

I HAVE NO EXPERIENCE IN ADVERTISING.

What I do lack in experience, I make up in my ability to creatively identify minor insights that turn into fresh innovative perspectives.

This portfolio is a showcase of how I think.

Enjoy.

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The College of William and Mary

Williamsburg, VA (May 2007 Graduate)
Bachelor of Arts in Economics

As an economist I can do a cost/benefit analysis for pretty much anything, talk incessantly about supply and demand, or draw a graph with guns and butter. I chose to major in economics because of the wide array of career options I would have after college. However, I could not foresee that my decision to study economics would be vindicated by learning how to approach issues from a holistic perspective and utilize analytical reasoning to solve problems in a broad social context.

Eastern Virginia Medical School

Norfolk, VA (Summer 2006)
Research Assistant Intern

Crazy as it may sound, I was paid to do 'alcohol research' for one summer as the principle investigator of a drinking and driving study involving college students. I administered alcohol to subjects and quantified disparities in driving simulator performance between drunk and sober trials. In addition to writing a pilot study protocol and contributing to two academic papers, I learned the importance of moderation in all things (like alcohol) and also that academic research is not what I want to do with my life.

Season's Restaurant

Williamsburg, VA (July 2003 - February 2005)
Food Server

It wouldn't have been college if I didn't wait tables at some point in four years (Would you like to hear about our specials?). While advising patrons on a 20-entrée menu and serving ten tables per shift, I learned that the customer is always right and the necessity of multi-tasking.

Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity

Vice President

I organized and promoted every social and philanthropic event for our 60 person chapter. Being responsible for the safety of 500-700 people each event usually meant that I was stressing over seemingly insignificant details; however, knowing that so many people were enjoying themselves because of my behind-the scene work was gratifying and validated my efforts.

Well Read

I have a bad habit of reading too many books at once (I'm currently on four) but I'm constantly trying to learn and gain new perspectives on my surroundings. The type of books I've read are manifest in my 'Freakonomics-style' of thinking and some of my favorite authors include Malcolm Gladwell, Seth Godin, and James Surowiecki. I've learned the value of collective intelligence but understand the dangers in relying solely on conventional wisdom as it is often times wrong and can lead to stagnation and flawed reasoning.

Personal

I run marathons for fun (I'm not insane) because I love challenging myself and because I know that my best ideas come to me when I remove myself from situations. My biggest pet peeve is bad manners because little things can have significant impacts and the craziest thing I have ever done was go skydiving.



I ran the Inaugural Georgia Marathon with my brother in March 2007. All things considered, I had a great experience. After I finished the race (3 hrs. 22 min.), I took a short nap in a shady area of some downtown park.

When I woke up I saw my brother sitting next to me when a small group of people walked by. One gentleman, noticing that we had both finished, asked us how we did. As a runner, this is never an easy question to answer. If I replied that I finished in X time, will the average person truly comprehend how good or bad the time is? If I said I beat my last time by X, will the average person truly comprehend the margin of improvement? If I said nothing and just showed a look of pure exhaustion, will the average person truly comprehend the effort of running 26.2 miles?

As I was struggling to respond to the question, my brother interjected...

'I FINISHED'

It was the perfect answer to the perfect question. Nothing more, nothing less was required. In those two simple words, my brother conveyed a genuine truth about why people run marathons...To FINISH them...nothing else. Not to beat times. Not for any other reason (at least the first one).

People do not run marathons for running's sake. People are motivated and inspired by the very notion of setting a hard to reach goal and accomplishing that goal. It's a motivation that strikes at the very essence of the human spirit.

I think this insight touches on a genuine truth about the marathoning population. We are in the middle of a Second Marathon Boom; record numbers of individuals are crossing the finish line at all major races referring it as

THE EVERYMAN'S EVEREST.

Only by understanding what compulsions drive people to take on the marathon can brands such as Nike and Vitamin Water (whose livelihoods revolve around individuals with active lifestyles) realistically expect to capitalize on this running wave.

People who would benefit the most are those in the greatest need of accomplishing goals and gaining momentum in their lives. Completing something so challenging and demanding will place people on a new life trajectory that will enable them to continually push their limits and demand more of themselves.

Aspiring lifestyle brands should therefore recognize the millions of individuals who have come to a point of stagnation in their lives and help re-create the urge to raise the bar and constantly push new limits. It becomes then, a matter of reaching out to this segment and showing them that anyone can run a marathon, they are not alone, and that they can enjoy themselves along the way. Brands successful in embedding themselves in each stage of this three-tiered strategy will experience heightened levels of brand loyalty and identity because of their association with the feelings of euphoria individuals get from runner's high.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Everyman's Everest

Convey the message that anyone can run a marathon. Tell the story of celebrities who ran marathons previously (Oprah, P Diddy, Lance Armstrong) and also of the countless individuals who run marathons despite insurmountable odds (physical impairments). Brands can communicate these stories by printing them on their products (Vitamin Water would print on individual bottles) and concluding with some sort of challenge or proposition that provokes the consumer to participate in this larger lifestyle movement.



Create Running Communities

Marathon preparation requires strenuous training and unwavering discipline. By incorporating training into a running community, individuals can interact with peers and will have a constant feeling of support that will enable them to reach their goals. These communities can be virtual, as demonstrated by the achievements of NikePlus, or they can be physical, whereby a brand would sponsor weekly runs as part of an overall training program geared toward a particular marathon. The running community should create the perception that those not involved are missing out on a lifestyle conducive to health, happiness, and achievement. Ultimately an experience is created as individuals begin to associate marathon training with friendships/close bonds formed between running partners and also the brand that facilitated the running community.



Foster Encouragement

Make each mile significant. Include signs/billboards along the course that suggest the runners have the support of their (branded) running community. Reinforce this by positioning 'friends' along the course who represent the brand to cheer for marathon participants. Identify running community members by providing running apparel (with brand logo) with space for individuals to write their names. It is more encouraging to hear people calling you by name rather than by 'runner' or race number.



What do Justin Timberlake, Ricky Martin and the Backstreet Boys have in common?

They are all products of the pop-driven boy band era of the 1990s that showed little regard for authentic talent and sold millions of records because of the marketing strategies employed by media elite in American culture. A select few individuals highly positioned in the media have the power to sell anything branded as popular culture to the public regardless of its content because of the power of cumulative advantage.

Cumulative advantage is the phenomenon otherwise known as 'the rich grow richer' or 'the popular grow more popular' effect. Essentially, any initial disparities between individuals in terms of reach or reputability are exacerbated over time; an advantageous position is allowed to become increasingly advantageous. This happens because individuals are heavily influenced by public information, regardless of what they might know privately. If you were on YouTube, you would notice the list of 'most viewed' videos. By watching any of them you would be adding to its status as a 'most viewed' video, which would increase the likelihood that somebody else will watch.

The effects of cumulative advantage allows a few individuals to broadcast their own interpretations of what is culturally significant and form the groundwork necessary to sustain the viral transmission of ideas throughout a population. This is what happened during the boy band era when the efforts of Lou Pearlman, highly influential manager and mastermind behind the Backstreet Boys and N'Sync, turned groups of young teenage boys into the most recognizable figures of an era.

It isn't that the media consciously promotes and sells creative works that lacks genuine substance or authenticity. However, it should be acknowledged that many creative works that permeate social consciousness lack a sense of uniqueness that should be embodied in anything culturally significant.



Art in its most basic form is an experience so beautiful, so moving so inspiring in one's life that the individual feels compelled to share that feeling with others. The individual therefore attempts to share his experience through various forms of communication, be it written verse, spoken word, painted imagery, etc. Often times other individuals become equally inspired by these representations of reality and seek to recreate them in their own way. What results is a simulacrum, which is an infinite series of replications of replications of reality to the point where the initial life experience has become so diluted, so tainted, that it ceases to be enjoyable.

To avoid the trappings of these popular culture doldrums, we should be on the continuous search for fresh, genuine expressions of individuality. Given that we live in a new era where the means of production are in the hands of anyone with a computer and an idea, there exists a greater platform for individuals to express their voice and proliferate creative works in society.

The problem for marketers and brand strategists becomes one of increased competition. Consumers are no longer idly accepting all things labeled 'popular culture'. People realize they can formulate their own tastes and determine what is culturally significant on their own. Popular culture is slowly becoming something organically derived because people value the uniqueness of others' ideas. Advertising agencies must constantly strive to highlight the individuality in culture if they are to compete against the Time Person of the Year 2006... **YOU.**

RANDOMNESS

I have wanted to create an [open source website dedicated to road trips to major American cities](#). As somebody who enjoys traveling to new places and meeting new people, one obstacle always seems to be not knowing where to go or what to do. The site would serve as an information exchange so travelers can experience the local flavor of a city by hitting hidden local spots they wouldn't otherwise know about if left to the pages of outdated travel guides. The structure of the site would be similar to Wikipedia in that information posted on a particular city would be edited according to its value and credibility. As local knowledge gains global reach, people will become increasingly mobile which will result in a greater velocity of cultural assimilation across regions.

[Sometimes getting people to believe in an idea is similar to getting people to go to a party](#), it all comes down to game theory. Its success depends on the turnout of cool, interesting people. The tricky part is convincing cool and interesting people that other cool and interesting people will be there. It boils down to expectations of the expectations of other likeminded individuals. The secret is talking to the right people with the right message at the right time.

I believe that a 'War on Terrorism' cannot be won with traditional means because it is not a traditional war. It seems to me that [we should engage in a war of ideas to effectively denigrate acts of terror](#). As seen with piracy and slavery, implementing a concerted effort on the part of the international community to stigmatize acts of terror coupled with an effective policing strategy can achieve dramatic results. By crowding out the extremist ideas that become embraced by disaffected youth who lack viable economic opportunities with positive ideas that will drive social change, perhaps a peace can be achieved.

I understand that the ability to add value to a brand is constrained by the effects of commoditization. While Starbucks was extremely successful in selling a coffee drinking experience, their ability to price above cost has come to a halt within the past year. Their share price has fallen considerably in the last six months, the Economist ran a story on the 'commoditization effect' of their brand (people began to perceive their product as just another cup of coffee), and several websites are dedicated to disseminating anti-Starbucks propaganda. The fact remains that consumers are beginning to understand that the value-added coffee Starbucks sells isn't worth the \$4 per cup. [The experience they are seeking can be found at the local coffee shop and not at "FOURbucks."](#)



I believe necessity will drive a person to do most anything.

I hate conspicuous consumption.

I believe that levels of emotional resistance predicate any creative breakthrough.

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