THE PASSION ECONOMY. YOU SHOULD TOO!

I want a passion economy that would relentlessly focus on the real issues of health care, education and energy independence to name three. I'm tired of "tame solutions" that plaster over what we all know are "wicked problems". You're tired too, right?

I want something bigger than my appetites to fire my imagination. Other generations had their "moon missions"; why can't we find ours? Don't we all suspect our creative genius can come up with something more than a 24/7 food channel?

And I want to leave behind the good a passion economy creates. A passion economy looks at something more than the bottom line. I don't want to sell out with a smirk... and for a condo in Florida. I want a legacy for my work, my organization and even my generation. Don't you?

The passion economy is about being real, big and lasting. But how do we get there and will it be "good for business"?

Here are three "good for business" steps toward the passion economy.

One, don't settle for vicarious passion.

Our marketplace is full of vicarious passions. Take the Super Bowl—millions of passionate but passive observers watching 22 passionate participants. We've got to get beyond "watching" and get to the "doing".

Passion brands elicit participation. Harley Owners Groups and Fiskars' supporting scrapbookers are about passion and doing. Riding a Hog or showing off your scrapbook are not equal to going to the moon. But these companies get us off the couch and remind us to get "in the game" and join the tribe. That's a step in the right direction.

Two, connect the "thing you do" to the "big thing" you're part of.

Design, story and innovation are all ways to get at the bigger systems our products and services affect. Dan Pink's argument for "a whole new mind" opens the door to a passion economy while demonstrating its competitive advantages.

The learning disabilities that say, "I am my job" and "this is all I make" keep our self-image and aspirations small. It is no wonder many businesses could disappear and no one notice.

Passion connects the dots between what we make and the difference we make.

Three, experiment with your point of view.

Many have no passion for their work. The work may not be the right work. But in many cases the problem is point of view. When the point of view is adjusted the passion appears.

I have seen management teams “come alive” upon discovering a new perspective on their old familiar work. Recently I watched a equipment manufacturer suddenly see themselves as educators and evangelists for a dying art. The work didn’t change but the workers’ perspective did. Passion showed up!

Why tamp down your passion and that of your colleagues by looking at your business the way your business has always been looked at?

Are you reinventing a dysfunctional industry or part of the auto industry? Do you make memories or just sell jewelry? Are you a mashup between social media pioneer and “old-fashioned” home-visiting doctor, or merely another doctor trapped within the system?

Mike Wagner

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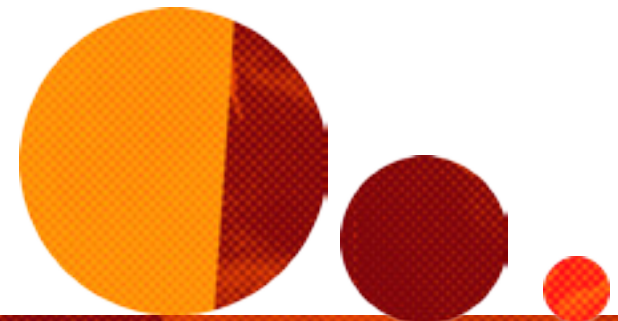
<http://www.twitter.com/BigWags>



Experiment with your point of view till your passion shows up.

Bottom line: there’s nothing inevitable about the passion economy. It’s not fated. But, there is something very attractive and, on a good day, profitable about choosing passion over the predictable ways of the marketplace.

I know what I’m choosing. Do you?



A Passion Economy is Built By Passionate People

Mack Collier

THE BUZZWORDS AND PHRASES ARE POPPING UP LIKE KUDZU IN THE SOUTH. “Consumer empowerment”. “Social Media”. “Customer evangelists”. All wonderful ideas and tools that companies should be aware of.

But at the center of these ideas are people connecting. “Social” media is about communication build around creating and sharing content online. “Consumer empowerment” is the feeling that for the first time, people truly have the ability to let their voices be heard to companies and organizations. “Customer evangelists” are special customers that are so excited about a company that they evangelize that business to others.

People are passionate about connecting with one another. This is a big reason why social media is so popular right now, because it allows people to so quickly and easily connect with others, and even form connections and relationships with the people they come in

contact with.

But how do companies tap into this? How do they find their passion? Or better yet, can they align their passion with those of their customers?

A company like Threadless suggests that this is possible. A company created by a few people that had a passion for designing t-shirts, and giving other designers a way to connect. Now those people have built a business around that passion, and they have found a way to let their customers co-create that business, by empowering the people that share their passion.

Is that the key to creating a passion economy? Perhaps my love of social media has blinded me, but I always go back to the idea that anything that empowers people and taps into their passion is a

good thing. Instead of better reaching customers, should companies be looking for a way to bring the voice, and more importantly the PASSION of their customers, into their company? What if that passion could be incorporated into the business, until the company's most passionate customers helped co-create the purpose and path of the organization? What if a point was reached where the customers literally shared ownership of the company's goal, purpose, and future?

I think it's a question that's worth exploring, and the company founded in Chicago by a couple of would-be t-shirt designers shows us what the answer could look like.

People are passionate about connecting with one another. This is a big reason why social media is so popular right now, because it allows people to so quickly and easily connect with others, and even form connections and relationships with the people they come in contact with.

Mack Collier

Social media consultant, speaker and trainer. Likes people. Likes teaching companies how to use social media to interact with customers as people.

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Raising The Stakes

Mike Arauz

IF YOU COULD DO ANYTHING YOU WANTED, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

In the past few years, hundreds of millions of people around the world have begun to confront this question as they explore the endless possibilities created by the internet. If you could communicate instantaneously with any other person, or huge groups of people, anywhere in the world for free, what would you tell them? If you had the tools to facilitate conversations and organize groups of people, without the limits of time or space, what would you ask them to do? If you could mobilize and work with an unlimited number of people who shared your passion for a particular cause, what would be your mission?

These questions used to be hypothetical; now they're real.

Our answers to these questions reveal our most personal curiosities, interests, and passions. The answers are also informing the decisions of consumers every day as they choose which brands deserve their time, attention, and money.

This means that brands need to become advocates of shared pas-

sions if they aspire to play a role in the lives of their consumers. No longer is it enough to simply have a remarkable product. No longer is it enough to be top of mind. No longer is it enough to elicit an emotional response. Now, brands have to tap into existing passions, and empower the communities that are already forming around shared interests. Brands need to demonstrate that they are passionate about something more important than their product. Brands need to invite their consumers to become part of a movement.

We live in a new world, and we are beginning to have new expectations for what our role as participants should be.

At the Futures of Entertainment Conference at MIT in November 2008, Yochai Benkler, author of *The Wealth of Networks*, said that “the increasingly widespread practice of people coming together for effective purposes” is changing how we perceive ourselves and what we're capable of. Think about how a generation of people who have grown up taking Wikipedia for granted think about themselves differently. We recognize the power in many people coming together, each of us making small contributions, and our collective work adding up to something huge and meaningful. We are increasingly

seeing ourselves as more effective agents of change.

This is the mindset consumers bring to brands, and it's raising the stakes of the game. Good answers to these traditional questions are merely the cost of entry: What does this product do? What makes this product better than the others? What does this brand say about the kind of person I am, or want to be? Now, consumers are giving brands a new challenge: How will engaging with this brand help me to become a more effective champion of the most important, meaningful, or inspiring interests in my life?

Is your brand up for this challenge?

Brands need to demonstrate that they are passionate about something more important than their product. Brands need to invite their consumers to become part of a movement.

Mike Arauz

Mike is a strategist at Undercurrent, a New York based digital think tank. He's passionate about making the internet a better place.

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The Passion Economy: Opportunity for Brands or Just a Fad?

Katie Chatfield

UNDER THE STARS AND SLAPPING AWAY MOSQUITOES in the backyard of an inner city Sydney terrace house a heated debate is taking place. Old friends are sitting well on different sides of the fence on the Passion Economy.

On one side is despair at ‘vulgar success’ at what Tim Jackson (see: <http://tinyurl.com/TimJackson>) calls the broken system of consumerism that has driven the (global) economy to the verge of collective bankruptcy:

Consumerism is what our country now produces—not products.

This position paints profit as an uncompromising evil agent, and those who pursue it to be morally vacuous architects of greed. That being successful in business and having ethics are mutually exclusive. That we need to invest power in institutions and give them the remit to make the hard decisions because humans cannot put aside self interests to work for the common good.

And on the other side is me. My agreement that empty and self-

ish consumerism is a prescription for unhappiness. My refusal to apologize for the dedication and commitment I have for what I do, and the level at which I can operate. My sense of personal responsibility and ability to create contribution points for others. My focus to leave this world in better shape than when I found it. That the personal benefits of giving back and using my powers and privileges for good are embarrassingly abundant.

We live in times where there is great need—and vast resources. Some of our greatest needs are a sustainable vision for the future, purpose, quality of life, and sense of belonging. The resources that we have to meet these needs are just waiting to be harvested: the will of everyday people to do good. I have yet to meet a person who does not want to be part of a strong community, contribute to a safer, greener and more equitable world and see all children meet the future healthy and well prepared. So why aren’t more resources flowing to needs?

Testimonials: *I don’t know how. It’s too hard. I forget. The problems are*

too big. It would never make a difference.

So what could a brand's role be in this context? Great brands put people at the heart of everything they do. They examine what people need and question how those needs can be met. The opportunity for brands in this space is to be and build the bridges between needs and resources for people. Between people and what they want now, and what they want the future to be. To claim ownership of a need, build a sustainable purpose, engage, enlist, inspire action and make this action a habit.

An article in last year's *New York Times* focused on how to use consumer habits for social good. The article focused on an effort, by P&G, Colgate-Palmolive and Unilever to build a campaign to encourage hand-washing in Africa via effective marketing (see: <http://tinyurl.com/handwashing>). The idea was to leverage the skills and insights built by these companies over a hundred years with hundreds of millions of dollars invested in understanding how to create new routines.

Creating positive habits is something that every brand can commit to, and something that is being successfully done around a number of different passion points:

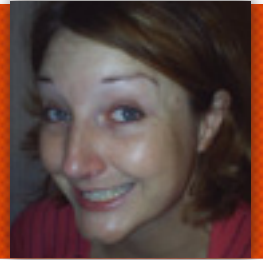
Vodafone's 'World of Difference' (see: <http://tinyurl.com/VodaPhone>), enables people with passion, drive

Katie Chatifeld

By day I'm a director of strategy...in all the moments in between I try to feed my insatiable curiosity and not get too shouty about it all

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and determination to become a 'living donor' and dedicate themselves to community organizations. Vodafone pays them a basic salary plus living expenses. The programme is running in New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands and Ireland and will be in five more countries by the end of 2008.

Rockcorps (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockcorps>) encourages community involvement among youth and young adults through the power of music. People who contribute four hours of community service at one of the company's volunteer events earn a ticket to one of its exclusive concert events. It is supported by Boost Mobile in the US and Orange in the UK.

Compassion and commitment to a better world are not fads. The opportunity here is for brands to use their resources and insight to identify the common passion between their offer and people and then create experiences that allow that energy to flow.

The Passion Economy

Alan Wolk

SINCE THE DAYS OF THE GREEK AGORA, RETAIL HAS COME DOWN TO THREE BASIC PROPOSITIONS: price, selection and service. Our economy tends to go in cycles as one, then the other moves to the forefront.

Right now, we find ourselves in a service-centric period. The post-war “price” era, built on the notion of an abundance of low-priced goods, all previously unavailable to the mass market, gave way to the “selection” era of Web 1.0, where the Long Tail model allowed us to buy the exact goods and services we wanted, which gave way to the current era, where years of shoddy customer service has given an edge to those companies who try and treat their customers with a modicum of respect.

While many see this as the dawn of an Aquarian era, where passionate people are building a society based on consumer empowerment, peace, love and understanding, I appear to have left my rose-colored glasses at home. To me, the service sell is just one more trick in the arsenal, one more way to make a buck. Sure, the most

successful people are passionate about what they’re doing, but they always have been. Companies have realized that consumers will pay for customer service. That is, they will pay a premium price for customer service, so the extra costs of providing premium service are offset by extra profit.

Stores like Starbucks and Whole Foods were the precursors of this movement: their business models are built around giving customers a superior experience, be it the rich smell of fresh-brewed coffee, row after row of neatly stacked fruit or plush seats and stylish blond wood tables. (And let’s not forget how unusual that sort of décor was back in the days before Starbucks became ubiquitous.) In return for being well-treated, both physically and visually, customers were willing to pay quite a bit more money for something that was, at its core, a parity product: Whole Foods non-organic apples were no better or worse than those at the local Shop-Rite: they were just displayed better and the signage made them appear more special.

What Web 2.0/social media/conversational media does do is allow consumers to influence trends more rapidly than ever before. Back in the Jurassic Era (okay, the 1970s) it would take years for trends to make their way from the coasts into the heartland. These days, the voyage is nearly instant and consumer voices are more powerful than ever. The net result is that smarter companies can use these listening posts to more effectively gauge consumer reaction and then turn around and create more effective products, services and experiences.

Not to be a total cynic, however, one very positive development of the new economic reality is the diminishing life span of the inferior product: we can no longer use the smoke and mirrors of marketing to disguise shoddy products. “The Google” makes it too easy to unmask them for what they are.

So how will the Golden Era of Customer Service end? If history is any indicator it plays out like this: superior customer service becomes the norm, something consumers take for granted. At some point, someone zigs and begins to offer the same merchandise for less. Since good service doesn't feel that special anymore, consumers flock to the low-priced goods, to companies run by people who think low prices are the answer to all the world's evils (and a great way to turn a profit) and a whole new cycle begins.

Alan Wolk

Creative Strategist Alan Wolk is best known for his no-nonsense common sense appeal as seen in pieces like “Your Brand Is Not My Friend”

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So how will the Golden Era of Customer Service end? If history is any indicator it plays out like this: superior customer service becomes the norm, something consumers take for granted. At some point, someone zigs and begins to offer the same merchandise for less.

A Proposed Movement

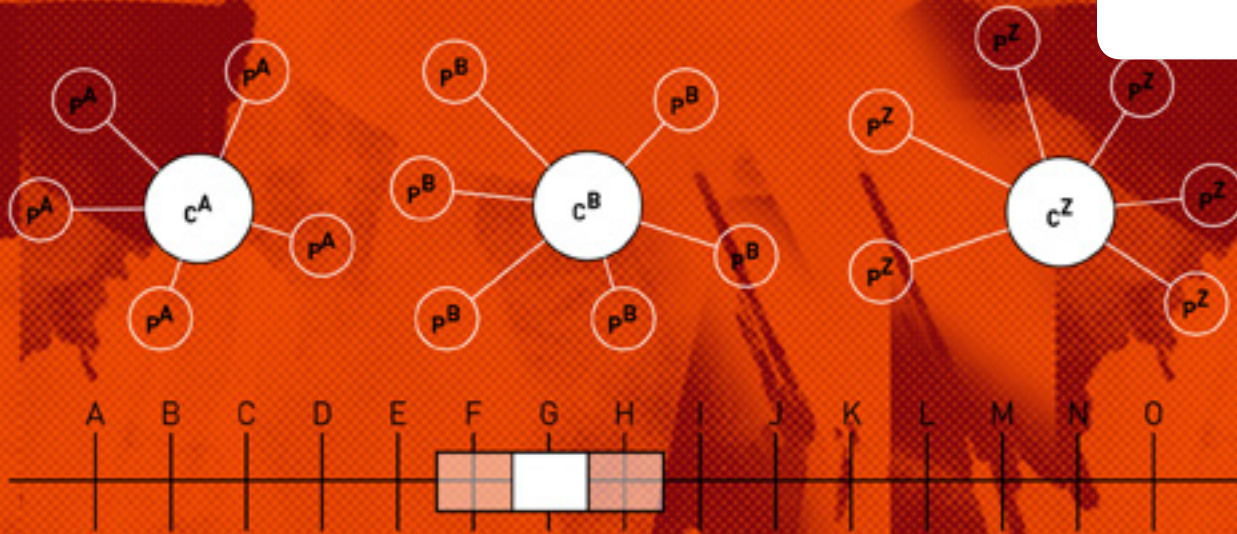
Peter Flaschner

Peter Flaschner

Designer, strategic thinker. Trying to make the world just a little bit nicer.

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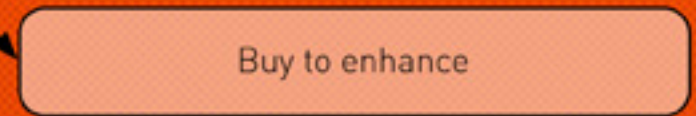
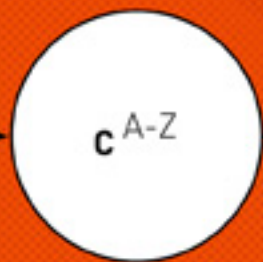
I propose that this movement will result in at least two forces that act on our economy. One, we will make buying decisions that do less harm to ourselves and the collective whole, and two, we will make buying decisions that enhance our passions and our membership in communities.

A person who has an increased sense of empathy has a fuzzier sense of the boundaries of himself and the larger whole. As a result, that person may tend to make decisions that reduce harm to the whole. This could manifest as a decision to buy local, to support fair-trade, to car-pool, etc.

It's easier than ever to find our own passions. The web is a reflection of every passion a human can hold, each a quick search away.

Group formation is easier than ever. Communities form around areas of shared passion:

The more one participates in a group, the more one's potential empathy grows.



The Passion Economy

Charles Edward Frith

WE'RE LIVING, BREATHING AND CONNECTING IN THE THICK OF QUITE REMARKABLE TIMES. It seems the revolution will not be televised but will certifiably be twittered first. But is it a passion economy we're witnessing, and if so, is there an opportunity for brands?

Passion is one of the most overused words in the marketing lexicon. Many fail to distinguish between a real passion and simply doing their work, albeit enthusiastically, because it pays the mortgage or fills the freezer. The torture test for passion—but not the litmus—should be something that can thrive and flourish without fiscal reward. However, the binary options of the past are dissolving and increasingly, the opportunity in a flat and networked world for people to marry their passion with their daily toil, or invest time in their passion, is only a Google blog search away. A liberating revolution of self-fulfillment is emerging; each day the visibility for intellectual actualization bursts in via the RSS feeds; exciting times indeed.

So is the passion economy an emerging and cogent trend? It always existed, I believe, in micro-pockets that relied on happenstance, serendipity or fate for survival and was thus much smaller and more isolated. However in our time it's becoming increasingly fecund through our ability to network and share experience, learn from one another, discover matched agendas and problem-solve by way of the exponential power of the internet, which is still only a few thousand days old.

The potential opportunity to fix some of the most urgent challenges of our age has ostensibly arrived at precisely the time when the tools to do so are widely available to the world's internet population. The conversation is everywhere from blogs to bulletin boards and Twitter, not forgetting the massively important audio and video content that is changing the way we process information biologically. Some of the smartest thinking is available for all to witness as soon as it is dispatched into cyberspace; recency being one of the most powerful parts of this communication context. The question then remains: is there room for brands and marketing

communications to join in? Tricky really, because the golden rule of “social-anything” is to keep it social and avoid commercialism. However with the right organisational DNA, that pioneering handful of companies who aren’t pathological about the relentless and senseless stampede for mindless growth, it’s apparent room exists for some of those commercial entities to at least have a voice in the expansive digital filigree. This select few can really shine outside of the broadcast-and-monologue marketing communications model like never before, with compelling authenticity, values and conviction-of-direction that are the hallmark of the few brands who know how to participate in the lives of their customers on equal terms. They love to engage at any opportunity, and critically, they harbor a fancy notion that to make the world a better place is not an unreasonable goal.

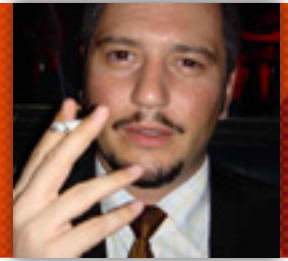
We are after all, all in it together.

The current context is that our planet is visibly beginning to choke on it’s own senseless growth for growth’s sake.

The twisted logic of the 20th-century business premise of infinite growth from finite resources has finally collapsed with considerable philosophical aplomb. We may well have just avoided a mid-future catastrophe by weaning ourselves off the consumption drug via an economic hallucination that perpetual growth was an unassailable

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truth. Well it wasn’t, and while crashing the car into the tree isn’t the smartest way to save on carbon emissions or the safest way of rejecting the pernicious and selfish disposable society, we now have a chance. There’s a glimmer of hope.

Maybe this is a one-off chance to emerge blinking from the economic hologram we lived in, and combine forces with the most amazing people around the world now feeding off the macroeconomic imperative for rewiring our economies, and through our ever richer and deeper technological communication tools to put the right people together, shred the old hierarchy and get on with the task of creating smarter growth through a passionate economy.

Is there a role for third-millennium brands to engage in the passion economy?

Yes.

What took you so long?

Putting People First

Matthew Milan

LAST SUMMER, I RESIGNED FROM MY JOB AS THE HEAD OF PLANNING IN THE TORONTO OFFICE OF A LARGE INTERACTIVE AGENCY. Naturally, people wanted to know why I was leaving. I summed it up to a friend and mentor in the following way: “There are some problems you can’t solve with just words.” When Sean asked me to write about the Passion Economy, I jumped at the chance, but immediately afterwards realized that right now the notion of the passion economy is also “just words”.

To understand where I’m coming from, it’s important to know where I’m going. My company doesn’t do marketing, advertising or brands. We do interactions, situations and people. We design relationships for organizations that help facilitate the exchange of value, and we put people at the center of the business model, not the brand. As an admitted and recovering contrarian, my first thoughts about the notion of the Passion Economy were questions about what the words actually meant.

At the surface, the imagery of the Passion Economy is beautiful, enticing and idyllic. It’s a really impressive movie poster, but it tells you nothing of the plot, or whether watching that movie is actually worth your time.

Thanks to people like Alex Osterwalder, Victor Lombardi, Michael Dila and Jess McMullin, I’m a rabid business model design geek. I care more about the plot than the poster. I’m frankly not interested in watching another *movie* starring brands.

When I hear “passion” and “opportunity for brands” together, I worry that we’re all collectively watching another Batman remake, and the only difference is that we’re getting Christian Bale instead of Val Kilmer as the lead. If we’re serious about understanding how to “grok” the way in which passion can support value exchanges (that money stuff) between organizations and individuals in a modern economy, we need new characters and a new plot. I love the “Hero’s Journey” as much as the next person, but frankly it’s

getting fucking tired and played out.

We need to figure out the part that passion actually plays in contemporary and emerging economies, and then resist the urge to frame it as a solution for the brand problem. This means asking some tough questions and testing our hypotheses out in the wild, failing fast and learning from the results. If passion drives an economy, we have to know *how* that happens. Is passion the product? The means of production? The sweat equity? I honestly have no clue right now, but I'd love to see us try to find out through some old fashioned trial and error, reflective learning and a bit of intentional thinking that focuses on people first. What far too few marketing folks understand is that the future is here, and it involves investing in people. Having your brand on Twitter is not investing; helping create more value for individuals is.

Bottom line: the Passion Economy a great notion, but it's also just words. It's my hope that organizations start putting the needs of people first, design from real needs, not market segments, and

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create the frameworks that monetize the heck out of the untapped passion that exists in people. We won't do that by talking, but we might have a chance if we start making.

Sadly, most organizations have it backwards. Brands don't empower consumers; people empower brands. Until more companies relearn this lost perspective, conversations will continue to kill markets, and brands will fight an unwinnable advertising-based war of attrition. Brands have to stop bombing and start building. Only when organizations start to help individuals create real value will they understand where the passion in a shared economy really lies. Until then, it's just a pretty poster.

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Front and back titles are set in DIN Light.
Article titles are set in Chapparal Pro Bold 30pt.
Body copy is set in Chapparal Pro Regular 12pt/19pt.

I used a demo of InDesign CS4 for the layout. The software is awesome. I'll be upgrading from CS3. Graphics were made in PhotoShop CS3.

I used a set of high resolution watercolour brushes (available for free from Bitbox <http://www.bittbox.com/freebies/free-hi-res-watercolor-photoshop-brushes-set-ii/>) to create the textures throughout the pdf. This was a lot of fun. I hope it shows. - PF

