

# THE NEW RULES OF INNOVATION IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

by Emmanuel Kuehn

I have got this pet theory of either looking at business through a microscope or a telescope. Before I kick off, let's first define the difference between these two engaging instruments and their usefulness.

A microscope has the power to take an object or policy and to scrutinize parts of the whole close up. It has the power to magnify. A telescope on the hand has the power to bring someone up close, but only something, which is far away and perhaps not visible to the naked human eye. Call this a type of global overview.

Now, let's apply this principle to business professionals. There are two kinds of people: One type enjoys examining minutiae and the small details. The other personality type enjoys looking at much bigger objects or projects from a distance in hopes of drawing the object or project closer for inspection. Both perspectives are valid and indeed, complimentary.

In business the close up snap shot is vital to root out problems. The other perspective relies on a establishing a helicopter point of view before delivering an analysis. Prior to the wave of social media and micro-management of branding and ideas, business ownership were perhaps more concerned or focused on their own organizations than a "global" market and its impact on operations and profitability. Multinationals grew to gigantic proportions across markets and in essence wound up replicating job functions across national or regional markets.

Control was portioned out according to the business practice and specialists were appointed to manage "their" practices in product development, marketing production, logistic, sales finance, IT and so forth.

The end result made the internal organization so complicated that even the senior management could not really control and command, let alone empower people in the decision making process.

This lead to large organizations calling in the McKinseys" of this world to conduct an audit of the organisation and to restructure its activities to be more cost effective and efficient.

These external trouble-shooters would look at the company from the inside by zooming in to more closely examine the details to get a better understanding of the situation. Management consulting exercised in this capacity is certainly the "microscopic" approach to orgainsational management analysis.

Senior management of the organisation would continue to view their firms through the lenses of their hired management consultants. The more complex an organisation, the more difficult it was to understand how it operated with awareness. Complexity clearly demanded closer scrutiny. The only problem here is that if you stare too long at details, you begin to forget the bigger picture. Both market environments and the competition move on whether your firm does or not. This can create an uncomfortable dilemma.

Recent business "history" has shown us what the consequences can be when this happens. Large firms disintegrate, break up or even disappear. The cliché, "too large to fail" comes immediately to mind.

The catalyst to further intensive change has clearly kicked in with the onslaught and continued growth of social media. Today, there is no or little "lag time". Results and changes take place in seconds. Procedures are on hyper-drive and this can also cause further confusion.

Spending too much time organizing and re-organizing a company internally using a microscope creates a huge gap between what the assets the company may have and the reality of the market potential and its requirements.

Since 2000, the market place has drastically changed. You do not need to be a rocket scientist or a Nobel Prize winner in economics to see this. "Mammoth" organizations were so complex that to survive, they were in a word forced to streamline their operations. This was done using the "proverbial" microscope to get deep within the company's structure and operational processes.

Some organizations, clearly suffered and others did manage to become more cost effective, in line with the market requirements. A quick analysis of the automobile industry in the USA will bring a few stirring case studies.

A remedy to these shortsighted strategies was forthcoming and it was when senior management recognized that to "win" an entrepreneurial mindset and action plan was obligatory. React fast, think globally and get a helicopter view of the situation. Here the "telescope" metaphor becomes more poignant.

Examining business organizations today compared to those ten years ago and you will see the forces, which propelled these shifts. Today's business is an interaction of people and companies. I like to think of this as a "web of satellites".

A company no longer acts as if it operated on an island. Inter-connectivity is the key and social networks have provided the fuel to accelerate these changes. Both the firm and its customers appreciate the added value above and below the line. Think of this as innovation in business management. This has become so important that these processes are now instituted within major business schools across the world at the graduate degree levels.

(The above article is Part 1 of a Special Report on the impact of innovation in the workplace.)

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# PLAYING THE GAME

by Emmanuel Kuehn

(The following article is Part 2 in a Special Report on "Innovation In Business")

Innovation in business to an entrepreneur is like a fish in seawater. It is a natural environment. A key risk to small entrepreneurs is when they focus too much on their own organizations.

Most entrepreneurs recognize the importance of vision sharing coupled to a global understanding of the economy on a macro-economic level. It is impossible to deny what others are doing even if you are a trailblazer aka Steve Jobs. He knows through the fire of experience what happens when a firm is too focused on itself, or considers itself as so unique that no one will bother to change to your platform even if it is stimulating and innovative. It is simply unrealistic not be aware of what happens in other competing organizations and on other continents.

New entrepreneurs tend to look at business through a "telescope" as I discussed in my previous article. Like Google Earth, an entrepreneur can zoom in and zoom out depending on the criteria.

Consider that although Google Earth enables viewers to zoom in close to your home with street finder it can never open your front door and highlight your leather club chairs positioned next to the fireplace. Entrepreneurship demands a double view whether in a small or medium sized structure. They have the reflexes to move quickly and adjust policies or products to perceived market changes or forces. This can only be accomplished when you have a "broad" strategic and organizational view.

Some of us hold the idea that large global corporations understand the impact of social media and the ramifications for their business practices. Oddly enough some do and others are still dragging their feet. Some get it like Google and take appropriate action, but even Google can overplay or underplay their hand. For example, the original founders are now back in the drivers seat taking the firm back to its "entrepreneurial" start-up origins by making the firm leaner and more efficient.

Google is in a better than most firms to exercise the microscopic and telescopic points of view regarding management strategy. After all, they are one of the firms, which have successfully shaken business in general to enter a "new" age of doing things.

To say that social media have transformed business practices and communications is an understatement. New media has given business an overview of what happens in global markets as well as the world at large.

It has not been my intention to criticize diverse approaches to running organizations. Rather it has been my desire to encourage managers to put more stress on a telescopic approach to market analysis and organizational management. Business is global in a way it has never been before and the challenges are relentless without end. No longer do we have time to take a "breather". We must consistently stay on top and this means building the right "mix".

In my view, the days of the large corporation are numbered. Organizations will forge alliances with suitable partners and keep their own streamlined and lean. Firms will further specialize and thus focus on their unique assets. Specialists can regroup under an umbrella organisation when they feel that that a "new" type of economy of scale can deliver added clout.

What remains to be seen is what I refer to as the human factor. Will partner players be empowered? How much shared ownership will there be? Right now the game is open. How do you want to play the "game"?

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# THE TRUE MEANING OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

by Emmanuel Kuehn

In the "old days", long before the appearance of Social Media, the only way to contact or connect with people was to meet in person, talk on the telephone, or even to write a letter. Although people still meet and connect in this manner, it can seem a bit "old fashioned" given today's context and new media tools.

Did we lack something or did communications suffer?

It is my sincere belief that we did not. We conducted our affairs the way people had for years, literally with each other in real time. Relationships between people were more concrete and sincere. Why?

In business, it was done starting with a glimpse, a firm handshake, a look and shared conversation. One was in daily contact with prospects and customers. Not by letter, but via direct visits, appointments, and even telephone calls. Whichever way we chose, it was a direct relationship with mutual goals. Of course, there were misunderstandings. People are people. However, it was easier to dismiss misunderstanding and to build a consensus.

Was business easy?

It certainly was easier, when compared with the prevailing habits and changes of today. At that time one probably knew what communication was. In my view, this approach was more "human" and really "social".

Since the explosion of Social Media, communications between firms and individuals is more complex. Although technology allows us to talk via video conferencing to someone on the other side of the world, is it really communications as we understood the concept before?

The context of social interaction has impacted on our knowledge. The principal of networking has moved into another dimension. For example, your average teenager has hundreds of Facebook "friends", whereas before one had really a handful. The "digitalisation" of friendship has altered the concept and bonding between individuals. Real friends can usually be counted on one hand.

Communicating with friends is done today via coded language. It is much easier to say, "I love you" via a SMS or a chat message. Due to unclear communication via SMS or chat, many misunderstandings are tough to solve.

Young people move less because they do not need to go towards each other. Everything comes to them on their computer screen. They spend hours glued to their screen with a smart phone in one hand and the keyboard or joystick in the other.

Today, Social Media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Viadeo, FourSquare, and Google Buzz can be used to communicate the person's actual location and to inform "the world" that you are drinking a Starbucks coffee on a terrace because the sun is shining. People literally flood the web with information that doesn't interest anyone except the people who have nothing better to do than spend hours exercising the dexterity of their fingers on a computer keyboard or smart phone.

Where is the emotional communication between people?

Where is the real exchange and interaction? Virtual communication dominates our social interaction. The end result is a generation "social network" junkies.

In the business world, many people are travelling less in order to cut costs. Meeting clients in this context might seem more efficient, but the human bond is clearly absent. It is so much easier to send business relations an email or SMS.

My fear is that the "human" side of the equation will suffer as a consequence. Extensive Social Media has a function, however is it as effective as we think?

We have become willing "slaves" of a system that actually creates a huge gap between people. The real purpose of Social Media platforms should be to bind people with each other. After all, the human race is by definition, social. As social beings, we aim to exchange and share ideas in order to broaden our understanding and awareness.

What is the point of having so many social network "friends"? Are we just collecting marbles like we did when we were kids? Are we not blind to reality?

Real communications whether in business or socially should be to bond and meet as genuine individuals. To share a mutual goal or project requires contact. Social media should be seen as tools to supplement and foster the original ties not the other way around. The famous introduction and handshake adds a dimension which I feel is now being made redundant. And it will be our loss, if the two are not used in tandem.

We are in a transition period. Evolution does not necessary mean improvement. Within a few decades, we may even see a return to more traditional values and "old fashioned" ways of relationship building. After all, if we take the hottest musical trend of the return to vinyl as a metaphor, anything is possible.

As a human being we owe it to ourselves, colleagues, clients, and even to our children to foster the ties that count in forging a bridge between tools and the sincere interaction which can only come when we look into the eyes of another human being.

What do you think?

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# THE VIRTUAL JUNKIE

by Emmanuel Kuehn

Now, don't get the wrong idea. I am not a Luddite nor do I advocate going back to a time before Edison or living with candlelight. What I do suggest is that we wake up and take stock of where we are going. I have entitled this article - Virtual Junkie - for a reason. You see, in the "old" days junkies were real. They lived their experiences in real time with real consequences. If you took the wrong drugs, you paid the piper. Just ask Thomas de Quincy.

Junkies were traditionally looked down upon by society as a whole. They were seen as escapists looking for a type of utopia stimulated by various plants or chemical agents.

In today's world, there is not much talk about junkies. Drugs and various escapist paths of this type still exist but they are a minority taste. The "new" junkies I am referring to are "virtual". Their addiction is to mobile handsets, iPods, iPads, and any other device, which allows them to stay wired 24/7. Hi-tech has revolutionised our universe. For those born into this era and coming of age to talk of another time is to speak through a time capsule.

People begin to question your sagacity: "What do you mean you do not have a mobile phone?"

Generations before Generation Y had other experiences and has other reference points. Mobile phones and tablets are mini computers. They are light, compact and easy to use. An advert for iPad shows toddlers using the new technology of drag and click without effort and even without instruction. It is intuitive and almost seems genetic.

Amazon for example is experiencing a boom in selling Kindle. Kindle for those you who do not know offers virtual books online. The advantages are clear. You do not need to carry a truck to read books on safari. However, the tactile relationship between the writer, reader and object is lost. Trust me on this folks there really is a relationship. How do you explain this to younger generations who don't really read or just surf? You can't because it is impossible. Are they loosing out on something? I think they are, but that's a subjective issue.

All these new trends suggest drastic shifts in consumer behaviour and our consumption of media and entertainment products. Recently I journeyed to Las Vegas, and what I saw sort of struck me. A majority of the passengers were hooked into something: an e-book, game, or movie. Or in another case, which I saw in the States is the case of the network Four Square. This social network allows you to let your "friends" know where you are and what you are doing in case they want to join you. Every idea and thought is "shared".

What happened to real bonding, I mean speaking and actually being with a live breathing human being? The excuse we don't have time seems so flimsy, don't you think?

What this points to is the nature of the way we reach out touch each other. In the back of my mind, I feel something is missing as I watch people communicate virtually. It seems like what has rapidly become a cliché: How can you have a billion Facebook connections and no real friends?

No matter. When my plane landed, It took us a good 1h30 to reach the Customs desk. Instead of fidgeting everyone consulted or spoke on their phones or handsets. The legal consequences of using handsets before customs is strictly prohibited. Most people ignore the rule. Perhaps soon the law will follow custom and be dispensed with.

The following day I journeyed to a trade fair I had come to see. The same behavioural pattern unfolded. Everyone was wired. There is almost nowhere you can go today and not be hooked in. Although I am as guilty as the next man, I realise our communitarian addiction. The danger is that

there is no longer a demarcation between professional and private life. With this type of invasion of privacy, where do we draw the line?

Is it possible to re-establish a form of equilibrium?

I fear there is no going back. We even share our fetish with our children. Is it any wonder that they become just as addicted as we are?

I guess like with many other "vices" we must learn to exercise constraint and self-control? Is it possible? Do we really want to?

The judgement is out. Time will tell, but the handwriting is on the wall.

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# THE WILD WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

by Emmanuel Kuehn

Like many seasoned professionals, I started working during the 20th century. It seems like yesterday, although in reality it has been 22 years ago and we are now in 2011.

When I started out, client orders were placed via telex and later by fax. The company I worked with had only one PC. Every time we visited a customer or a prospect we would record the information by writing it down and keeping the information in a paper-based file system. When looking for potential customers, we would 'surf' through the yellow pages to find suitable companies.

Our challenge was to get our product "known" on the market. To do so, we incurred expensive advertising costs by booking space in specialized magazines. It was a costly exercise. Companies, who could afford to do so drove their branding campaigns primarily on TV adverts. TV advertising seemed like the best way to build and enhance name brand recognition. It certainly was a concrete way to reach our target market and eventual end-user of the products we offered.

Although this will seem unfathomable to today's younger generations, all the tools we rely on today did not exist such as the Internet, mobile phones, iPads or even social networks. The likes of Google Trends, Facebook, LinkedIn, Viadeo, YouTube, and LinkedIn were something we couldn't have even have imagined. Business and relationship building were done in the "old fashioned" way.

Tools and networks did exist but they were more constrained and tied to the physicality of location. Travel was more important if you planned to do business overseas or outside your home country. Despite your best intentions, doing business outside home markets was more constrained. However, despite these conditions, we worked hard and did the best we could do given the context and conditions of the time.

The difference between what we did and our competitors was creativity. Creativity is equally as important today, although it can be leveraged differently.

The concept of walking around and doing business from a laptop or mobile phone was worthy of science fiction. The idea that we would build "relationships" with people from around we would never physically meet was unthinkable. Were we really missing something?

## 2011 Is The Time For Forward Thinking

The 21st century has revolutionised the work environment. Electronic tools make the "old" environment appear like the Stone Age to the youth of today who have never known anything else. On a positive level, we have learned never to take anything for granted in a global economy, which is in a constant state of flux and functions on the dynamics of change now more than ever.

Social Networking has become a cornerstone of the marketing process. Even just two years ago most corporations did not have a Facebook profile. Today, this is unthinkable. Facebook has become a necessary and dynamic tool to interface with clients and end-users in a direct and almost personalised manner. The best sites are constantly updated and show a strong interaction and engagement.

A website has become the the firm's window on the world and to the world. It exhibits what the company does, stands for, and highlights products and or services, which are on offer to potential clients. Despite the fact that these sites are designed for broad constituencies, they are geared to professionals. If you think of the site as a type of "catalog" then you are aware that a website must be

updated to be relevant to an audience who are constantly surfing and comparing your site with others online.

If you are a professional in Marketing & Advertising, these are indeed exciting times. The market and its communication channels are constantly changing and favour those people who are innovative, creative and dynamic. To capture attention, communications must engage the audience. The logistics chain of wholesaler, retailer and customer should be a seamless flow.

Retailers know to push sales that they must be in touch with the end-user. The constant challenge for manufacturers and producers is to know and anticipate the needs of their customers, which brings me to the real theme of this text: the impact of social media.

### The Impact Of Social Media

Social Media is the opportunity for companies to really get in touch with the people buying and using their products on a regular basis. Although it is expensive to advertise on TV and magazines, traditional promotions and PR/Marketing campaigns can harness the usual tools. However, for a company willing to seize the initiative, it costs far less to create a profile on Facebook and post corporate videos on YouTube.

The Social Media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and others can generate and channel opportunities by bringing the customer into the actual campaign. Ultimately the best "advertisement" is to read the testimonials of satisfied clients.

Social Media should be more than just a "shop window". It is seen as an interactive "meeting place" where people discuss, share ideas, and post suggestions. Marketing professionals gather the information, weigh the possibilities, and can draw on the data collected to enhance or change products and services currently being offered. The reaction time is immediate and you need not wait to implement changes.

Because Social Media has the air of spontaneity, it appears easy to manipulate and exercise. You would be quite wrong if you draw this assumption. In reality, it requires meticulous work and research. The communications strategy you seek to employ should be based on analytics.

My counsel to Corporates is to thoroughly think through the following points:

- 1) Website: use the web as a company catalog. However, if you want the firm to really capture attention, then the firm must also engage the potential client. Make the website more than a "shell".
- 2) Blogs: for blogs to work, they need to be updated consistently and in a style to which the reader and client can relate to and respond to. If communications centre on products, give the articles variability. If you constantly repeat the same thing or the articles come across as just a sales pitch, the customer will feel "turned off".
- 3) LinkedIn: LinkedIn is the leading professionals social network. Professionals speaking to professionals look for a different target message and have different expectations than the general public. You can use this network to recruit and expand the professional network of your organisation.
- 4) Twitter: This network is one of the least understood and utilised channels to use effectively. According to recent reports over 30m tweets are sent out across the network per day. The goal is to generate interest in a space of just 140 characters. Although you can promote and advertise, the best use of twitter is to drive your strategy to the next level. There must be something to back up the "tweet" if you really want someone to follow you.

Facebook: The traditional use of this social media has outgrown its original intentions and is now harnessed by the corporate world. Give your audience a reason to visit this channel. Contests and games have been used by some. Others use it to deliver corporate information. The best way to use Facebook is to create an interactive community, which is responsive to need and questions.

YouTube: Videos are an excellent means to show the engagement of your firm in its field of expertise. Creating a "corporate media channel" requires a budget and coherent strategy. This should not be used unless the videos are professionally executed otherwise despite your best intentions, the firm will look ridiculous.

Please Note: Although there are many social media to pick and use, your firm must have a consistent and well thought out marketing strategy. The last thing you want is for social media to backfire on your intentions.

One of the things you should also take into consideration is not just what you or your experts say online but what the community says about what you do online. By generating the "right" feedback, you will give your firm the voice and practice of authenticity online. In an Internet driven environment, this is crucial not just in theory but practice.

If you feel uncomfortable

Oddly enough, there are many people who are still uncomfortable with social media. There are many experts and firms who specialise in this domain. Contact one of your choice, and talk through your objectives. You can no longer afford not to use this media.

When considering the future know there are infinite opportunities for companies that can launch great marketing campaigns online with limited financial resources. The only drawback is that many firms will also try to do this. Just remember that those firms who succeed will be creative and audacious. This is the way to separate your firm from the crowd.

Social media is a great way to advertise. Use the tools judiciously and not as a "trash" bin.

Ultimately, human beings can only absorb so much information. With sensory overload, people quickly block out any information stream, which does not capture their immediate attention. Many people "surf" the web ceaselessly. Your job is to get them to remain on your site with intent to purchase or get involved.

The Challenge Of Now

Today's challenge for seasoned players is not to worry about what "we" did before the Internet and social media have reshaped our business environment. It is to evaluate the new tools and shape the message delivery to what people expect today from the Internet and the positioning and buying of products online and off line. By doing so, your use of social media will be an asset. Not to engage will put your firm's activities at risk, and you will no longer be able to meet the competitive challenges as the global economy continues to mutate.

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# THE DIGITAL DNA OF SOCIAL MEDIA- Are Social Media platforms really as "social" as we believe them to be?

by Emmanuel Kuehn

A majority of articles related to Social Media can seem quite eloquent, particularly when they address issues concerned with promoting our businesses or when we are looking for employment. How many times have you heard or read that Social Media is the "real" revolution of this century?

I too agree with the above statement, and even consciously coach many CEOs and the members of their organisations on the most effective strategies to follow to "get out" their messages. All social media and networking platforms have rules, etiquette, and protocol. To transgress the rules will leave a bad impression and could even damage your CRM and/ or corporate brand.

Despite my positive view of these media channels and their impact, I do hold reservations. Let me take a few moments of your time to explain.

The first concerns the "Wild West" atmosphere and the relatively recent explosion of Social Media. The Internet literally can give anyone willing to spend the time a platform to voice his or her opinion or expertise online. While some of us are lessening the impact of our "carbon" footprint many have already left a deep "web footprint".

A web footprint comprises the posting of CVs, shared personal photographs, personal life stories some mundane others more dramatic, and even their credit card details when making purchases online. You name it, and there is a platform for shared views. It is as if we feel a "social" need to express our identity to verify that we exist.

I can already here some in the audience say, "Get with it! Everyone uses the Internet today whether SMS and email. This is the technology and innovation of our time. Use it or be left behind." Although this is true, caution must be exercised when concerning the transmission of sensitive data so it is not pirated or used for criminal purposes.

Oddly enough although we recognise these facts, there are many people still naïve enough to believe that the Internet and social networks are harmless. What you put up online can come back to haunt you. Do you remember the case of one gentleman, who had posted certain details online via Facebook only to later discover that the information was damaging his professional "brand"?

It took this fellow 3 years to get Facebook to agree to delete his account after an intense and fierce legal battle. When you delete online information, there is no guarantee that it is really deleted. Even if you control the information you post online this does not stop malicious parties for trying to destroy your reputation.

Regarding the information we sow on the web is one thing, but what someone else might sow for us is another. How many people post pictures of themselves and friends online and trade in gossip? The issue appears quite common and harmless since this is the "favoured" way most people communicate today in both professional and non-professional contexts.

This is where problems begin. No one can control what friends write about us.

What about your enemies?

The classic example involves the famous "lost weekend" in Barcelona or a recent party in which we may have relaxed a bit more than usual. Friends inevitably comment on the photos and leave their witticisms. You can always delete unflattering comments made on your Facebook account, but not the bits posted on other accounts. You can see the dilemma.

People who are jealous of you or do not like you to be polite, can really do you a great deal of harm. For example in one of the networks to which I participate, a man discovered that his partner had been unfaithful. Besotted with rage, he decided to take revenge and wrote a long story about his wife and her private life. Since his motive was to inflict pain, he made the details poignant and posted the article across the web on key blogs. Everyone who knew these people read the article. The woman involved suffered a severe depression as a result as well as losing her professional credibility. She had become "damaged" goods in the eyes of many. I won't bore you with the ethical ramifications of taking such action, but it is quite clear of the impact and negative results generated.

In my view, the above case represents a form of "digital criminality" against someone. Corporations can also suffer similar fates from disgruntled and frustrated employees. No firm wants to see private and sensitive information concerning their activities disclosed to a broad public without board consent. How can we avoid this?

There is a real issue of ethics and integrity. Although the web is open to all, and we have the freedom of written expression, we also should exercise discretion in accordance to rules. You wouldn't yell "fire" in a crowded theatre? The Internet equivalent would have similar repercussions.

Our digital DNA online must be controlled. If we do not exercise discretion, others will do this for us or governments will find a way to limit our freedoms with legal regulations and consequences for abuse. Currently, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others have no rules and thus, the door is wide open for abuse and slander.

A key question to consider: How private is our life if we make personal information available to a wide public online?

Facebook for example, has come under increased criticism for selling our "details" to various companies. Even Google shows the most minute information concerning where we live via their Google maps. Every dwelling on a street can be gleaned including passageways and gardens. Therefore, you must recognise that anything you put online is no longer private. It is now in the public domain.

The digital universe has transformed our world and the way we interpret and gather information. Social Media has played a key and pivotal role in this transformation. Either current or future employers will use the social media to gain access to your profile and any other information you have posted about yourself online. The only way to maintain any privacy is through direct control and communications management. You must learn how to protect your "personal" as well as your "professional" brand. Otherwise, be prepared for "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly". Risk management control should be fundamental to your social media use.

As a conscientious professional, I handle my own communications management. I do use and approve of controlled social media use. My private life however, is private. So should yours be. The DNA rules of social media use are unwritten. The rules apply to the young and unwary as well as to the seasoned professional. Act in good faith. Filter the information you use, post, and comment. Ethics and integrity do matter. Although you may not be able to prevent what some else may write at least you can be vigilant on what you write and post online.

Do not accidentally shoot yourself in the foot. So, what should you do?

First, take the time to be consistent. Make sure that your profile on Facebook or the tweets you send do not damage your professional "brand" on LinkedIn. As a coach, my advice to CEOs and Marketing Managers is that the best communication strategy for using Social Media starts with your self. Forget the "lost weekend" photo shoots.

Recently in the Netherlands, some high-profiled people have lost their functions due to casual racist remarks posted on Twitter. Remember, there are professional and law enforcement people "patrolling" the web. Take good care of your "web" footprint

There is a French proverb, which states: "Vivre heureux, vivre caché".

Considering today's discussion, I will leave you with one more idea to contemplate:

Are Social Media platforms really as "social" as we believe them to be?

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# THE BUYING BEHAVIOUR TRIANGLE THEORY; - Do you buy with your BRAIN or with your HEART?

by Emmanuel Kuehn

Consumers are the same all over the world!

You might disagree with this statement, and argue that a Chinese consumer is totally different from an English one. However, consumers are human beings, regardless of their country of origin. In fact, outside of skin colour, language, and culture, there is absolutely no difference when it comes to consumer behaviour.

Let's begin by defining what are the keystones involved in the purchase process: the brain (the rational aspect), the heart (the emotional aspect), and the wallet (the financial aspect).

The brain asks: "Do I need that product?"

The heart asks: "Do I like that product?"

The wallet asks: "Can I afford to pay for that product, and is it worth the money?"

Those 3 components can be displayed in a form of a triangle entitled, "The Buying Triangle". At the top of an isosceles triangle is the brain. At the base on the left is the "wallet", and on the right is situated the heart.

So why is the statement "consumers are the same all over the world", true?

Look closely. They all have a brain, a heart and a wallet, in some form. What differentiates one consumer from another is the way these 3 key elements - brain, heart & wallet - interact with each other. Despite the variations, all three elements are clearly in play during the decision to purchase any product or service.

Traditionally, the brain operates like a control panel constantly evaluating, assessing situations, and behaviour. The mind and brain have been designed for this function. Nonetheless, we could argue that by thinking too much, some people struggle to make a decision. The situation becomes more complicated when other elements such as emotions (heart) and finances (wallet) are involved in the evaluation process.

The marketing "gurus" who build advertising campaigns try to play and manipulate these key elements. What counts most for strategists is to trigger the emotional side of each consumer's response nature. So, if you find yourself liking something, don't be surprised to find that your brain is struggling to convince your heart not to buy the product.

Price is also a key factor in the "struggle" or purchase decision. The price point needs to be "right" to get the consumer to commit.

Consumer durables are one thing. Now what happens when we consider luxury goods?

Clearly, the emotional element plays a significant role in the decision to buy. The purchase decision is based on the delivered emotional perception and value of the product. Rationally, if you need to buy a

car, one car is as good as another in theory. Providing that the car is operational, any car will take you from place to place. Now, let's throw caution to the wind. What about acquiring the new Aston Martin Vanquish?

### Emotional Decisions

People shell out a bundle for a big car splurge when it appeals to their passions and emotions. Certain car manufacturers build and design these cars with exactly this purpose in mind. A car becomes more than a vehicle for transport. It morphs into a dream machine of mechanized form of fantasy.

Emotion, sex appeal, and status definitely influence these type of high-touch purchase decisions. Emotional decisions are also predicated on notions of self-worth, self-identity, and reward and recognition.

### IT Toys, Gizmos, & Laptops

Apple is another good example of a successful marketing machine. They do not just sell cutting edge products with an innovative design. They are providing us with visual and tactile stimulation. What is this? Another set finely honed emotional responses. The marketing strategists for Apple know how to play our emotions. They also know the utility of their products and when the messages are properly conveyed, they are able to generate "must have" purchase responses.

Are Mac products worth the investment? I think they are and so do many others. I am always impressed by the way they turn "want and desire" into "need".

### The Impact Of Credit

The banking sector is another example of how marketing can shape the way we decide on financial services. In the "old" days, people put their savings into a checking and savings account to pay their bills and keep their money safe.

Credit however, represents big profits for the banking industry and no more so than the use of credit and bankcards. "Plastic Money" gives us the illusion that the money is not real and makes us feel that we have the power to spend more than we have. Most people today, do not settle their payments with cash. Previously, you could picture someone with a wallet full of bank notes. With each purchase the notes shrink and you are filled with a sense of "loss". Credit cards give you a different sensation. It is easier to spend money because it has become more imaginary in your mind.

Let's be honest, if we had to buy only with our brain and a wallet, we probably would buy and consume a lot less. Ultimately, we do not need very much to live and survive. Human nature however is always looking to acquire what it does not possess. More is never enough, and so to fill this emotional gap, we look to buy and consume more.

### Price Tag Positioning

In retail outlets the position of the price tag in either the sleeve or clipped inside the garment, makes the consumer look for the "price". Examine now the engaged action. You have held the item in your hands. You have caressed the cashmere, and in your mind, the jumper is now part of your collection. Mentally you have bought the item before actual payment has been made.

Were the price up front and visible, would you react the same way? Perhaps? Or perhaps you would be more reflective on your purchase decision.

The only products with price tags at the front are bargains. The price tag is now used as a trigger to invite people to buy without considering need. "Bargains" are usually strategically placed at the entrance, acting as a magnet. Think of your local supermarket. Product placement is driven to get people to react quickly without thought and consideration. Even children are targeted with the positioning of sweets in front of the cashier. Temptation has been built into the retail experience.

## The Evolution In Consumer Behaviour

Historically since World War II, Western economies have experienced a tsunami of products. Durability was once a hallmark before planned obsolescence became part of the business model. Remember, business is in business to sell. This means every time something is new, it is portrayed as better, more efficient, or more glamorous. You can quickly appreciate the draw of the "emotional" nature and power of effective advertising and marketing.

What do we do?

As committed consumers we buy more and more◀

Market shares in Western Europe are saturated and hard to increase. The credit crunch has also dampened spending.

So emerging markets such as Eastern Europe, China and India are the new targets to pick up the slack. They represent massive potential economic growth. These "new" consumers wish to be like their Western counterparts in terms of style and status. Their emotional side is open to be triggered and it works! They are buying more and more. Increased revenues and DPI have made this possible.

In the West, we have been told that unlimited credit was fine until the recent crisis. Emotionally we liked this proposition. No wonder why we have come to a situation where people could not afford to reimburse their debts. Inherent wisdom tells us to put the triangle back into balance. Finding the "right" compromise is necessary for emotional and financial stability.

Next time you find yourself in the midst of a buying scenario, pay attention to the complex triangle process. The next time you hesitate buying something, think first before you react.

The challenge is even bigger when couples buy products together. Most of the time, the man and the woman are not tuned to the same frequency. The sales person has to be smart enough to stimulate the party who hesitates.

So who's going to be the winner the next time you buy something?

Your brain or your heart?

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***Business Is A Matter Of People***  
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# BEHIND THE MASK

by Emmanuel Kuehn

We think we know the people with whom we live or work. However, does one really know the person or do we just see a "mask"?

Behind the mask hides the true person whom we think we know. I would like to take the time today to discuss the question of "masks", for the simple reason that all of us are complex human beings and have multiple personas.

The classic example is every Monday morning we put on our professional mask for work and execute our job functions according to the position we play. When we return home at the end of the day we change our roles. For some of us it is the role of father or mother. For others it is the role of friend or companion.

In Italy, the theatre is very expressive and perhaps best defined by the masks used in the "Comedia dell'Arte". I recognise that we do not see ourselves wearing funny masks like in the theatre. However, because of the demands of our lives and the multiple roles we play intentionally and unintentionally, we act and behave differently with different people and in different contexts. It is this concept I refer to when I use the metaphor of the "mask".

Trying to discover ourselves as well as the others we can come into contact with can be a challenging process. Sometimes we think we know the person we are dealing with and in fact we do not. Other times we can know someone more than we think we should. Like chameleons, we can glide in and out of our various roles with ease and even unconsciously. To further complicate this environment we can add the spice and variety of distinctive cultural factors, which have conditioned our behaviour. If Europe for example, we have many distinct cultures and countries where people live side by side and can be and are quite different from one another. For example, the people in The Netherlands although living not far from the French in Western Europe are very different from one another.

Notice, I did not state better or worse. Just different. Cliché can also affect the way we deal with one another. The French can be seen as hot-blooded and emotional. The Dutch can be seen as cool, controlled, and cerebral. Even though, I recognize that this is a type of cliché, it is also my experience. Because my own background is a composite of both cultures, I have come to see more than what lies behind the facades.

I have found the French "easier" to get to know because they are more expressive. The Dutch on the other hand tend to be more reserved. They almost fear their emotions and are more comfortable behind a "mask". For example, it is not uncommon to see the current French President, Nicolas Sarkozy lose his cool even at high profile events. His exuberance boils over and he can become quite emotional in public. In contrast, the Dutch Prime Minister or Queen come across as "cool" as a cucumber. Inside, they might be astir but their public person will not permit them to show anger even to journalists. Mastery of emotions can be a benefit particularly in trade and diplomacy. Living both cultures at a deep level has given me this viewpoint.

As a dual national, I left France 20 years ago when I moved to the Netherlands.

It took me some time to study and understand the distinctions in the temperament and behaviour of these two national cultural groups. My investigation into the temperament and behaviour of people is not academic. It has been done simply to better understand myself as well as others. Of course, I have not limited my "field work" to just these two groups. It also incorporates every culture I have had the pleasure to visit and work with around the world.

"On the ground", I learned not to be judgmental but rather to observe and respect our cultural and behavioural differences. My personal "wealth" is to have learned how to read people and the ability to

see their "true" face behind their masks.

I must confess that I have made mistake. After all, we are human beings and not computers!

My research, and I like to believe, my understanding has enabled me today to advise leaders of corporations. Business leaders know that if they wish to manage across borders, negotiate and export that direct communications and interaction is essential. Nobody sets out intentionally to make a "faux pas". Let us remember, that people make business with people.

The recent arrival of social media platforms such as Facebook is a true social and Cultural Revolution. People who traditionally hid behind masks seem to let their "hair down" and share intimate details of their lives with others who they will never really meet and do not really know. In my view, this represents a major social shift. This is quite different with another medium such as LinkedIn. Here people still carry their masks. You can see this in the way they exhibit their professional profiles. There must be something wrong with that!

Facebook uses the word 'FACE' and not 'MASK'. Facebook makes it possible for people to be discovered by others without wearing a mask. Well done Mr. Zuckerberg!

Indeed, when showing one's face, privacy is totally gone. However, the potential danger is that, once you reveal your true face, it is very difficult to put on your mask with credibility.

With social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, be conscious of the information, which you put online. The information you make public will remain engraved on the Internet like a digital fingerprint, and it is almost impossible to erase! Just like companies develop a social media strategy, each one of us, as individuals, should also think strategically on the good and 'safe' manner to use social media. Social media platforms are extraordinary tools but should be used with caution.

Always keep in mind that the proverbial 'Big Brother Is Watching You'. Given the opportunity, "he" can see your persona behind your mask.

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# THE POWER OF READING PEOPLE - We all read books! Do we know how to read people?

by Emmanuel Kuehn

The majority of us has been to school and are literate. From our youth we have been inculcated with the tools to read, write and the fundamentals of sound grammar. Being taught to read and write does not mean we understand what we have read nor does it imply that we have digested the material. Information in our societies is for the most part transmitted via one form or another in a written format.

At university or business school, we are given the tools to manage and interrupt this information in a coherent and analytical manner. When I contemplate how many books I did read about management, marketing, strategy, and finance my head begins to spin. The problem with "theory" is that it remains theory until it becomes a "practice".

I am not downplaying the importance of reading nor research, which feeds this industry. Quiet the contrary. It is elemental and fundamental to building a knowledge base. However, it is just a base.

Criticism of MBAs grads is a favourite among the press over the last 10 years, One of the principal reasons behind the pasting of "young" grads from business school is their tendency to wear their new knowledge on their sleeves. Young grads are eager to prove themselves and deliver. However, some of their attempts at making their way in the world come across as misguided arrogance.

The rough and tumble of the real business world calls for a quick adjustment. This is when we realise that there is a huge gap between theory and practice. Indeed, textbooks are there to "explain" in academic and technical terms the complicated business models and theory, which can impact or shape actual practice. Unfortunately, many of those scholars. who write these tomes have never worked in the real world by practicing the aspects of business they write so keenly on.

The plunge into real life was a challenge when I first started out, and I am quite sure that this challenge remains the same for new grads even if the economic context is different today than when I graduated. It goes without saying that the "best" school we can attend is the ongoing school of daily business life as it applies to our professional activities. The sooner young grads understand this concept the better.

You might get the stuffing beat out of you in the process, but you will develop genuine knowledge as well as a dose of humility. Depending on the individual, the transformation from student to practitioner can be months or years before someone becomes aware of the process.

The "missing link" between theory and practice comes from observing more seasoned players and/or mentorship, if we are lucky to stumble upon someone who recognises our full potential.

Do you remember your first business meeting or presentation?

In my own case, it did not take me long to realise that the theories I had learned needed to be adapted. For example, when I was at my first meeting with a buyer I could see that inside he was laughing at me. Not in a malicious way, you understand. However, in a way that any seasoned pro looks at a "greenhorn". Of course, at the time, I found the situation embarrassing and distinctly unpleasant. We both knew that we were not speaking the same "language". He expected to be addressing a "business" professional, and he got stuck with me.

The cat comes out of the bag when you are asked questions, you cannot respond to with authority. The "authority" must demonstrate genuine understanding and professional reflexes not book-based theories. During the questions, I squirmed and tried my best, but clearly it was inadequate. I was made to feel this, which didn't please my ego but was a tremendous and valuable lesson in hindsight.

Why didn't anyone at business school explain to me the value and importance of people was a mystery to myself? Clearly, understanding people and the way they think and react is crucial to any business engagement.

As time went on and I matured, I saw that not only did people matter most, but also that each individual was unique and different in their approach. Even if you are selling the same product your pitch needs to be adapted to your audience. Ultimately, you learn to think and respond "on your feet" because although there might be an aggregate response or strategy, reading your counterpart and making the bond will determine whether the sale is clinched.

Don't get me wrong. I do not want to mislead or dissuade our younger readership. Quite the contrary. I am a full believer in higher education and yes, evening business education. However, I would like to stress the importance of internships, practice, and the leverage of maturity, which comes only with practice. Just to demonstrate this point, let me mention that although I have 20 odd years experience at my back that I am still learning and the process is continuous.

My advice is to stay open, be willing to change, and to adapt yourself wherever you find yourself planted. Business is not a science. It is an ongoing and never ending stream of change. Adapt to these changes in line with your personality and uniqueness and you will be able to stand up to any challenge. Understand your own nature and self and you will stand out not through arrogance but through accomplishment.

One way to do this is to make your self-adept at reading and understanding the tenants of human behaviour. Human beings are not "machines". They have feelings and emotions. Learn to read body language without becoming judgemental. Verbal communication skills are great. However, non-verbal body language is also revealing.

The word "yes" is not the same in every culture. Understanding this context can show you volumes in seeing the differences between the way Asians and Europeans do business.

In my view, learning to read people is one of the most important aspects of doing business. The only school in which you can master these techniques is in the field.

Here are some elemental keys, which you should experiment with if you do not already do so:

- Do not be judgemental
- Scan the people you will be working with or engaging within the first 5 minutes of your encounter. This time is referred to as "make or break moment" of the business meeting.
- Fine-tune your business antennae to the same "frequency"
- Listen more and talk less
- Observe the details and make mental notes
- Learn to read the body language (non-verbal) of people in cross- cultural contexts where there are distinct differences
- Learn that "Yes" can also mean "No"
- Learn to decode what people say from what they don't say
- Show empathy

- Deconstruct the rational from the emotional side of the person you are with

In business, what people say is import, but what people don't say is even more important. Reading people implies using your senses in order to get a complete picture.

Most of us do not use our senses when doing business. The most common response is to give an answer to a specific response or question. This is just the starting point.

Start with firm a handshake. This is the first tactile impression we get from someone. Do not underestimate the importance of this first handshake. The "5 golden minutes" are crucial to define who is who. First perceptions count.

By being more conscious and open to your business partner, you'll be able to better understand what's in his or her mind. By learning to better read people, you'll be better positioned to understand the person behind the mask. Reading people is not only done with one's eyes but with all the senses.

This is our common challenge. To do better business, we should spend more time reading people. That's what business is all about!

Enjoy the reading!!

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# SILENT IS GOLDEN

by Emmanuel Kuehn

In business, people tend to talk a lot! That's obvious as it would be difficult to do business without words.

A sales person willing to sell a product/service will try to convince the buyer. He/she normally will be the one talking a lot and the buyer will be the one listening a lot. That's how business works in this world.

The issue there is that when the sales person talks, he/she is focused on what to be said. The buyer will be listening (sometimes not◀) and will be thinking (sometimes not...) And as sales people like to talk, they hardly take time to listen and thus to think.

But after all, how much information can a sales person collect when talking too much. The clue is to let the buyer talk more. That could be a challenge as buyers are smart enough (not always◀) to keep information for themselves. So once the sales person really understands that business is not all about the product to sell but also, and mainly, about the buyer's expectations, there will be less talk on his/her side and more thoughts.

Have you experienced when talking to someone who asks a question without granting you the time to answer to it as he/she goes on with talking. How frustrating is that!

The good thing is that you have got time enough to think that the person you are talking to is not respectful and does not really care about what you have to say.

In general, it is important to focus on what others have to say. The more a sales person will listen to the buyer, the more he/she will have time to think. From those thoughts may come the answer to some questions he/she had before the meeting. It is all about taking time to discover the buyer's need and expectations.

As a young driven salesman, I was the one who talked. I always had a lot to say about the product, the company, the pricing, the market, the competition, you name it I thought I was a good salesman. Sure I booked successes but what I did not realize that I missed many opportunities to sell. That occurred when facing an experienced buyer.

They were the ones wise enough to let me talk. And I did!!

So, for the ones who tend to use their mouth more than their brain try to talk less and you will think more. When asking a question to someone, just ask it and then shut up! Allow the other person to answer you. He too has the right to talk as well.

Wishing you to do business a wise way!

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# INTUITION IS THE ULTIMATE NAVIGATION SYSTEM

by Emmanuel Kuehn

We are in the midst of the European summer holiday season, and August is when the most people take to the road. Given the state of highway infrastructure, driving is easy, roads well maintained and convenient. Unless you are going to a major tourist centre most of the interesting holiday locations are off the beaten path and require car transport.

When I grew up, it was more common to travel with a glove compartment full of Michelin maps. Today, travel has been drastically changed by technology and the use of "SatNav" (Satellite Navigation). This system is easy to use once properly installed. Human beings have taken to this technological aide like bream to seawater. Why is it that we place so much trust in electronic devices?

The problem with this relationship is our shift to dependency. Blind trust robs us of our freedom to make our own decisions or other choices. Putting our trust in high technology sounds logical, and so most of us succumb.

In my view, over the last decade, we have become "dumb". We place too much trust in electronic devices. For example, recently, a woman on holiday vacationing in France called her travel assistance hotline after getting lost following the posted directions on SatNav. I know this sounds incredulous, but it is a true story.

The humour in the drama to me is self-evident. We have abrogated our power to make decisions. It almost seems that we have lost our instinct to know when something is right. Have we mislaid our instinct with the neglected roadmaps?

It seems we as though we have.

Let's talk about intuition. When was the last time you used your intuition and felt comfortable doing so?

Knowing how to use and rely on intuition takes years of practice. It is as it were our natural internal guidance system. When it functions, it rarely let's us down. The more we use it allows us to build a reflex response to a multitude of issues. It is an excellent tool in the quiver of decision makers.

What I find peculiar is that many people are afraid of their own inner voice. Bad decisions lead people not to listen to their inner voice, and this failure cuts them off from the "universal intelligence" that can guide us if we are open and if we listen.

To follow the right path, requires directions.

Similarly to the "Tom-Tom", intuition guides us back on the right track. This happens even at the unconscious level.

The challenge for all of us is to learn how to trust our internal voice, which guides us. Why should we trust a "Tom-Tom" and not our own inner feelings?

In business, the most successful professionals are those leaders, who have come to rely on their intuition in the decision making process. Only bean counters rely just on the statistical data. A second benefit to harnessing your intuition in business and personal life is the power to exercise your judgment with a stroke of self-confidence.

Remember tools are just tools. It is how the tools are used, which makes the difference. I don't counsel

abstinence in the use of tools, quite the contrary. Just understand that they are aids not solutions to the proper use of judgment. If you follow this advice, you will arrive at your destination and your intuition will blossom.

Have a great journey on the path of your own choosing.

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# WALKING THE PATH

by Emmanuel Kuehn

Life on earth demands that we all follow a path. The adventure begins from the day we are born and lasts until the day we shed our physical form. We do not know the length and nature of journey. This is the mystery and challenge life offers each of us. What we have in common is that each of us must walk our own path despite what we might share with others. Regardless of our culture, social background, profession or religion, we are all pilgrims on a path of our own choosing.

Although our paths are unique, they are not a series of empty spaces between the start and the final destination. What I mean is that each of one us must find a sense of purpose to give meaning to our journey. Simply put, life would have no purpose if we did not have goals to achieve or a sense of a "mission".

For example, if someone plans to walk from The Netherlands to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, on what is called "El Camino", they have a purpose. Although there is a distinct destination, what is of major importance is what we see and learn on the journey.

Ultimately, we want to arrive safely at our destination with the satisfaction of completing this "pilgrimage". However beneath the obvious, there are usually issues we want to work out on the way. For some, it is the pleasure to meet and discuss spiritual topics with like-minded people. For others, it represents an endurance test to see how we can overcome physical discomfort. Then of course, there is the point of learning about our self. Call it, coming to grips with what makes us tick and who we really are.

One person I know has walked "El Camino" three times within a short period of time. What's the point doing this, you might add? Even I asked him this question. His answer was that on each journey, he set himself different targets.

Since we are all walking on some "path" shouldn't we be setting milestones to reach and objectives to achieve? Have we really thought this through? One problem I have encountered is that I see many people who "walk" with absolutely no sense of purpose, target or proverbial compass. What is worse is that they do not prepare and think that the journey will take care of its self.

I am not suggesting that you plan out every minute detail of what you will do, but you do need a road map and strategic plan of some sort otherwise you will get good and lost.

Do you like walking about disoriented like in a fog?

The problem with being disoriented is that you have the illusion that you are going somewhere. In reality you just walk in circles. This is not strategic planning; it is the worst form of self delusion and prove dangerous to your self as well as others. Think about it.

My advice is to plan in advance where you want to go, and then to take the necessary steps and plan for your journey. Planning is crucial. You won't just march off to Mont Blanc would you? Of course not, you agree this method of travel would be foolhardy. The same is true in both professional and personal development. Mental and physical agility are required. So are the right tools and equipment.

Take the case of airline pilots. To be an airline pilot requires serious training and a through knowledge of this field of endeavour. Clearly, we do not just "take off". There are rules, regulations, safety precautions, and schedules. The journey of life also requires a schedule even if you make changes in your travel plans along the way. Change is fine as long as it is well managed.

Finally, I think it is important to mention that although our path is our own, we can walk part of the journey with others. People make our journeys exciting and provocative learning experiences. They can also provide comfort and support along the way. Our travel companions can also change and be changed by the journey. Above all, see this adventure as a stimulating learning experience, and you will discover the meaning of life.

**We all are pilgrims on the path of life. Our journey is not about the final destination but about the road leading to it!**

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# SMILE AND THE WHOLE WORLD SMILES WITH YOU

by Emmanuel Kuehn

You have probably heard people saying that communication is all about action/reaction. When you look at somebody who is also laughing, you tend to laugh as well. Laughter is communications beyond language. The power of this type of communications defies logic, but it is so. Words can sometimes be superfluous.

People in business by definition tend to be primordially goal focused. When visiting customers, they concentrate on their sales targets rather than an emotive form of interaction. Although there is much to said about a "rational" tact, their emotional and intuitive sides get shunted aside so that there is no bond. I believe that this approach to business is a shame.

You may not perceive your client or colleague as a person with both thinking and emotional qualities, but they are. Both sides to the "relationship" are necessary to clinch any deal or beneficial understanding. If you don't engage, you risk underestimating the person's ability to "read" the situation. A misreading on your part could undermine an opportunity beneficial to you and your client.

Remember the key to sales is the first step, which is the "5 golden minutes". I have addressed this issue in previous posts. It is worth taking the time to establish a relationship with anyone with whom you come into contact. From my perspective and experience, I believe that it is the most important step of the entire sales process.

A cardinal mistake is to think that a deal is in the "bag". Emotional relationship building is fundamental. Why blame your "client" if your product is not sold?

With the right approach, you hold the reins to guide your meeting to a positive end and closure.

Let's examine one of the most common human responses. The act of "smiling". Smiling doesn't infer that you are silly or senile. It has a great power to transform any situation providing it is applied in the context of your environment. Every one reacts to human warmth. A "smile" can be worth a thousand words.

No need to follow any expensive sales trainings to practice this technique. No need to implement complex theories either. The business of forging workable relationships is not rocket science.

Do you find it that difficult to smile at someone?

For some of us who are hidebound this might be so. In principle however, it should not be. We smile regularly with friends and family. It is effortless. Why not in doing business?

The main reason could be that business people feel that business should be done in a serious way. The term "serious" should not be misread. I agree that business is not a place of entertainment like a circus.

Nonetheless, a dose of humor applied in the right manner allows for complicity and understanding. If humor is misused, it can clearly backfire. Don't be afraid of your emotions, but use them to a positive effect. Channel your personality do not stymie it. You can be serious and still show that you are human.

Is it possible to smile and at the same time being serious?

I have put this principle to work for years with positive results. So can you. Business can give much satisfaction when executed in a relaxed atmosphere. Why make the scenario more complex than it might already be?

Throughout my career, I have experienced the impact of a simple smile. Since any form of communication releases an action/reaction, the people with whom you share a smile are for the most part responding in kind. If they don't respond, no need to panic. At least you will be content with the effort.

Think of smiling as a free gift to share with others.

Not all scenarios are easy to navigate, I grant you this. For example, I once had to attend a meeting with four buyers who were not "user friendly". In fact, they took great pleasure in making the sales person feel terribly small.

When entered the room, I felt like a soldier in front of a military tribunal. The best response to that was to put a smile on my face. I kept smiling at them and realized they were slowly becoming "nicer", more human. Eventually, they defrosted.

Ultimately, we reached a stage in our communications where there was a shift so we could address each other as equals.

I guess my smile was strong enough to let them see that, although I fully respected their position and power that I was not impressed their initial game of intimidation. If a meeting goes nowhere, everyone loses. By the end, their attitudes shifted and they let go of their masks. Even they felt a sign of relief. I must add that although I did not make a sale, I succeeded in changing their behaviour, which was no mean feat.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you the following anonymous poem I stumbled upon and well describes the impact of smiling:

Smiling is infectious; you catch it like the flu.  
When someone smiled at me today, I started smiling too.  
I passed around the corner and someone saw my grin.  
When he smiled, I'd realized I'd passed it on to him.  
I thought about that smile then I realized its worth,  
A single smile, just like mine could travel round the earth.  
So if you feel a smile begin, don't leave it undetected.  
Let's start and epidemic quick, and get the world infected!  
Everyone needs to SMILE!!

(Author: anonymous)

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# THE JAR OF SAND

by Emmanuel Kuehn

Before implementing plans for this New Year, it is important to stop for moment and look back at what you have done. Whether it is for personal or professional reasons, we can find ourselves on a roller coaster. It is challenging for most of us to calm down and get a grip.

Don't get caught up in the worthless chatter of social media believing yourself to be the sum total of Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Trends, and Viadeo. You are made up of flesh, blood, heart, and soul. Your beauty and value is beyond price. In fact, you are priceless!

Should we decide not to slow down, life gives us some warnings. It's never too late to open our eyes and ears to what life has to show us by example.

Therefore, when a year ends, it provides us with the ideal opportunity to take stock. Look into the mirror. Who is there behind the reflection and the mask?

Who is the real one hidden behind the facade? No need to wear a mask in private! Be honest with yourself and use your objectivity. Now it's time to evaluate your good actions and your mistakes, the successes and the losses. Assessment allows us to go forward.

Learn To Prioritise

The goal is to learn and then move on. The better the evaluation, the easier it is to make decisions on what is really important. Be honest and not judgmental.

Self critique is always a gut wrenching task. Most people find it simpler to criticize what others do. Once the process is complete, you are well positioned to set goals and priorities for the New Year. Use the same methodology as you would in making a sales forecast or a budget for the company you work for. Keep your objectives in mind. Like when you drive your car, you must have a destination.

Once you have set your goals and priorities have you considered that any decision you take can impact on your personal or professional life?

Have you set your goals and priorities in a wisely?

Although we strive to be conscientious, I'd like to share the following story with you.

A Jar Of Sand

A professor stood before his philosophy class with some items in front of him. When the class began, he picked up a very large and empty glass jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls.

He then asked the students if the jar was full.

They agreed that it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls.

He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "yes".

The professor then produced two cans of beer from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed.

"Now," said the professor. "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls represent the important things - your family, your health, your children, your friends, your passions, the kind of stuff that if all else was lost and only these remained, your life would still be full.

"The pebbles are the other things that matter, like your job, your house, your car.

"The sand is everything else, the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first, there will be no room for the pebbles or the golf balls."

You know, the same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small things, you will never have room for the things that really matter.

Pay attention to the elements that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Set aside time for your medical check-ups. Help out at a charitable institution. Take your spouse out to dinner. Don't worry. There will always be time to clean the house and fix the hinge on that cupboard door. Take care of the golf balls first; the rest is just sand.

Well, you may now revise your goals and priorities now◀

Whatever you decide for this New Year 2011, just keep in mind that you'll have to face the mirror again. It's just a question of months. So you have got the possibility now to be proactive in making early changes instead of being reactive and complain that things did not go the way you were expected.

Setting goals and priorities is important. Don't be too rational and allow some space for your emotions too. You are a human being and not a computer!

Ultimately if it does not feel right from inside, you simply may have set the wrong goals and priorities.

Here is wishing you all the best for 2011. Business wisdom is sometimes just a question of common sense. Now empty the sand from your shoe.

About The Author

Emmanuel Kuehn is a Management Consultant, Business Coach & Trainer for both corporate organizations and individuals.

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