Attention Is More Valuable Than Money or Time

Until recently, information was scarce, and attention was plentiful. If you could inform or entertain a consumer, your information had power. Wars were won with cracked codes and information systems.

When information was scarce and attention was plentiful, traditional marketing made sense. That's why we were all raised with classic schoolmarm marketing principles such as "reach" and "frequency."

But now the opposite is true. Information is plentiful, and attention is scarce. Search engines have turned information into a commodity. At the same time, attention has became more and more limited, and consumers have become overwhelmed with options. Your influence is determined by your ability to get people to take action.

Yet it's not easy to break through and be heard. Every time you communicate, you face three deadly threats.

The Three Deadly Threats to Communication

Some companies have large marketing departments staffed with experienced and talented writers, designers, and strategists. They draw from dream budgets and produce high-quality materials. Yet often even all of those resources aren't enough. Why? What gets in the way of a strong marketing message?

Today, every piece of your communication faces three enemies: distraction, competition, and commoditization. In my book *How the World Sees You*, I define these three deadly threats to all your communications—from team meetings to personal introductions to buying Google AdWords.

These same threats apply to brands:

Distraction: Your audience won't pay attention.

In our chaotic world, our minds and our lives have become so cluttered that we rarely focus on just one thing at any given time.

We've thrown open the doors to the short-attention-span theater, and now the show parades around us at a rate of five thousand marketing messages per day, faster than FedEx, louder than a pop star, bigger than Disney World.

Attention spans are shrinking at a rate inverse to the growing number of distractions. Our brains are becoming trained and rewarded to be distracted. For a brand, the only defense is to get and hold customers' attention by fascinating them.

Competition: Other brands are catching up, and surpassing you.

Most of us grew up believing that, to compete, we need to be better than the competition. We need better skills, better players, better résumés. But what happens when your best is no longer good enough? What happens when that amazing software application you just spent beaucoup bucks developing is blindsided by an even better program? One that's less expensive, to boot?

Better is fragile. It can be trampled in a nanosecond. Attempting to be better puts companies on a hamster wheel, running faster and faster—and in the same direction as everyone else—to keep up. Better is weak.

Different is king. When you can differentiate yourself in the market, you step off the hamster wheel, never to return. You only look back to witness the frenzy your brand is causing in the hamster cage you left behind.

Here's your choice: Spend a lot of time and money in pursuit of *better*. Or find what makes you *different*, and then do it on purpose.

Commoditization: People assume you're just like everyone else in your category, without any distinguishing qualities.

What's your specialty? Hmm, don't have one? You might be becoming a commodity. If that's the case, you're in trouble. You'll have to lower prices, because people won't see any reason to pay