

spices are mixed separately, in two different factories, to minimize the number of people who know the whole recipe. Then the company combines all eleven ingredients at a third location.

Maybe KFC's recipe is more special than what you can buy at your local grocery store, maybe not. But *Mystique* seems to help people think so. From a brand perspective, it's hard to know which is more valuable: the recipe, or the secret.

Stories are often more fascinating messages than facts are. Stories allow others to participate, and to draw their own conclusions. Over time, a group's "tribal knowledge" turns into a mythology, creating an unspoken shorthand for bigger events and stories.

If you want to build mythology within your company, rather than circulate a PowerPoint presentation of data, cultivate legend and lore. As we know from poker, too much obvious information kills *Mystique*.

Spark Curiosity

David Copperfield is a modern-day Houdini, spellbinding audiences with feats such as making the Statue of Liberty disappear into thin air. In one of his most famous tricks, Copperfield floats acrobatically across a stage, suspended in midair, almost daring audience members to disbelieve. And yet the audience members do believe—unless they have read *US Parent* 5354238, which details how the trick is performed.

The magic trick ceases to fascinate once the audience knows how the white rabbit appears from the black hat.

Intriguing people and products make us curious to learn more. When a brand spellbinds us with *Mystique*, we might ask friends about it to hear their experiences, research it online, read product manuals, spend time learning about its history and process, and spend time in the store. If we're deeply fascinated by a brand, we go out of our way to learn insider tips, or travel to a conference where it's featured.

This level of intense speculation doesn't often happen by accident. More likely, it begins with a secret that sparks curiosity.

The Kitchen within a Kitchen

As you walk through the doors of the Beverly Hills restaurant *Crustacean*, it's clear that the establishment is less like a restaurant, and more like a sacred temple. Underneath your feet, gigantic orange koi fish swim beneath glass. To your left, you spot a face in the shadowy tables that may (or may not) be an A-list celebrity. All around you, the atmosphere is thick with *Mystique*.

Yet there is one secret that you'll never know.

Crustacean is famous for one signature dish: the garlic crab. I'd tell you the recipe if I could, but like every other devotee, I have no idea. This recipe is so religiously guarded that the restaurant's founding family built a special "secret kitchen" inside the restaurant's main kitchen.

Yes, a kitchen. Inside the kitchen.

In this sacred space, the founding family members make their famously secret garlic crab. No one but blood relatives of the family are allowed to enter. You can't beg or buy your way inside this kitchen (even if you marry into the family). Outside the kitchen, at *Crustacean*'s coveted tables, the elite crowd is talking about the one thing they can't order on the menu: access.

It's not unusual for a restaurant to fascinate customers with creative cuisine, bubbly waitstaff, or trendy decor. Yet one little slice of mythology can build positive hype, not to mention revenue. The key to *Mystique* isn't always what you *do* offer customers, but rather, what you *don't*.

If you fascinate your audience with *Mystique*, they'll want more information. Reveal that information very carefully, if at all. Show a glimpse without giving away the money shot. When information isn't available, people become curious. Topics that spark our curiosity become discussed, debated, and dissected, often without