



The Book Douglas Atkin; *The Culting of Brands: Turn Your Customers Into True Believers*, Portfolio, Penguin, New York, 2004.

The Big Idea We all crave 'meaning' and 'belonging'. Cult-like brands have become the new religion because they provide these two basic human needs.

Speed RAP People queue overnight to be the first into the new Apple temples, I mean, retail stores. Cult-like brands inspire extreme religious-like customer loyalty – and fanatical behaviour. Customers are no longer satisfied with mere product. They're buying into an ideology with meaning, purpose and value; an identity with personality; and a community of like-minded, mutually interested souls. The two most important elements of a cult-like brand are the ideology and the interaction between your customers. Your ideology provides vision, meaning and desire. The contact with you and fellow customers builds a community. This provides meaning in a chaotic world and a place of belonging.

Your Challenge Start a cult today. Cult your brand and build a devoted following of loyal customers. Be different, take a stand and build a meaning engine and a community that lets your customers be more of themselves.

RESOURCES : anything you use to generate wealth.

ACTIONS : an act of will, a deed completed.

PROFITS : to gain an advantage or benefit.

Review : The Culting of Brands

Douglas Atkin; *The Culting of Brands: Turn Your Customers Into True Believers*; Portfolio, Penguin, New York; 2004.

Atkin is a heretic - and probably proudly so. In *The Culting of Brands* he makes some audacious calls.

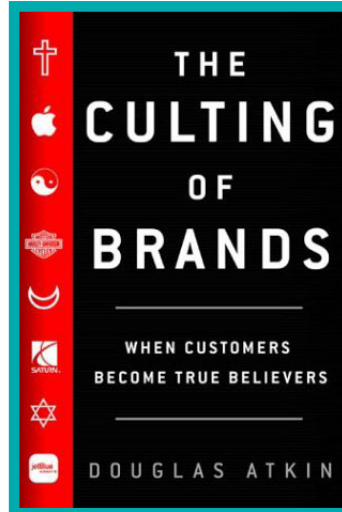
He proclaims brands as the new religion. Ooh! He prescribes brands as sources of meaning, identity and belonging. Aah! He cites brands as nourishment for the human condition. Wow!

Is this an advertising executive drunk with wishful thinking? I think not. He's on to something. Something big... He's made the connection between brands and communities.

It's big because Web 2.0 is the biggest show going right now. And, Web 2.0 is all about 'Constantly, Connected, Conversational Communities'. ([Book Rapper 9 – We Blog](#))

The interesting thing is Web 2.0 doesn't get mentioned once in this book. It's not that Atkin missed something. On the contrary, he was ahead of the game.

The term Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 – the same year Atkin's book was published. Given he has written and researched the book months and years in advance of it being published, we can congratulate him on being on the front of the new wave.



Atkin is not the first to write about cult-like brands, nor will he be the last.

The great thing about his book is the depth and breadth of his conversation. Too many branding books talk about it as a superficial layer to an existing product and not as an eco-system for living.

Atkin presents some Herculean insights:

- The shift in brand control from producer to consumer;
- The history of brands from identifying products to building user congregations;
- The rise of the Spiritual Economy;
- The heralding of Community Marketing as the next big thing.

Atkin has pitched a strategy that communicates across an entire business. Whilst not a how-to book, the details are there embedded within the interviews, the case studies and the principles espoused.

That's why [Book Rapper](#) exists, we've done the work for you and turned it into an implementable plan.

RECOMMENDATION

The [Book Rapper](#) business is being redesigned based upon this book! Howzat for a **RAP!** It's the best branding book I've read because it covers branding at so many levels. It includes the big picture of meaning and belonging. Also, case studies and diverse examples ranging from the Mormons to Harley Davidson, Apple Computers and The Body Shop. Highly recommended!



Douglas Atkin is currently the Chief Community Officer at web-based [Meetup.com](#).

[Meetup's](#) goal is to get people who spend their life talking online to meet offline and in the flesh. It's a bit like reverse-Facebook. They're literally in the business of building communities! I bet he was headhunted for that role!

When he wrote *The Culting of Brands*, Atkin was a partner and the chief strategy officer at advertising agency Merkle + Partners. He'd been working with big fish, like airline jetBlue.

Prior to that he'd been a brand manager, at the home of brands, Proctor and Gamble. That's a great pathway if you wanted to learn traditional branding and then explore new ways of doing it.

The writing of this book grew out of his experience in focus groups. As they discussed sneakers, soft drinks and other things, Atkin realized that something out of the ordinary was happening right in front of his nose. Some of the participants were salivating about products with religious-like reverence.

Once Atkin made the connection that brands have this power to spark cult-like passion and belief he decided to go to the source and study the real cults. Thus began a seven-year pilgrimage that culminated in this book.

BR Context: A Soap Story

Once upon a time in a small village, a local soap maker produced his wares and sold them out of his own front door.

For the other locals in the town this was a godsend. After their weekly bath you could hear them sing, 'Clean at last! Clean at last!'

As the village became a town, another soap maker arrived. At first the two artisans were a little wary of each other. There hadn't been another soap maker in town before.

They soon realized, the town was big enough for the both of them and they happily shared the town's customers.

A short time later, the General Store received a visit from a travelling salesman. He represented a big soap making company from an emerging city over 100 miles away.

The quality of his generic soap wasn't quite as good as the handmade ones the locals had been used to, but it was a little cheaper and it was yellow.

At first the locals avoided it, simply because it was different and they didn't trust 'different'.

Eventually 'cheaper' won over some locals and the new product established a regular clientele – much to the disgust of those who stayed with the hand-made local product.

Some time later, another travelling salesman from a different soap company appeared.

It didn't take long for a rivalry to emerge between the new soap giants. The *Great Northern Soap Company* versus the *Great Southern Soap Company*.

There was a discount war, free samples and special offers. They even started advertising to attract attention, with both companies yelling 'OUR SOAP IS BETTER!'

The customers loved this. They not only had more choice, they had people craving for their attention too.

But the local soap makers hated it; eventually both of them went out of business.

Not long after, a third soap appeared but it wasn't from a third company. The *Great*



Southern Soap Company had produced a new soap.

It looked like the other soaps but came in a bright white box with a beautiful girl on the front. The package was so stunning you could imagine someone making art out of it one day.

And, best of all, it wasn't just soap, it was called '*Luxury*'. And, it wasn't for getting rid of dirt either. It was to 'make yourself beautiful.' Or at least, that's what the pack said.

Yes, it was a bit more expensive but hey, if it'll make me beautiful... Damn, those extra cents, I'm worth it!

Then some time later, there was a soap explosion.

A fourth soap appeared, and then a fifth and then another... There was one for 'real' men, one with 'No Logo', one with a jet flying to Tahiti on the packet and even one for kids claiming 'No more fears.' How could soap be all that?

But all this did was to confuse people. Which soap is the one for me?

Soon the people of the town started to form little groups around the soap they used.

The women who drove big cars only used 'Luxury'.

Other women refused to talk to those who bought 'No Logo'.

And, ironically, the soap for 'real' men became a gay icon – they even started making it in funny

shapes. They said it helped them enjoy it more.

Some time soon after, a new soap '*Planet*' appeared.

It wasn't like any that had arrived in town before. The packet said it wasn't soap either but a way to save the planet. And, they had the t-shirts to prove it.

They said those other soaps were made with nasty chemicals and that was causing hot weather, endangering animals, killing brain cells and polluting the rivers.

They didn't want you to just buy the soap. They wanted you to come to a meeting where people stood on soapboxes.

They wanted you to join them in saving the world - one bar of soap at a time! They wanted you to join them in the charge of the soap brigade!

And that was the end of soap in that town.

Of course, people still used soap, they simply didn't buy soap for soap sake anymore.

RAP1: The Culting Edge

PROFIT: Trekkies, football fans, Mac users, Harley riders, Landmark Forum graduates, eBay traders and hybrid car owners often present cult-like devotion to their cause. Studying successful cults is a powerful source of insight for uncovering the timeless techniques to brand worship and extreme customer loyalty.

THE CULT PARADOX

Contrary to popular belief, people join cults not to conform but to be more of themselves. This is the cult paradox.

An individual's journey begins by feeling alienated or different from the world around them. They begin searching for alternatives, a place to fit.

They know they'll have found it when they:

- 1 Feel safe and secure
- 2 Notice that feeling of difference from the outside world is valued and honoured.

Finally, within this group they will be able to achieve things they couldn't elsewhere. As an individual they'll grow within the group of like-minded others.

Think of the great teams you've played in during your career or watched achieve sporting success. Everyone walks taller!

MORE OF ME

"I want to belong so I can become more of me."

The cult paradox is probably why 'belonging' is such an underestimated part of marketing.

Business celebrates being 'customer focussed' yet misses the chance to fulfil the basic human

need of belonging to a group of like-minded people. And, they miss an opportunity for more sales and customer loyalty.

If brands are the new religion it's time for business to unite product and purchaser into a community of users.

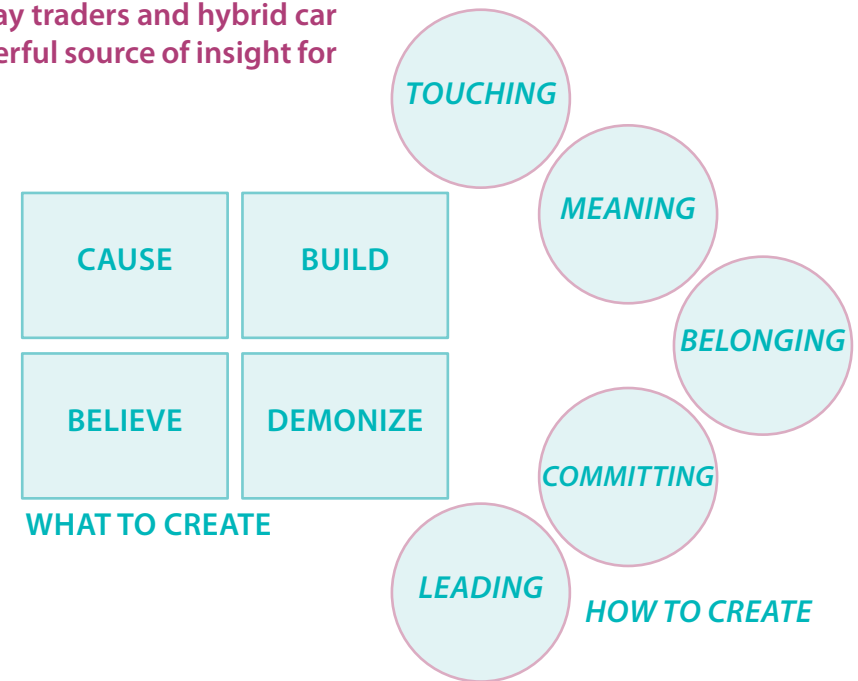
It's also time to direct attention to satisfying the universal needs of belonging, meaning and identity.

BRAND DEVOTEES

The popular image of brand devotees is they are flawed. They're typically viewed as weak and shallow. Yet, they're just like you and me. In fact, they are you and me!

Action : Which brands do you worship? Whilst your immediate reaction might be 'not me', ask yourself...

- Which gadgets make you feel cool?
- If your car was a person, who would you be?
- Which clothing/handbag/shoe brands do you most like to strut in?
- What's your 'don't answer the phone my show's on' favourite TV program?
- When did you last get dressed up to cheer for your team? Wasn't it great to part of the mob?
- What could you not live without?



Your Brand Arrow

Brands live in the minds of the consumer. Therefore, it's a two way street. Just like Web 2.0! Fancy that... Sometimes you need to drive your brand, building it, creating it, designing it and telling it like it is. And, sometimes you need to sit back and let your customers drive it, shape it, talk about it, share it and tell you what's going on.

The Brand Arrow is not a bunch of separate elements. It's a co-ordinated set of components designed to lead your brand in a consistent direction.

Action : Apply the Brand Arrow to your organization. Go through the nine-step RAPs to create your cult-like brand.

RAP2: Cause

PROFIT : What's your cause? What do you want to have happen? If you're not out to cause anything then you might as well go back to bed. Your cause is the sharp end of your branding arrow. It's at odds with the current world. It needs to be to attract a band of worshippers.

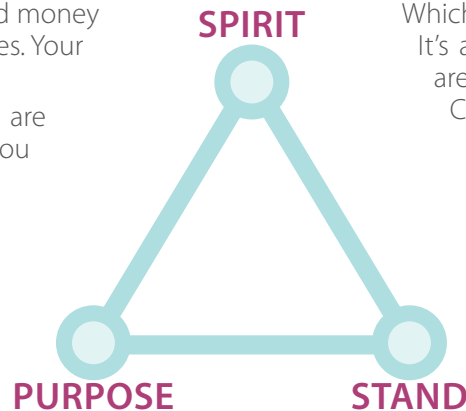
PURPOSE: WHAT'S YOUR REASON FOR EXISTENCE?

The purpose of your business is not about making money. We need money like we need to breathe, but breathing is not the purpose of our lives. Your purpose hits a deeper nerve.

What's the problem you are solving? What's the concern you are addressing? What are you aspiring to? If you stopped doing what you are doing right now, would anyone notice? Would you be missed?

Clue: Human beings are social animals. How are you helping people live better lives?

Action: Define your purpose. What's the real reason you're in business? Why did you really get out of bed this morning? Really, do you expect me to believe that?



STAND: WHAT'S YOUR POINT OF VIEW?

Which eggs do you buy? Free range? Cage? Organic? None – I'm a Vegan? It's an everyday loaded question. We buy with our points of view. Eggs are produced in multiple ways because not all eggs are created equal. Consumers don't want it that way. And neither do you! Sameness is the death of brands.

To create a cult-like following requires some degree of edge or alienation. Your brand must stand for something. It must represent a distinct alternative to the status quo.

The good news is not everyone will like you and your opinion. That's the point of branding: the sharper your edge the better. Superman stood for 'Truth, Justice and the American Way'. His stand was to help people in need.

Action: What's your stand and what are you going to do about it? Define your stand AND the actions that would follow. What sort of eggs are you providing?

SPIRIT: WHAT'S YOUR POINT OF DIFFERENCE?

Cars stopped being about transport long ago. Today we buy them for comfort, safety, showing off and because we can.

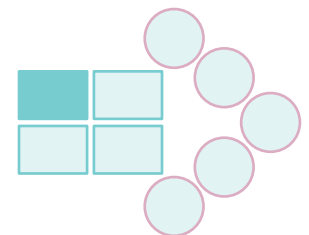
We live in a Spiritual Economy. Not some airy-fairy, dressed in purple world. The spiritual are 'issues bigger than daily living'. They're not physical; they're symbolic. They're not rational; they're emotional.

The good news is demand for the spiritual is constant. We need meaning and belonging today. And, we'll need them again tomorrow.

Your point of difference doesn't live in your product features and benefits. Chunk up. It's what your brand stands for. It's what it represents. We consume and produce beliefs, meaning, worldviews, aspirations, possibilities and dreams.

Revlon started selling dreams in a jar decades ago. The Church has been selling salvation for centuries. Barack Obama is selling us 'hope'.

Action: Define your point of difference in spiritual, emotional and symbolic ways.



RAP3: Believe

PROFIT : Belonging and believing are bedfellows. We need to belong to survive. And, we need to have similar beliefs to create a common world so we can survive together. Consumers are no longer buying mere products, they're buying into a belief system. And, this means they're buying into communities of like-minded people with similar worldviews.

DOCTRINE: WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Traditional marketing has focused on demographics and psychographics to target consumer groups. The new approach is to present your brand based upon what you believe and attract customers to you.

The Moonies believe God has a feminine and masculine nature.

People who drive hybrid cars believe it is worth paying a little more to pollute a little less.

Google believes "don't be evil".

- What do you believe?
- What is true for you about your industry?
- What do your members believe?

Action: Distinguish your beliefs. What is true for your organization? What are you aspiring to? Then audit yourself. Are you living true to what you say? Adjust course accordingly.



AGREEMENT: THE SOCIALIZATION OF BELIEF

Building belief is a contact sport. We need others to confirm, practise, support, enhance and believe in our worldview.

Collective agreement is the basis for determining our sense of the world.

Traditionally we relied on geographic locations to provide our community interactions. Thanks to a mobile workforce and the internet, we're collaborating and interacting in new ways with people from all over the world.

In this context, brands have emerged as legitimate communities for people to belong to and believe in.

Research shows that the strength and frequency of group interaction has the strongest influence on belief and commitment.

Action: Meet regularly. Create ways to interact with and meet with your community as often as you can. This is the shortest, fastest, strongest way to build belief within your group.



MANIFESTO: WHAT DOES MY CHARTER SAY?

Your Manifesto is a documented account of your beliefs and your worldview.

Perhaps the most famous is the US Declaration of Independence that begins with the immortal line: "We hold these truths to be self-evident..."

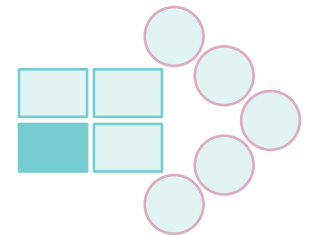
Notably, it was created at the launch of brand "USA" and was a collaboration of like-minded souls.

If you're a demi-god like Steve Jobs you might get away with writing your own, particularly if you're just starting out.

Otherwise you'll need input from your community. This might take time. The Body Shop Charter took 18 months to produce.

Use your manifesto as the basis of your marketing and promotion to ensure a consistent message - Harley Davidson does.

Actions: Start writing or start listening. Turn your brand plan into a manifesto that you live by.



RAP4: Build

PROFIT: Your cause and your beliefs become valuable when you make them tangible. Create physical building blocks to enhance your group's feelings of solidarity and let them demonstrate that *'we're in this together'*. These tangible elements are designed to create group identity and encourage advocacy and sharing, about your group, by your group.

RITUALS: WHAT WILL I DO REGULARLY?

Rituals are not random, they're practices with purpose. They're your ideology in action. You do them because they mean something to you and your (brand's) worldview. You're not doing them for the sake of it, they're a physical demonstration of your commitment. These outward displays are also an invitation to others to join you.

Consider: Hare Krishna's are vegetarian, shave their heads, wear saris and chant a lot. Mormons don't drink coffee, tea or alcohol. Supporters watch the game on TV whereas fanatics go to every game. Real Facebookers log on as soon as they get out of bed to see what their friends are up to. Trekkers dress as their favourite character.

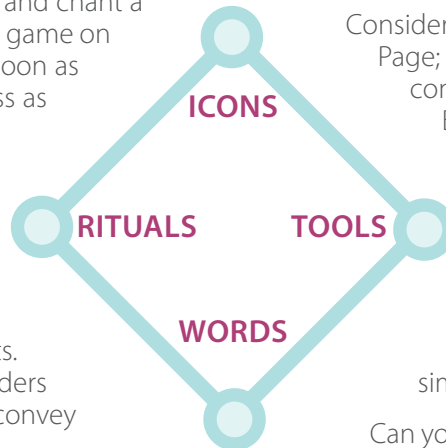
Action: Distinguish the rituals of your hard-core users.

LANGUAGE: WHAT WORDS DO I USE?

Jargon includes those in the know and excludes everyone else. Think computer programmers, teenagers and financial statements. Saturn car owners talk about joining the 'family'. To Harley Davidson riders car drivers are 'cagers'. Knowing the right words is a way to bond, convey meaning and separate yourself from others.

Ask yourself: What's your dialect? What metaphors and models do you use to describe the world? What's blasphemy? What do you NOT talk about? Politics, sex, religion, money? How do you converse: provocatively, politely, with humour or in code? What's your catchphrase? What's your in-joke? What's your bible? Is it a book, defining article, movie or a person?

Action: Create catchphrases, observe jargon, highlight key words and phrases. Write your own dictionary and your own bible.



ICONS: WHICH SYMBOLS REMIND US OF YOUR CAUSE?

Branding started as a way to distinguish your goods from another. Now they have become icons of belonging, connection and meaning. Think football team. The symbolism of your brand is a mark of distinction separating you from the rest and it's real power lives in its underlying meaning.

It's part of your identity. How will we recognize you?

Consider: the Christian Cross; Coca Cola's colours; Tiffany's Blue; Google's Home Page; Harley Davidson's growl; Apple Computer's startup theme; Apple iPod's control wheel; Homer Simpson's "D'oh!"; Hitler's Moustache; Sydney's Bridge and Opera House.

Action: Identify, design and use your icons regularly.

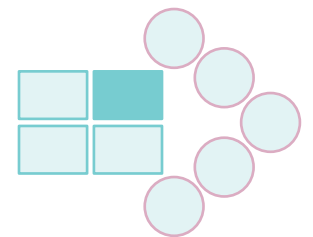
TOOLS: WHAT TOOLS DO I USE?

Tools not only let you do your work, they define who you are. They're no longer just utilitarian; they're iconic. Without the right tool, you're simply not playing the part.

Can you imagine... A teenager without a mobile phone? An executive without a Blackberry or an iPhone? A rapper without bling? Ikea without an allen key? Political missionaries without slogans, t-shirts and bumper stickers?

Also, tools may not be physical. They may be an idea or a model like Malcolm Gladwell's Tipping Point or Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Action: Choose your weapons and make them iconic.



RAP5: Demonize

PROFIT : Appealing to the masses is the opposite of how you get cult-like devotion. Stop trying to please everyone. Your goal is to create a distinct group identity and to achieve this you need to separate yourself from other groups. The most direct way to do this is find an enemy to defeat. Who or what is your biggest threat? This can be real or intangible.

DEFINE US

'Who are you?' That's the most powerful question you can ask yourself.

'What business are you in?' is the most powerful question for any organization.

These are identity questions. When we change our answers to these questions, everything changes.

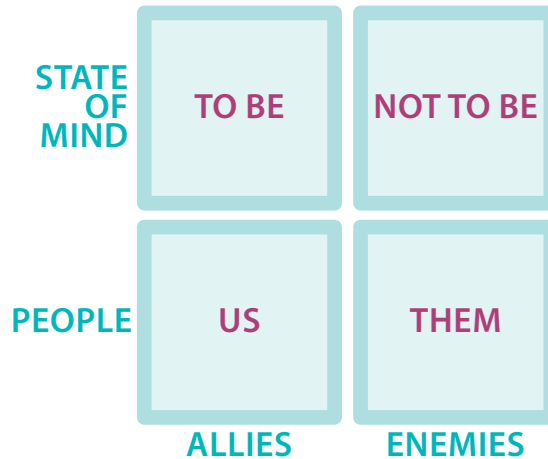
Action : Document the qualities that make you who you are. What is distinctive about you? Unique? Personal? What's your 'Cause'? Beliefs?

DEFINE THEM

In the same way sporting contests inspire loyalty for your team, they instantly position the opposition as the enemy who must be defeated. By defining who we are, we also define who we are not. Sharpen your brand edge by heightening this 'us' versus 'them' divide.

Taking on an enemy is a classic strategy for a brand underdog. In that famous ad of 1984, Apple portrayed IBM as Big Brother. More recently Apple took on Microsoft in their 'Mac Versus PC' ad campaign. Virgin Atlantic publicly declared war on British Airways and American Airlines, whilst in Australia, Virgin Blue took on Qantas.

Action : Who or what are you competing against? Reflect back to your purpose and your beliefs. What's the opposite of your purpose? Opposite to your beliefs?



WAY OF BEING: 2B OR NOT 2B

Your brand demon can be real or intangible. You can demonize a state of mind, an action or an internalised feeling.

How do you want your members to feel? Brands are emotional charges that inspire, motivate, soothe and challenge us to be 'all that we can be'. Remember those Army ads?

Nike's "Just Do It" is a brand of self-achievement. It demonizes 'apathy' and 'not doing it'.

Harley Davidson is a rebel or outlaw brand. They provide fuel for individuals who don't quite feel at home in traditional society. They love the freedom of the road and are avoiding being trapped by humdrum life.

Google famously declared 'Don't be evil' as an attack on unethical business and biased search results. This has become one of their guiding principles.

Action: Define who you will be. Distinguish the way of being you despise.

EXCLUSIVITY: WHAT IS THE PRICE OF ENTRY?

Separate yourself from the outside world by being exclusive.

Typically, we think of this as being a function of social privilege. You can only be a member of *the* yacht club if you are part of the high-brow society. We don't want the riff-raff here!

Yet there are other forms of exclusivity worth considering.

Price: Not everyone can afford a Ferrari.

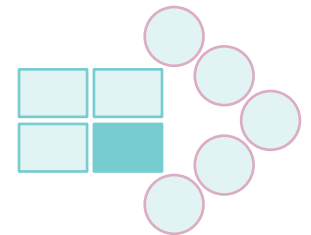
Knowledge : Only the tech-savvy can contribute to Open-Source software.

Style : Apple appeals through design.

Supply : Millions watch the Superbowl on TV but not everyone gets a ticket to be at the game.

Performance : Even fewer get to play in the Superbowl.

Action : What's the price of entry for your cult brand?



RAP6: Touching

PROFIT : A big mistake to avoid is to believe your product or logo is your brand. Your brand is the feeling people get when they talk about and interact with your business. It's an emotional charge and to create brand worship you need to design when, where and how your flock come into contact with your brand.

BELONGING: LET ME BE MORE OF ME

We survived 'Mass Marketing' where individuals were treated as a single group. Then we had 'One-on-one Marketing' where individuals were separated from their peers.



Now, we have 'Community Marketing' with the best of both worlds. It's a whole new way of selling where the brand is cultivated, served and infused into the community. Like wave and particle theory in physics, individuals and groups are not separate things, just different parts of the same thing.

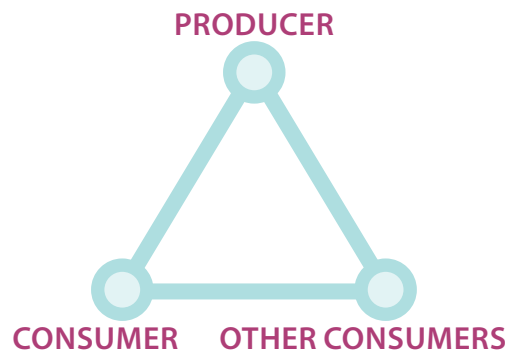
It's not either/or; it's both. We want to be more individual by being part of a group.

Action : Build a Community around your brand. Look at the existing communities: How can you get them to talk? You to them, them to you, them to each other...

PEOPLE: INVITE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The great myth about cults is they're filled with losers and misfits, who can't make it in the 'real world'. That's simply not true – how would that attract anyone else to join?

Research confirms that '*People Buy People*'. That's right, they buy into who the people are in the group before they buy into the ideology. Socially successful people are part of successful cults.



This means you must have member interactions if you want to build a community, especially as part of your induction process.

Get the right members when you begin: people like me, or people I'd like to be. Like attracts like.

Action : Create opportunities for your consumers to connect with each other online and face-to-face.

INTERACTION: CREATE POINTS OF CONTACT

When do you touch your customers? Literally, emotionally or metaphorically?

Like your rituals, your touchpoints are purposeful and deliberate. They're designed to bring your ideology alive.

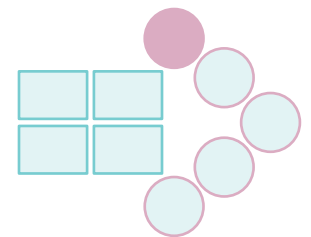
Apple customers have been videoing themselves opening their latest purchases and proudly displaying this on YouTube.

This seemingly innocent moment is captured and celebrated. Design is central to the Apple view of the world and their clever packaging rejoices this stand.

Apply these three key steps to developing a Contact Strategy:

- 1 Design a deliberate, sequential pathway for members to interact with each other.
- 2 Keep tabs on who participates and encourage the shy to play.
- 3 Ideally, design this to be self-run – by the people for the people.

Action : Make a list of every-when and every-how a customer touches your business. Apply your ideology as you redesign each one of them.



RAP7 : Meaning

PROFIT : Products can easily be copied. Even service is turned into a commodity, sold and imitated. Providing a way for consumers to create meaning in their lives is more difficult to duplicate and easier to charge a premium for. Cult brands give us the chance to act out our values and beliefs, they're complete meaning systems. They enable members to make sense of their world. It's part of what your community is buying into.

MEANING : MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD

In a rapidly changing world, we need sources we can turn to make sense of the world. Commercial offerings are the new religion because they play this role for us.

Consider, Oprah's position as sage for women around the world.

Her Book Club selections interpret the chaos of the world into some kind of coherent story.

Oprah's discussion of spiritual issues allow viewers to create goals for their lives: careers, finance, relationships, weight-loss.

Her regulars and guests provide a sense of control. For instance, Dr Oz guides you through your health issues.

How does your brand interpret the world? Hybrid cars say we can lesson our footprint on the planet. Provide purpose for others? Offer a sense of control?

Action : Marry your beliefs with ways to act in the world. List your beliefs down one column, then define how you would act to be consistent with this view.

CREATION: USE MYTHS & STORIES

The Body Shop's products aren't unique, they're simply wrapped in meaning. Their budget containers and their contents come with a story. A simple tale about the product source, be it the Brazilian nut conditioner or the Nepalese paper. Their products make you feel luxuriated on the outside and satisfied on the inside because you've helped save the planet.

The beautiful thing about stories is the listener interprets them and creates their own meaning. They also create a shared experience.

Highlight the importance of people in your stories. The pursuit of celebrities demonstrates the high level of curiosity here.

Action : What's the story behind your brand? Demonstrate your cause, your beliefs and values through your everyday tales.

DISTINGUISH: ARTICULATE OR BUILD

Where are you going to get your meaning engine and belief system from? The answer is more obvious than you might think. Either build upon an existing worldview or articulate one that already exists and is hidden from view.

1 Build upon existing

Christianity was built upon Judaism. Mormonism was built upon Christianity. Each added a little something to an existing ideology - familiar enough to be acceptable, different enough to be new.

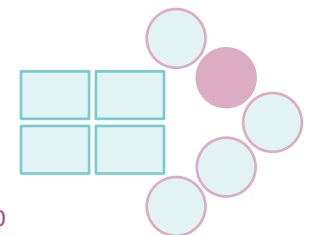
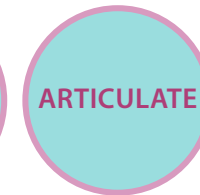
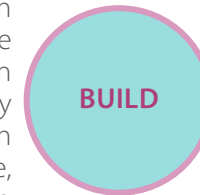
Ben and Jerry's ice cream is built upon an anti-corporate political agenda: high-quality product, fair profit and community service. They believed a company had a responsibility to their community and they built an ice-cream business based upon that idea.

A great opportunity today is to build a 'Green' business... how about 'Green Music' or 'Green Customer Service'?

2 Articulate the Existing

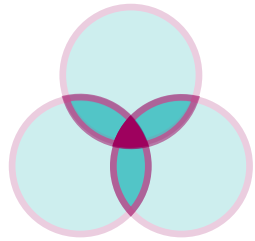
Harley Davidson were fortunate to have a strong culture behind their brand. Starting with the Hell's Angels and movies like *The Wild One* and *Easy Rider*, they were able to tame the outlaw and allow the rebel to flourish. The key here is to articulate it and then give it voice so it can be shared.

Action : What's your platform of belief? Is it existing or waiting to be articulated? Define your meaning engine.



RAP8 : Belonging

PROFIT : Feeling secure within a group of people is a key safety net for living. It allows individuals to feel strong enough to expose their inner thoughts, feelings and true self. Business celebrates being 'customer focussed' yet misses the chance to fulfil the basic human need of belonging to a group of like-minded people.



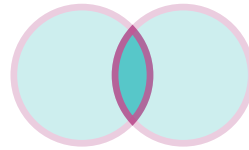
CARE: LOOK AFTER EACH OTHER

Caring for each other is the social glue that holds communities together. The US Marines is built upon the simple premise that '*nobody gets left behind*'. This culture is created from the first day of boot camp. This *mutual responsibility* is a key plank in any strong culture. It's an indicator of a shared sense of belonging and a willingness to work together.

Why would a community form around your brand?

- **To learn?** Software users teach each other what works best.
- **To make it work?** Ebay's online community couldn't function without their trust ratings. It enables a group of unknown people to trade with each other and honour their sales.
- **To create?** Wikipedia attracts a community interested in building something they couldn't create on their own.

Action : Define the reasons your community comes together.



CONNECTION: CREATE SHARED EXPERIENCES

We belong to groups to make meaning and we do this through sharing our experience.

Previously we developed shared experience living in the same time and space – same neighbourhoods, similar work, local events with familiar people.

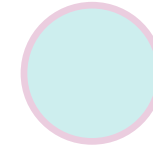
We now seek it in new ways and resonating with brand communities has emerged as one solution.

Experience can be shared literally, "I was there when..." It can also be had metaphorically, where one connects to an actor in a movie or an event that has happened elsewhere. "Where were you when..."

Create group events so members can swap stories and make friends with people who are dealing with the same problems.

Design it so they share a literal experience and give them an opportunity to speak with each other about it. This could be the way to link back to your cause.

Action: Design how members share what is going on for them - to you and with each other.



INDUCTION: DESIGN YOUR WELCOME

Bootcamp for the US Marines is not simply about getting fit.

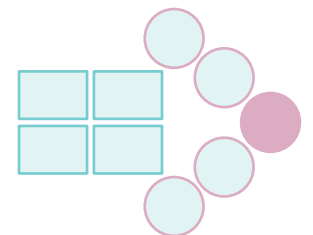
Like any powerful induction it serves two key roles: creating shared experience and forming a break with the past. The aim is for it to be a watershed, a defining moment that sets up new possibilities for the future.

Ideally, an induction works both on building up the sense of self and the sense of belonging to the group. Participants draw power and safety from the group so they are more free to express themselves.

Celebrate the 'welcome' experience through:

- Design, like Apple's packaging.
- Breaking with the past or launching new futures through a ceremony, like a wedding.
- Destroying previous limits, try fire walking.
- Separating from the outside world - retreat to an unfamiliar location.
- Enabling people to talk about their experience - a workshop or online forum
- A sample of what's to come, eg. a test drive.

Action: Create your Brand Induction Program.



RAP9 : Committing

PROFIT : The act of committing comes with buying into the ideology. “Yes, I believe that. Yes, I will act like that. Yes, I’ll be part of that.” The key to commitment is to increase it in bite-size steps. You don’t get married on your first date. Increase the interactions to increase the relationships. And, break down the barriers to committing.

GROWTH: BUILDING THE STEPS OF COMMITMENT

The first step in building commitment is to interact with your customers. People buy people. Be welcoming.

The Moonies developed a technique called ‘Love Bombing’. Participants were lead through a series of exercises made to make them feel like they were meeting the happiest people on the planet. Judgement was suspended and criticism was banned.

Warning : Don’t over do ‘love bombing’ or you’ll come across as a fake and scare people away.

Start with a low cost entry. A free sample works for Krispy Kreme. Then build it up slowly with small sacrifices. This might be money, time, emotions or creativity.

Provide a path for members to gradually increase their involvement,

as if you were dating someone.

Increase the interactions to build the relationship and break down the barriers to committing. Use social glue: the more time you spend together the stickier the bond.

Action : Your Commitment Steps reflect your Contact Strategy.

Design a pathway for people to join your community. What’s the first point of contact? Then what? And, after that? Until finally...

INVESTMENT: TRADING AND REWARDING COMMITMENT

Commitment is a two-way street. If one party is doing all the taking then you’re heading for a breakdown. Ever been in a relationship like that? Did you feel betrayed? Did you leave?

Would you give that loyalty to a brand?

Apple customers love their innovative products. That’s why they buy them.

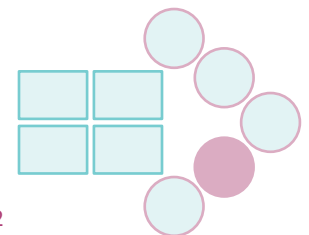
They make the buyer stylish because they have the latest, cool device.

When Apple stopped delivering innovative products back in the late 90s, their community suffered too. They lost their cool factor also.

Steve Jobs came back on board and the iMac relaunched Apple with a string of successes. Cool again!

Remember commitment is a trade. I promise this, if you’ll agree to that. When one side dips out, we feel ripped off. Beware : A brand loyalist who turns into a brand terrorist can put a big dent in your reputation with a few online clicks and keystrokes.

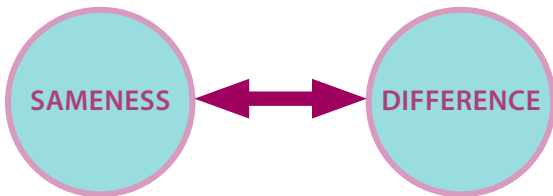
Action : Get really, really clear on what your customers are buying and what they expect from you. This may not be what you think it is. Talk to them.



RAP10 : Leading

PROFIT : Leading a community of people who choose to follow you is very different from leading a band of employees or conscripted soldiers. Your tone of voice needs to reflect that you don't own your community and you'll need to influence the group in different ways.

TENSION: MANAGE SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE



The major attraction in your cult is your point of difference. However, if you're too different you're just going to become a target of abuse. Remember the kid who got teased in the playground? You need to manage this tension between 'sameness' and 'difference'.

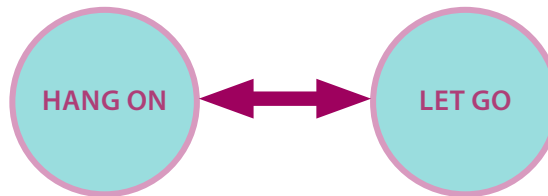
Historically, the Catholic church labelled non-believers 'heretics' and burnt them on the stake.

More recently, Napster in its cry for free music demonized the recording industry. Their call to action was so powerful that millions of songs were traded for free. This cost the music industry big bucks and they countered with a court case to erase the young upstart.

To cause change you need to have followers for your leadership. That's obvious. However, if you walk too far ahead, your followers will lose sight of the path you tread.

Action : Feedback is everything. Design multiple ways of receiving this from your flock. Where appropriate, incorporate this into future updates. Consumers rule!

OWNERSHIP: HANG ON OR LET GO



The popular view is that charismatic leaders run successful cults. In the world of the cult brand, we see leaders such as Richard Branson or Steve Jobs leading the way.

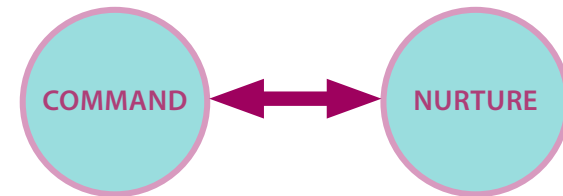
The reality is that most successful cults have distributed power and responsibility beyond a central individual. The last thing you want is your fearless leader to keel over and die and your brand get buried with them.

Remember, you don't own your community or even your brand. Your brand lives in the hearts and minds of your members.

To keep it on track is a shared responsibility between producer and consumer. If one falters the other suffers too.

Action : Provide the tools and resources for your community to thrive and then leave them to it. For instance, build an online forum and let your users run it.

CONTROL: THE MILITARY COMMANDER AND THE PRIEST

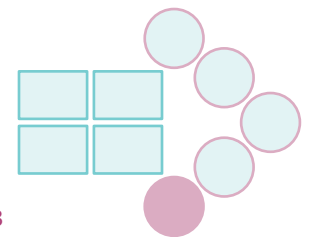


The world of marketing is drawn from the military commander. We have campaigns; we target customers, pursue market domination, launch products, attack competitors, penetrate markets and strategize to capture market share.

The cult brand model has a different flavour. A high priest attracts a congregation by preaching a spiritual path filled with meaning and purpose whilst leading the rituals to encourage regular worship.

Brand managers need to nurture and support a community and listen to what it needs.

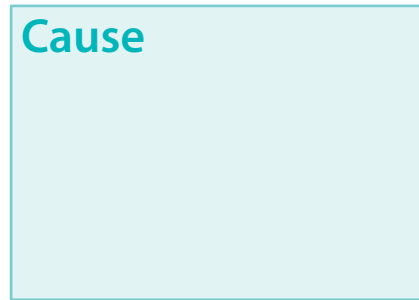
Action : Design communication paths so you can listen to what is happening within your community. Start with Web2.0 tools. Watch, listen and observe.



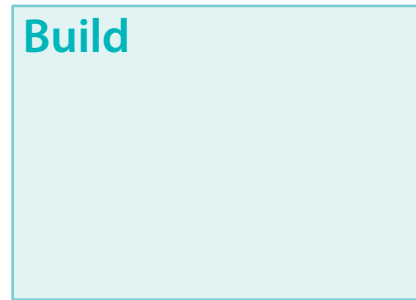
RAP11 : Your Brand Plan

Action : Write down one thing you could take on to create your cult-like brand in each of the nine boxes/circles. Then pick one to implement. Work your way through your list. Pin this plan on your wall as your reminder.

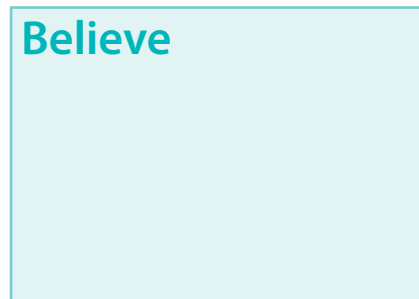
Cause



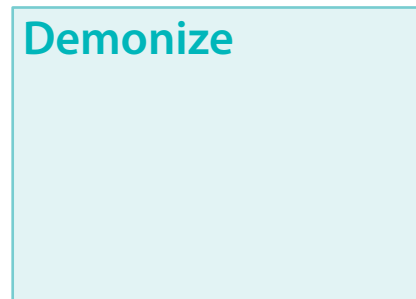
Build



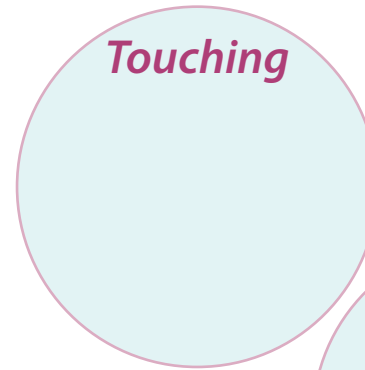
Believe



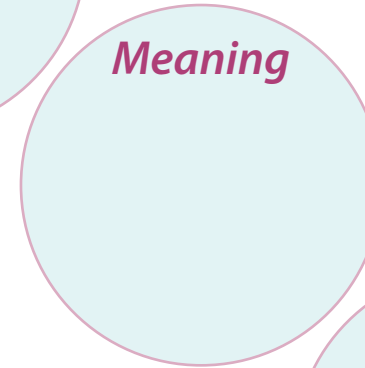
Demonize



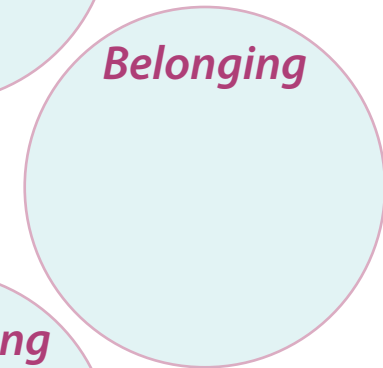
Touching



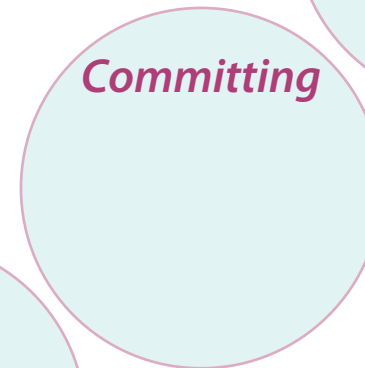
Meaning



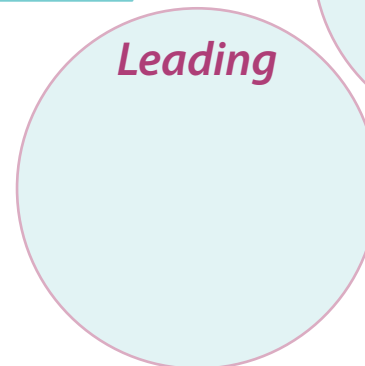
Belonging



Committing



Leading



More info...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi folks! Thanks for reading **Book Rapper**. I think we've all got our own special genius. Mine is to take a whole bunch of information and distil it into some simple yet co-ordinated pattern. I used to be an architect. And, for me, tracking trends and working out how they fit together is just like designing a building.

Cheers, Geoff (McDonald)

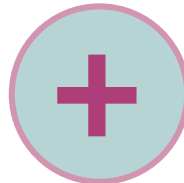
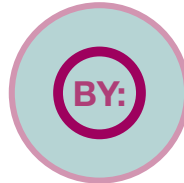
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Custom : We also design custom solutions for your unique situation.

Delivery : This can be delivered in a variety of ways depending upon what you need. This might be one-on-one coaching or mentoring, or group events such as keynote presentations, facilitating strategic planning meetings or creating projects to achieve specific outcomes.

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