

What **course creators**
need to know to fall in love
with marketing and sales

Marketing
that makes
sense

Marketing made Human

Malene

Benndtzen



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Marketing Made Human:

What course creators need to know to fall in love with marketing and sales

To all the brave men and women who are determined to make the world a better place through helping people solve important problems and achieve dreams.

To all the passionate course creators and online teachers who have the courage to listen to their hearts and put human connection at the center of marketing and business.

To my lovely family, friends, and tribe who support and inspire me, and gave valuable feedback during the creation of this book.

We are better together.

Note to the reader

This book will change your view on marketing forever. It demystifies the path to marketing success, and empowers course creators to love marketing and build a brand that customers will love to promote.

I am on a mission to put human connection, fundamental human desires, and shared values at the center of marketing strategies. The goal is to remove the fear and discomfort for entrepreneurs who are struggling with internal value conflicts and who are experiencing a lack of meaning and negative emotions against marketing and selling.

Course creators have an exceptional opportunity to tap into the new agenda of social media and take a more human-centered approach to marketing. This opportunity leverages how consumers are actually making purchasing decisions today, as opposed to the old paradigm of marketing.

Hopefully, you will feel inspired to tap into this new, yet ancient marketing paradigm to create a powerful brand and grow into a successful entrepreneur and a confident marketer and leader of your true tribe.

If you have any questions while or after reading this book, I am more than happy to answer them. Send your question or feedback to mb@malenebendtsen.com or connect with me on social media.

I'd love to hear your thoughts!

Hug's from Malene

What you will learn

This book will:

- Demystify why you (with good reason) may have felt reluctant to marketing and sales, and outline a new paradigm to help you feel inspired and capable instead
- Show you how fundamental human desires are driving customer happiness like never before and how you can leverage that in your marketing
- Shed light on the forces driving immunity to traditional marketing and explain how social media platforms are responding to consumer demand to be ‘unreachable’ by traditional marketing, while increasingly empowering consumers to act as voluntary marketers
- Teach you how you, as a personal brand, can leverage factors commonly ignored by bigger brands
- Help you find the courage to fully step into your role and take full ownership of the empowering force you truly are to your most desired audience
- Show you where to focus your efforts with generous human interaction and solid guidance to turn customers into engaged brand ambassadors
- Outline how to build sales funnels in this new marketing paradigm and which metrics to use to measure your business success

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You can get everything
in life you want if you help
enough other people get
what they want.

- ZIG ZIGLAR

Introduction

Across industries and niches, entrepreneurs are confused and stalled by the ever-evolving marketing monster.

Distrust, discomfort, disrespect and a sense of overstepping boundaries arise in many of us when exposed to traditional marketing. This nasty gut feeling is sparked when we remember the decades of lies told, secrets kept and information controlled by corporations alienated from regular people like you and me.

We feel powerless when we realize that even legislation can't protect us against sleazy and dishonest marketers. No wonder so many of us hesitate and resist marketing and sales.

It is a fallacy. Neither corporations or marketing agencies have the power we tend to believe. The only truly powerful force in the marketing space is, in fact, the consumer.

For more than a decade, we ignored the fact that two-thirds of the touchpoints during the purchasing process has nothing to do with company-driven marketing.

Instead, it involves consumer-driven marketing activities, such as Internet reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family.

Consumers rule and they created just one rule: I am unreachable until I decide otherwise. Modern consumers are increasingly becoming immune to traditional advertising and they only trust people they know quite well.

Marketing activities that generate sales are to a large extent happening outside of marketing channels designed by the seller.

Most companies focus their entire marketing budget on the front end of their business. This approach ignores the fact that the majority of sales happen as a consequence of customers selling to customers. And, it gets worse.

- 77% of brands could disappear, and no one would care. This figure represents a 3% increase compared to customer loyalty¹ research from just two years ago. Some of the most prominent brands are still being cherished, but most of the others are quite simply dispensable.
- Meaningful brands that are seen to be making the world a better place outperform the stock market by 134%.²
- 75% of consumers expect brands to make more of a contribution to their well-being and quality of life.³
- 50% of US consumers have left a brand they were loyal to for a competitor that better met their needs.⁴ 37% of consumers feel that true brand loyalty starts at 5 purchases minimum.⁵

Customers are to a large extent disloyal and will switch to a different brand if given the opportunity. With the wrong, old-fashioned marketing mindset, disloyalty will drive marketing budgets in an upward spiral in an attempt to replace customers leaving.

We are at the edge of an enormous shift in our most commonly used marketing strategies. I suggest a new, consumer-driven, humanized marketing can be the salvation of the many entrepreneurs like you and me, who get that awful gut feeling we talked about earlier.

This book project started with a wondering. For years, I have watched how new and accomplished entrepreneurs struggle with marketing and sales. I have noticed that having the right strategies and skills is just one part of it. Mindset and outright fear and discomfort are stopping passionate people from successfully fulfilling their dreams and impacting the world in their best way. Their uniqueness and powerful solutions remain well-kept secrets for this reason.

I finally started to grasp the answer to my wondering:

Given the right information and inspiration, is it possible to break down cemented perceptions and beliefs creating discomfort around marketing?

Will highly capable, very passionate and very ambitious entrepreneurs thereby be able to fall in love with marketing, empowering them to a bigger impact in the world and unlimited business success?

I aim to help you see your influencer role in a new, bright light, and find the courage to fully step into it and take full ownership of your role. Even if you at this point have just one person in your audience, this person is looking to you for help to achieve some kind of change. Know that there are thousands of people out there looking for precisely what you have to offer.

As a personal brand entrepreneur, you have many roles. One is to be a guide and help solve a problem your audience has. We can all agree on that. I'd love to convince you that *doing your marketing right is simply helping your audience decide* if they are ready for that change and if you are the best person to help them. They need guidance to be able to decide. They need to educate themselves to be ready for the transformation they truly desire. They need to trust you, and more importantly, they need to trust themselves.

If you truly care about your audience, it is not uncomfortable to help at any stage. Marketing is helping. Your job is not to convince or lure anyone into something that is not right for them or that they are not ready for. Your job is to make the diagnosis to be able to tell if you are the best fit for them and if they are a fit for the kind of business you want.

Understanding the underlying human desires and their role in purchasing decisions opens up new ways of approaching your marketing role with a lot more attention to the customers and audience you already have, even if just a few. If you are reading this book, I'll assume you are passionate about your niche and the solutions you

“

Most men lead lives
of quiet desperation and
go to the grave with the
song still in them.

- HENRY DAVID THOREAU

provide and you'll be happy to learn that is exactly what you need to become a highly-skilled marketer.

Recalling the majority of the decision-making process before a purchase has nothing to do with the seller but everything to do with other customers praising your services, you need an unconventional plan to tap into the processes going on outside your control.

Customers are increasingly immune to traditional advertising. In fact, most will go above and beyond to avoid more or less random ads. This has forced social media platforms to limit advertising in new feeds as well as other placements. Again, this has led to lots of companies and business owners experiencing rising advertising costs in recent years. Ads are still an important part of your business, but should be used in a much smarter way where you are helping the right people finding the solution they need, when they need it.

Social media algorithms appear mystical and it can be difficult to understand how to get in front of your audience and potential customers. But, consider the mission of social media platforms, how they are data-driven and take current customer behavior far more seriously than most marketers. You will see that the tools that used to deter you from reaching your audience can enable you to find and serve your true audience much more easily in any part of their decision making and transformational journey.

As a personal brand, you need a marketing strategy that covers:

- Exposure so you will be seen
- Runways to land people safely in your world
- Stories to share and relate to
- Conversations worth participating in
- Memorable moments
- A place for them to belong

Your audience subscribes to YOU. And they *will* move on if you don't show up throughout their journey. Your marketing plan should reflect that.

With a mindset focused on meeting fundamental human desires, NOW is the best time ever to connect with your true tribe and build a powerful personal brand that customers will happily and voluntarily promote.

JOIN THE
Community

To connect with like-minded teachers and coaches about the art of course creation, just go to malenebendtsen.com/coursecreatorscafe and request to join the community on Facebook.

Part 1

The Ignored Truth

History of marketing and why you fear it

Introduction

I love marketing! But let's be honest. Most people are not too fond of doing marketing or selling. What happened is that we were lured into forgetting basic human desires. That caused us to feel that engaging in marketing was unethical, egotistical, greedy, pushy and very very uncomfortable. My mission is to make you fall in love with marketing and selling, using your energy how nature intended you to.

I would like you to share your magic, improve the world and connect with your people. I want to help you find a place to belong in the world of business. You can shape a place for your tribe to grow in the world of whatever you are passionate about and whatever vision you share with your people.

In this first part, we will take a look at what has blurred your vision on the topic of sales and marketing. Then we'll take a look at the mindset

of the consumer and what they really want and don't want. I'll show you how marketing is now returning to authenticity. We will talk about the fundamental human desires that power successful marketing and how you can tap into those desires, create a lovable brand and become a modern marketer in a meaningful way.

I will show you WHY you may have hated marketing and selling and then we will move on into a new marketing paradigm. We're going to dive into what has changed and how you can successfully market your business and sell to customers.

Past experience tends to blur our vision

How we make sense of actions, conversations, and information is highly affected by our past. The creation of meaning is a retrospective process in our minds (*Karl E. Weick*: Sensemaking in Organizations).⁶ Whatever is occurring in the present moment will influence what is discovered and remembered when people glance back into the past. Every day we receive thousands of thousands of cues that trigger more or less conscious reevaluations of past events. We interpret what is happening in the present but we also keep changing our perception of past events as we move forward.

➤ *Karl E. Weick* is an American organizational theorist who introduced the concepts of “loose coupling”, “mindfulness”, and “sensemaking” into organizational studies. Author of 7 books.

This means that despite the frequency at which people express a lack of meaning in their lives, there are often many possible meanings and too many possible interpretations of information, actions, and situations. This can cause confusion. Consider how much information is already available for free. At the same time, people are often not moving forward because they feel they need information. We must acknowledge that people are usually not suffering from ignorance or lack of information, they are suffering from confusion in a crowded sea of information.

We, as humans, can be paralyzed when we feel confused. Thus, the feeling of order, clarity, and rationality is an important goal of sensemaking processes. Once the desired feeling is achieved, further retrospective processing stops. We stop reevaluating the past when we can get that sense of order, clarity, and rationality.

In a situation where there is a feeling of overwhelm, simply ignoring cues or interpreting information in a way that confirms what we already believe to be true, is convenient.

Edgar Schein's cultural model for organizational culture and learning and development can serve as an inspiration to understand how behaviors are rooted in personal values and attitudes, which grow from cultural values and assumptions.



“

Life can only be
understood backwards, but
it must be lived forwards.

- **SØREN KIERKEGAARD**

➤ The Danish philosopher and theologian **Søren Kierkegaard** (1813–1855) is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher. Much of his philosophical work deals with the issues of how one lives as a “single individual”, giving priority to concrete human reality over abstract thinking and highlighting the importance of personal choice and commitment.

While personal values are somewhat visible and can be talked about, cultural values are usually the invisible influence. Cultural values are often held subconsciously, and rarely, if ever, questioned in everyday life. We form those underlying beliefs and assumptions through experience. So unless we gain significant experience and ‘evidence’ that past beliefs are untrue, we will hold on to those underlying beliefs without even questioning them.

As we already learned, making sense of current events is a retrospective process with a goal of maintaining order and stability. Thus if you want to change your own or others’ behaviors, you need to first discover the nature of those beliefs since we are often unaware of them. You must make an effort to understand how those underlying beliefs were formed. That takes a genuine interest, good conversation skills, and a trustful relationship.

Kierkegaard’s famous words on the art of helping might serve to understand why attempting marketing with no previous relationship with the audience is an uphill battle. They may also help you understand

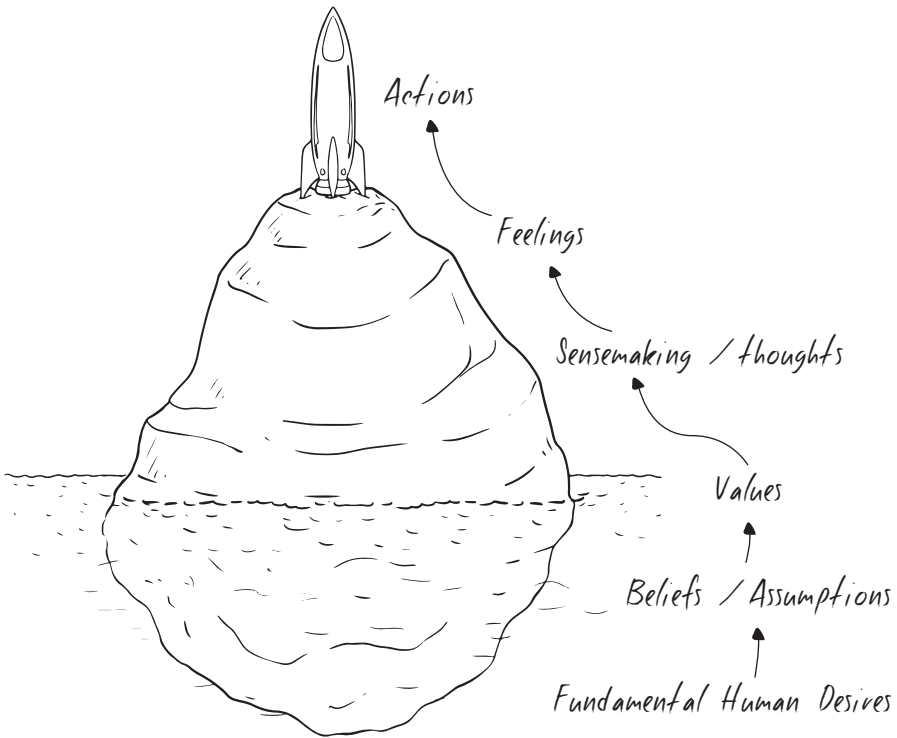
what your role as a marketer really is. The text is translated from Danish and shortened for the message to stand out more clearly.

'If one is truly to succeed in leading a person to a specific place, one must first and foremost take care of him where he is and begin there. In order to truly help someone else, I must understand more than he does, but certainly, first and foremost understand what he understands.

If I do not do that then my greater understanding does not help him at all. If I nevertheless want to assert my greater understanding, it is because I am vain or proud. Then basically instead of benefiting him, I really want to be admired by him'.

To be a successful owner of a personal brand based business you need superior knowledge, but also you need to understand where your audience comes from, what they understand to be true, their beliefs and attitudes in order to be able to teach them anything or help them at all. Your job as a marketer is to achieve a level of understanding that is superior to their own, so you can help them move past 'stuck' and decide.

Design thinking methods have cherished this for the last decade or two. No industrial designer with respect for himself or herself and their profession would take research lightly. They would dive deep into the world in which a solution is to be applied, not only to shape the solution accordingly but to discover better questions to ask, the values and aspirations held by the user, and the real issues to be resolved.



Origins for your love or dislike for marketing

According to psychologists, fear of failure is at the very top of the totem pole of human fears, above the fear of separation and loss of autonomy. For 15% of small businesses, the greatest challenge is marketing (GuidantFinancial, 2019), only surpassed by lack of capital (read: a looming lack of enough sales and profits).

The search term 'How do I market my business' returns 4.13 billion results on Google in 0,75 seconds (September 2021). You are not alone with your potential lack of knowledge, dislike or even fear of marketing.

There are 582 million entrepreneurs worldwide.⁷ 79.7% of US-based small businesses only employ the owner.⁸ The good news is the rate of first-year failure has never been lower (21.5% in 2019).⁹ As a solopreneur and personal brand based business, you have the advantage of NOT being a corporate brand.¹⁰ This gives you the opportunity to build an entirely different kind of relationship with your tribe. You have the freedom to change how you make sense about you as a seller and a marketer. By understanding your underlying beliefs and how they were formed, adding new cues, and telling different stories, you can change your perception of what marketing and selling is and see new value in those activities.

You can apply your new knowledge about sensemaking to understand your own journey. You can overcome your hesitations towards selling and marketing, to earning money, to becoming an entrepreneur, and start standing out in your market.

All of the beliefs and assumptions related to these feelings are the results of the sensemaking processes in your past. This includes personal experiences you had, words that were used, general norms in society you experienced, tribal narratives and opinions expressed repeatedly by friends or family members etc. All of this impacted the underlying beliefs that control your mindset towards marketing, and your anticipation of personal marketing success.

How you react to related or similar thought patterns and happenings in the future will continually change as you adapt to stimuli. The more willingly you reevaluate your beliefs and the more aware you are of your

assumptions, and the more curious you are and the more actively you expose yourself to new information and new ideas, the more likely you are to develop a mindset that will release you from limiting behavior and feelings. That is exactly my intention with this book.

The false illusion of loyalty

Now, apply this same knowledge to understand the journey of your audience. What happened in their lives long before they ever met you? How can you tap into their mindset and their world? How can you help them get past some of those limiting beliefs and assumptions? What would it look like to tap into their values to help them get to their desired destination?

As Kierkegaard suggested, you can choose to be curious and approach the marketing task like a designer would: diving deep into understanding the values, desires, and formed beliefs to truly provide helpful solutions and guide their decision-making process.

In contrast to the design discipline, the marketing discipline has developed in an unfortunate manner in many ways. Much advertising is detached from customer needs and desires and is composed with a ‘buy my thing’ mindset as the starting point. Often the only human component applied is that it is spiced up with easy-to-see-through psychological triggers.

Traditionally, marketing campaigns are not designed with any real heartfelt intent to help the buyer. It should be mentioned that there is

nothing wrong with using psychological triggers. However, your long term business success depends on you serving your true ready-for-transformation tribe.

Psychological triggers should be used with the intent of helping the prospect decide if the timing is right and they are ready for the transformation. Otherwise, you'll end up giving refunds at best, struggling with unhappy customers at worst - and for sure they will not end up happy customers ready to promote your brand and services.

Marketing strategists are to a large degree ignoring reality. Conversations and exchanged recommendations among consumers are largely guiding purchasing decisions - not conversations controlled by the marketing department.

Across industries, an average consumer purchasing process consists of 70% customer-driven marketing and only 30% company-driven marketing.¹¹

Though many marketing campaigns are considered successful in some aspects, they are usually nowhere nearly as powerful as autonomously customer-started and customer-driven campaigns. Thus focus should be directed on how to produce overly happy customers who love your brand so much they will voluntarily promote it by speaking positively about it to others.

The general focus point of marketers and marketing agencies is to attract new customers. Most companies realize the value of repeating

customers. They get that getting a new customer is a lot more expensive than keeping a customer that you already have.

The problem is, their strategies to create customer loyalty are not working. 87% of customers will willingly switch brands and cannot be considered loyal.¹² One reason may be, that primarily using financial methods or simply making it difficult to switch are considered irrelevant at best and unethical at worst by consumers.

Rarely, is the corporate marketers' job to increase the value delivered. That is often either considered an additional expense or somebody else's job outside the marketing department.

There is a lack of interest or systems to develop real relationships with customers. It is understandable that this exercise is more difficult for a corporate brand. You, on the other hand, as a personal brand based marketer have an excellent opportunity to stand out and offer exactly what the bigger brands are not capable of.

It is unfortunate enough that marketers have tunnel vision on customer acquisition combined with wrong strategies for building loyalty. Also as unfortunate is that building intimate relationships, and having relatable brand ambassadors is difficult for many companies.

Let's add one more dimension to that.

Marketers often attempt to attract new customers in ways that are no longer working. But before we dive into that, let's take a look at this manifesto from Cluetrain:¹³

'A powerful global conversation has begun. Through the internet people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter - and getting smarter faster than most companies.

These markets are conversations. Their members communicate in a language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny and often shocking. Whether explaining or complaining, joking or serious, the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can't be faked.

Most corporations, on the other hand, only know how to talk in a soothing, humourless monotone of the mission statement, marketing brochure and your-call-is-important-to-us busy signal. Same old tone, same old lies. No wonder networked markets have no respect for companies unable or unwilling to speak as they do.

But learning to speak in a human voice is not some trick, nor will corporations convince us they are human with lip service about "listening to customers". They will only sound human when they empower real human beings to speak on their behalf.'

You might think this manifesto is from a recent thought leader, but actually, the Cluetrain Manifesto is from 1999. That was 20 years before this book was written!

The term ‘relationship marketing’ was coined even long before that. In 1983, **Dr Leonard L. Berry** said relationship marketing requires an in-depth personalized understanding of consumer needs and characteristics.¹⁴ That’s thirty-five years of marketers intending to move customers up the ladder of loyalty.

➤ ***Dr Leonard L. Berry*** coined the term relationship marketing (1983), which emphasizes the need for organizations to maintain (rather than simply acquire) customers. Berry is a past president of the American Marketing Association.

A newer definition by **Mari Smith** suggests, ‘Relationship Marketing’ is about genuinely caring about all human beings on the planet and building solid win-win relationships with potential customers, competitors, influencers, media etc.¹⁵

➤ Often referred to as “the Queen of Facebook,” ***Mari Smith*** is one of the world’s foremost experts on Facebook marketing. She is a Forbes’ perennial Top Social Media Power Influencer, author of *The New Relationship Marketing* and coauthor of *Facebook Marketing: An Hour A Day*.

The fact is that marketers failed. Consumer mindset is not about loyalty, but the mindset of marketers is. Consumers are very loyal, just not to companies, and there are good reasons for this which we’ll get back to.

But marketers are ignoring those reasons. They are under the illusion that they can make customers loyal to companies. Often they are simply trying to pay them off through loyalty programs, discounts, get-two-for-one, etc. They are measuring loyalty in money. But it's not working. The only kind of loyalty that consumers care about is their loyalty to people they know, trust, and can relate to because of shared values.

You might ask how on earth this illusion is sustained for so many years when it is in nobody's interest. It is not working for marketers. Cost of acquiring customers using advertising is going up. Loyalty is going down. Nobody is helped by this kind of marketing. Consumers even feel resentful and are actively avoiding it.

So let's take a look at what happened and what should be done instead of what traditionally thinking marketers are doing at the moment and have been doing for years. The purpose of diving deep into this is not to shame marketers but to help you understand the unique opportunity you are facing as a personal brand.

Confused by technology

To explain how marketing has actually come full circle, I have developed a model inspired to some extent by the three rebellions in [Mark Schaefer's](#) book 'Marketing rebellion'.¹⁶ I am telling a different story than Mark though, because I want to get to a different point. If you find the following interesting, I highly recommend you get your hands on a copy of Mark's book which is full of wisdom and great examples.

➤ **Mark Schaefer** is a globally-recognized keynote speaker, educator, business consultant, and best-selling author. His blog {grow} is hailed as one of the top marketing blogs in the world. He is the author of seven best-selling marketing books and co-host of ‘The Marketing Companion’, one of the top 10 marketing podcasts on iTunes.

You’re probably familiar with the acronyms: business to business (B2B), and business to consumer (B2C). People to People (P2P) might be new to you but it’s not a new phenomenon either.

Others use the terms Human to Human (H2H) or customer to customer (C2C) which basically covers the same. I prefer P2P since it’s plural and therefore covers social media conversations and broadcasts better. Also, ‘people’, in a discussion on who is controlling marketing, has a more rebel ring to it that better suits my point.

We have come full circle from the original ‘caveman P2P’ to the ‘new P2P’ where values, authenticity and relationships are the very foundation for marketing. Powered by technology, this gives us completely new opportunities for activating audiences and turning passionate customers into voluntary marketers for brands they love (aka your brand, right?).

So let me explain the historical basis of this in a potentially oversimplified way. I believe it will help the point to stand out more clearly if told in a simple story (you can imagine me sitting in a big green recliner reading to you now).

Before modern times, people lived only among people they already knew; family, friends and maybe an occasional traveller who was bringing goods from other parts of the world or other parts of the country. I call it ‘caveman P2P’ because we are talking before any kind of empowering infrastructure or technology, but yes, the term is a bit exaggerated to stress the point. Let’s imagine a small town a few hundred years ago with a few hundred habitants.

What was marketing like back then? Well, somebody had something to sell and they would put a sign in their window or in front of their shop or home. Salesmen would go from door to door asking for an opportunity to talk with housewives and homeowners, and trying to sell their product. Vendors would bring their homemade and freshly grown products to the local market. Sometimes there was just one person selling the product category in town so the competition was between categories and not specific products or brands.

Word of mouth was really important. Someone would tell their neighbour about a product they bought and that they found was really good quality or worth the money they paid for it. Often people would only know about a new product available because of word of mouth. In any of these strategies (sign, knock on doors, market place, word of mouth), marketing was completely based on in-person conversations. Consumers were able to immediately ask questions directly to the person selling the product. That person would be someone familiar, trusted, and someone who lived in and interacted with the people in the neighbourhood long-term.

So what caused the change and sparked the appearance of new marketing strategies? Well, the **first transformation** was actually caused by *new structures*. Cities were growing. More and more people lived together. And that meant people were now living amongst strangers, whom they had no reason to trust or distrust.

Other types of infrastructures were built too, connecting towns to other towns and making it possible to move more goods between towns and eventually cities. This improved distribution increased assortment and product variety and made it possible for more people to buy more products. Companies were growing and becoming more organized. Individual sellers became groups of people organised in branded companies and selling their products in roles that were divided into specific skill sets and functions. That also happened for the marketing function. Marketing agencies were born. If you have seen 'Mad Men' (Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime), you can think about that here.

There were also new media companies; printed media and radio media. For the radio, the 1930s was a golden age. At the start of the decade, 12 million American households owned a radio, and by 1939 this total had exploded to more than 28 million.¹⁷

Radio advertisement was heavily introduced in the US and in Europe by Radio Luxemburg and Radio Normandie. People loved having 'direct' access to information and over the next 5 decades new media were introduced like long-form infomercials in American TV programs.

In 1988, I was a teenager in Denmark and our 2nd national TV channel, TV2, was introduced. Unlike the state-owned channel we were used to (DR), this new channel was financed by short-form advertising. The new channel surpassed the old in terms of viewers after just 3 years and became the most popular TV channel,¹⁸ highly due to the commercials. Some of you might also remember at this time, we wanted to arrive at the cinema in time for the commercials. Similarly, infomercials attracted great audiences in the US. Let's face it! We loved advertising!

However, these media were one-to-many broadcasting media. There was one sender and a lot of receivers of a message. Whereas before it was two people having a dialogue with each other, now it was a one-to-many monologue happening. People could not naturally trust the sender of that information or the unknown manufacturer of a product. Consumers felt alienated from a real conversation (and from corporate brands), and they wanted more information.

The information given was oftentimes sincere and correct, but sometimes marketers and companies were also, in fact, telling lies about their products and the benefits of them (smoke more - live longer style). Thus, consumers learned that marketers cannot be trusted, salesmen cannot be trusted, and over time consumers came to believe scepticism is best applied when it comes to information given by marketers and salesmen. They came to expect lies, and a desire for truth was building up.

What happened next was the information age, the internet. Desire for truth was developing into a pressure for truth. Thus, the **second transformation** was caused by an *increased level of transparency*.

Information age is a time of technology and data. We want facts. Social media, Wikipedia, TrustPilot etc. are examples of platforms where everybody can contribute and share important information with other people. Consumers push for better information. They want facts. They want the truth. *They want to be able to trust.*

Unfortunately, consumers discovered that not all companies were (or aren't) ready for a thorough, honest examination. And when consumers experience that companies are giving false information or they are reluctant to give correct and full information about how products are produced, about the environmental impact of the production, use of child labour or other topics they are concerned about - they will start to push for more information.

So, for the last few decades, consumers have been pushing for corporate social responsibility and the consumer's right to transparency. They have been pushing for value-based information. Companies have often reacted with an intent to hide information and reveal only positive information. Whereas before they had primarily or solely a product focus, now they had to protect the image they presented - whether it was true or not. They had to protect their brand. And to a large extent, that is still their prime concern.

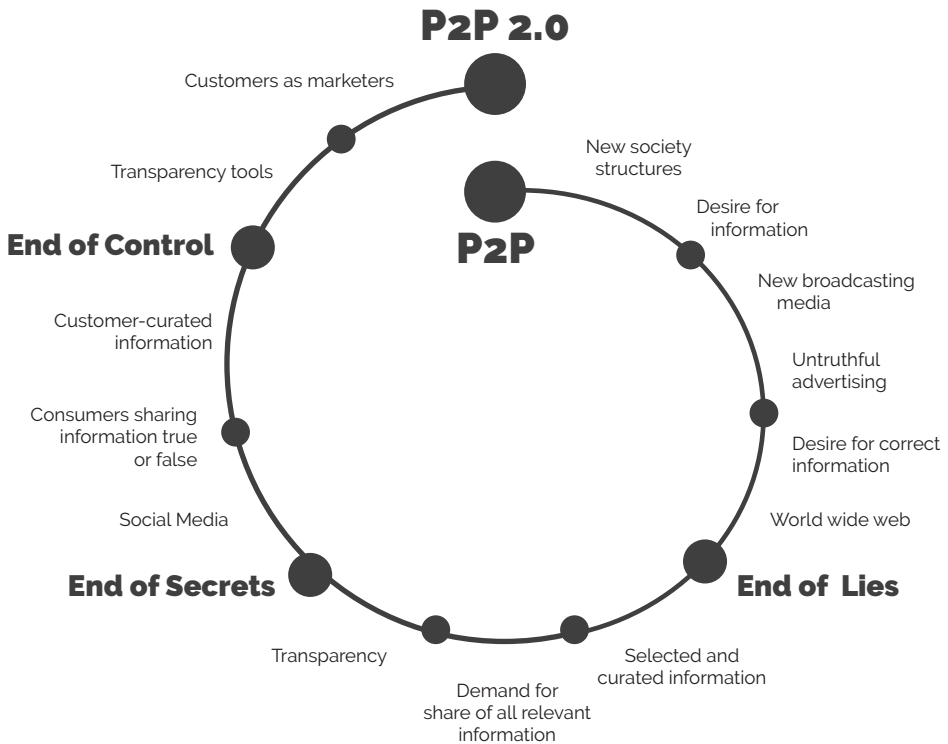
It is only natural that brands which are not ready for that deep examination by consumers who dive deep into their processes and their cultures and internal policies are scared of social media. In the beginning, most companies were actually reluctant to even be present on social media, and they were putting their heads down hoping

consumers would not have reason to talk in any negative way about their brand if they were not present. During my corporate career, I was engaged many times in management discussions on how to set up systems to monitor and control online conversations. The common belief was in many corporations, online conversations not initiated by the company were best avoided all together. This was the era of secrets or companies trying to keep secrets.

The **third transformation** happened when consumers stopped accepting those secrets. They have now lost trust in any information unless they know the source well, and for that matter in any company with whom they don't have personal experience.

At this point, consumers no longer trust companies or corporate brands. They only trust other people. They trust their peers. They trust people they know or people with whom they have a lot in common and with whom they share values.

At the same time, there is an increased desire to reveal secrets and expose anyone trying to keep them. *Consumers are creating transparency* to a large and increasing extent, and they are creating the exact transparency companies were so scared of. So what companies now experience, is the end of control.



Consumers, however, DO want something from marketers. They want them to create a sense of belonging. They want to trust because trust is the foundation of feeling safe, respected, important and any other positive feeling that grows from a relationship. But they require higher standards, authenticity, integrity, transparency and fairness. They want to be able to help out a friend, colleague, neighbour or family member with a solid recommendation of a brand or solution they love and had desired results with. In short, if they love your brand, they will promote it.

Companies have finally realized that social media area much more than just a threat, and they have for certain realized that it is inevitable

that they will be present and engage in conversations on social media. They realize social media holds opportunities as well as risk, and that the bigger risk is not knowing how to utilize social media to their advantage. This has caused marketers to study persuasion and psychological triggers to a never-seen-before extent. One proof of this is, how book sales have exploded in this category, ie there are currently 60,000 books available on Amazon for the search term 'Sales psychology' (September 2021).

Too few marketers realize that taking advantage of social media means they have to start with the advantage of the consumer.

The demand for customer advantage does not just apply to the product being sold, added benefits, or the price point. The marketing and sales process itself has to be perceived as something that is happening *for* them and not *to* them. If not, consumers will simply avoid marketing and make themselves unreachable. They will rely on their trusted sources of information: other consumers with similar needs and values who have experience with the problem they are facing.

This is the reason why peer review services, testimonials, etc. are popping up everywhere. 50% of consumer purchases are influenced by word-of-mouth. For Business-to-Business (B2B) the number is 91%. Half of word-of-mouth marketing occurs online.¹⁹

We have come full circle back to P2P, but a higher level of technology has enabled global transparency and empowered consumers to become

the strongest force in marketing. Technology empowered us to move beyond relationship marketing and into a world where people have the power to collectively promote or shame any brand they want.

Marketing is not just happening at the front end of your business but to a large extent at the back end. If you can make your customers love your brand they will voluntarily do the marketing for you.

I call it P2P 2.0. Customers are now the new marketers and though you still have a role as a marketer as well, your attention should be divided amongst classical marketing disciplines, new conversations, and connectivity-based strategies.