

FLAWSOME

MARKETING
BRANDING
BUSINESS
STRATEGIES
TRENDS
SALES
PROCESS
LATEST
CONTRIVERSY
DEALING WITH
NEGATIVE
FEEDBACK
POLITICAL
CORRECTNESS
UNDERDOG
MENTALITY
FREE PUBLICITY
CORPORATE TRANSPARENCY
SOCIAL MEDIA
HUMANISATION
CUSTOMER
PERCEPTION
CRISIS
MANAGEMENT
CUSTOMER
SERVICE

RYAN MCDONALD-SMITH

A NEW WAY OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In 2012 trendwatching.com predicted Flawsome to be one of the top future trends for business. It's a trend companies are using to stand out, engage customers, and be more memorable.

Flawsome is when a company is AWESOME despite, and sometimes because of, their flaws. The trend stems from human nature. People have a hard time genuinely connecting with, being close to, or really trusting, others who appear to have no weaknesses or flaws.

Discover how some of the world's fastest growing brands are marketing their flaws, and how, by being authentic, your business can attract a consumer base of advocates who love what you do, and will begin to spread your message for you.

Ryan McDonald-Smith

Ryan is a rising star as a visual branding strategist, graphic artist, web designer and cartoonist/illustrator. His company, Yunique Creation, helps start-up businesses create a unique, attention grabbing image and already established businesses to develop stronger connections with their target market through dynamic re-branding.

Find out more at www.yuniquecreation.com



The current marketing "rules" will ultimately lead to failure. In a crowded marketplace, fitting in is failing. In a busy marketplace, not standing out is the same as being invisible."

Seth Godin
Best Selling Author

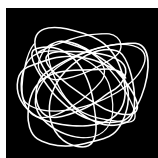
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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to two incredible men – my late grandfather, Norm Smith and school principal, Paul Thomson. I owe this book to them. Without their encouragement and belief in me as a writer when I was growing up, this book would never have been possible.

Thank you.

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It takes a village to raise a child; it also took a village to help me write this book.

I finished my secondary education to enter the workforce with determination and a talent for design. After some wanderings I found my place in graphic design and marketing. Throughout the journey I've studied, attended seminars, read extensively and, more importantly, worked hard to get where I am and to discover what I have learnt along the way.

My passion to teach and inspire is the driving force in the creation of this book. That said, I've developed a product that contains truly unique information and enables me to help pioneer the spread of a new marketing trend; a new way of doing business. I didn't do it alone and have a few people to thank for their help and support.

Firstly, I would like to thank my mother, Jean McDonald-Smith, who set this whole journey in motion. Not only did I follow in her footsteps as a successful self-published author, she was the one who emailed me the article from trendwatching.com which inspired the topic of this book.

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Lastly, thank *you*! If a falling tree doesn’t make a sound in a forest unless someone hears it, a book isn’t a book unless someone reads it. This is for you, enjoy!


INTRODUCTION

You're probably itching to get started so I'll keep this short and sweet.

This book is essentially about a marketing concept, which merges the traditional way of doing business with the fast-moving times of the 21st century. It is a trend which has emerged from forward thinking companies doing business with stronger integrity and authenticity than ever before.

Over the years technology progressed and companies grew from 'one serving a few' to 'many serving everyone'. As a result it was only practical that the way we did business would evolve to become mechanical and impersonal. It worked a treat for a time, but research is proving that people have had enough of being treated like a number.

This book will help you identify ways your business can be more unique and have people love you for it. It's not a get rich quick recipe, but it will allow you to stand out from crowd and increase customer loyalty; two vital ingredients for long-term business growth.



Playing it safe. Following the rules. They seem like the best ways to avoid failure. Alas, that pattern is awfully dangerous. The current marketing 'rules' will ultimately lead to failure. In a crowded marketplace, fitting in is failing. In a busy marketplace, not standing out is the same as being invisible."

Seth Godin
BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

STANDING OUT FROM THE HERD

Times have changed. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, there have been major shifts in how companies market themselves.

Branding is no longer about *differentiating* one business from another – branding is now aimed at making one business *stand out* from all the others. Just as businesses have to be more resourceful and creative to survive in this economic climate, they also have to do the same with their branding.

People with twenty to forty years' experience in specialised fields have been retrenched or forced to seek employment elsewhere, with many feeling pressure to prolong the period before retirement and look for new ways to fund and maintain their lifestyle. This has led to a sudden spike in the number of entrepreneurs who are utilising their specialised skill sets and going into business for themselves. It's an exciting time because this is where the most ingenuity and creativity arises, but it's also a time of strong competition. Even though we try to niche and market to a specific target audience, there's no denying that there are now more people than ever

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before who do what we do. In addition, some of them may be doing it better, for less.

According to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, there are 2.13 million actively trading businesses in Australia. Just over half of the new businesses in Australia fail within the first four years, and that sad fact has been true for quite some time. If you're not doing something dramatically different to your competition, you will just as soon end up another statistic.

A major frustration, which many good branding strategists have with traditional marketing techniques, is that most businesses are not marketing to create a better brand. They are merely promoting themselves, often aimlessly. At what point did we become so programmed that all our marketing materials started to look the same? I didn't study marketing in school, very few people did. In fact, most small business owners, who do their own marketing, haven't had any education whatsoever in the field. So the question is: where did we get it from? Well, the average Australian is exposed to around 3,000 advertising messages a day. Advertisers spend \$12billion a year persuading us to, as prominent financial author, Dave Ramsey rightly said, "buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't like".¹

It's monkey see, monkey do. We see what other companies, with well-established brand awareness, are doing and we assume that what's working for them must also work for us...so we do the same. There are simply too many companies just blasting out noise and calling it 'marketing' with no real thought behind it. So many global monoliths – the 'established brands' – just keep adding to the noise. Now the incessant surge of emerging start-up businesses is following suit and it's getting out of hand. There are very few points of difference; not much that is truly unique or creative.

I'm sure every person in business for him or herself has at least one clear point of difference. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on niche marketing, unique selling propositions, finding your big WHY, or any such thing. I'm going to assume you already know what makes you special. If the way you promote yourself has no clear point of difference then you risk being just another faceless brand adding to the noise. I want to show you a new and unique way to market, and ultimately brand yourself, so you're not just communicating that special little something, but you're doing it in a way that:

- ❶ Grabs attention,
- ❷ Holds attention,
- ❸ Makes a personal connection,
- ❹ Engages interaction, and
- ❺ Is memorable.

There's a trend emerging in the world today that really changes the way we interact with our customers and prospective clientele. The danger of giving it a name is that it implies it's just a new marketing technique. I relate such techniques to diets. They all have distinct names and tend to explode in popularity before fizzling out only to be replaced by the next new 'fad'.

The trend I'm talking about is not a short term fad. It is a trend which is already changing the way companies are doing business. It builds stronger sustainable relationships with clients and staff alike. Before we can define this new trend, we first need to realise an often overlooked fundamental of business:

All businesses are people businesses.

- People make products for people.
- People serve people.
- People work with people.
- People work for people.
- People market to people.

Keeping this fundamental in mind, it wouldn't be farfetched to say that the *root* cause of any business problem is not finance-related, it's not product-related, and it's not connected to structure or process. Today, as has plainly been the way it has worked for centuries, businesses live and die by their staff, contractors and management (people), and their interaction with customers (who are also people).

With the rise of social media people are interacting in a whole new way. That means businesses (people) are interacting with their customers (people) in new ways too. I won't attempt to dazzle you with the statistics of how many people use social media. Believe me when I say it's a lot, and by the time you finish reading this, those statistics will have increased dramatically.

Needless to say, the line between the business and personal aspects of life is blurring fast. I'm unsure of the right or wrong ways of blending the two. What I do know is this: humans have an innate yearning for social interaction and staying connected. There has been plenty of study on this topic and neuroscientists agree: the human brain seems to be programmed to seek out social interaction in order to grow.

South African Desmond Tutu explained in an interview that the

word ‘Ubuntu’, which has its origins in African Bantu languages, means that a person becomes a person only through other people.² Sadly, it’s entirely possible to work from home now and never actually see a customer in the flesh. Groceries, clothing and more, can be home delivered with a few mouse clicks. Among all the benefits of our progressing technology and communication, we have lost one very important thing: personal connection.

It’s clear that social media has gained so much popularity due to this lack of personal connection; people have lost touch with one another and are screaming to be reconnected. People are interacting with one another faster and more often now than at any other point in history, which is changing the way we do business. If a business is riddled with toxic internal politics there is no doubt that it will be unsuccessful in this new customer relationship era.

Any solutions in this new era won’t be new ‘business practices’: they will be new ‘people practices’. We don’t need a new ad campaign or organisational chart. There’s no quick fix. What we require is a change in our thinking. The competencies needed in today’s times are not greater public relations skills, but rather abilities in developing personal relationships. Even though it’s not easy to overturn decades of societal depersonalisation, today’s forward thinking companies are showing a willingness to listen and acknowledge their customers’ valuable input. This requires that they lay themselves bare and show that they aren’t faceless companies; that they are just people serving other people.

Although there seems to be uncertainty in finding the right way to draw a line between business and personal relationships, I truly believe that resisting it will harm businesses in the long-term. I find immense solace in this new trend into which we’re about to delve.

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The elusive trend I've been winding up to is called...

FLAWSOME!

I'd love to say I am the creative marketing genius who came up with the concept of **Flawsome**, but the truth is that I was inspired by a brief published by trendwatching.com in early 2012.

So, what is it?! Well, trendwatching.com defines **Flawsome** like this:



Consumers don't expect brands to be flawless. In fact, consumers will embrace brands that are Flawsome: brands that are still brilliant despite having flaws; being flawed (and being open about it) can be awesome. Brands that show some empathy, generosity, humility, flexibility, maturity, humour, and (dare we say it) some character and humanity."

Flawsome companies are:

- personable
- relatable
- caring
- open
- honest
- transparent
- human

- self-deprecating
- humble
- apologetic (when they do something wrong)
- unapologetic (about who they are)
- open-minded
- accessible

Flawsome companies can be:

- opinionated
- controversial
- politically incorrect
- shameless
- potentially offensive (but not for the sake of it)

Their communication with customers is usually:

- casual or informal
- humorous

One of the driving factors fuelling this **Flawsome** trend is 'humanised branding'.

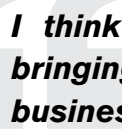
Humanised branding is when a business exhibits an attitude and set of distinct behaviours, resembling a person's personality. The personality could be inspired by an actual person, a board of directors, the staff, and/or the personality of the marketing department. It could be one of these which resonate through the

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rest of the company, or a collective personality that just develops naturally. Either way, it's the communication of the unique personality that differentiates 'humanised branding' from 'branding' as we traditionally know it.

The trend towards people being attracted to businesses with more humanised branding is based on human nature, which dictates that people have a hard time genuinely connecting with, being close to, or really trusting, other humans who appear to have no weaknesses or flaws. Now, for the first time in history, people openly broadcast and share their lives online – flaws and all. With that in mind, it's not hard to see why brands are increasingly expected to do the same. People are driving themselves away from boring brands in favour of ones with more personality, largely inspired by the rise in social media as we discussed earlier.

Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh explained it best:



I think people worry too much about bringing their personal selves into business, when I think the way to succeed in today's world is to make your business more personal."

Consumers' disillusionment at some downright dodgy corporate behaviour has festered into outright disgust and social media has only picked at the scab. As a result, any brand that can show business in a refreshing new light is guaranteed to be welcomed with open arms. With every business that succeeds while remaining reasonable, helpful, fun or even somewhat 'human', consumers will become increasingly disenchanted when dealing with traditional,

boring, impersonal brands. It's becoming more and more obvious that personality and profit are compatible.

Statistics released by *Havas Media* in late 2011³ revealed that most people would not care if 70% of brands ceased to exist. When I read that statistic, I wondered what the 30% were doing to make their customers care about them. Without knowing the identity of the 30% of companies, I'd be willing to put money on the fact that they truly care about their customers, and make it known.

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Another key driver for the **Flawsome** trend is the phenomenon known as 'corporate transparency'.

Brace yourself for a world in which everything – attitudes, prices, quality, behaviour, methods, processes, and other business practices which were previously thought to be private business – will be completely accessible and therefore potentially outed as 'flawed'. I'm not just talking about the legal safeguards put in place by governments to protect consumers from the questionable operations of dishonest companies, illustrated by the collapse of multinationals like *Enron*. I'm also talking about the exposure of previously invisible data through *WikiLeaks* and other whistle-blowing activity, in addition to subtle (yet equally infectious) user reviews, ratings, posts, comments, and general online word-of-mouth chatter.

Despite what most business owners fear, it's not actually isolated negative reviews which kill brands. In fact, there's evidence

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to say the opposite applies. Consumers aren't stupid – they know that no product can possibly satisfy everyone, all of the time. According to an article by Reevoo.com in early 2012⁴, 68% of consumers trust reviews more when they see both good and bad scores. Another study showed 30% of people suspect censorship or faked reviews if there aren't any negative comments. Now here's the clincher...Reevoo.com found that prospective customers who go out of their way to read bad reviews are 67% more likely to convert to paying customers than the average shopper.

Things can, and will, go wrong. While consumers are able to complain with more impact than ever before, brands too can react and respond. The real damage to a brand's reputation comes not from bad reviews, but rather from not listening to customers. Most consumers don't post their bad experiences for everyone to see straightaway. They tend to notify the company first. However, mismanagement of complaints and conflicts invoke online postings, which can spread like wildfire. Even if a negative review does go public, the response of the company is critical. *Maritz Research* reported that 83% of people who complained on *Twitter* and got a response from the brand they complained about liked or loved that the brand responded and 85% were satisfied with the response.⁵

If handled well, negative comments and responses from customers can be made **Flawsome**. You'll soon hear about a number of businesses that have mended and even built good reputations by responding in a **Flawsome** manner. Perfection is an illusion. Trying to maintain a flawless image can do more harm than good to a brand. With consumers likely to find out everything about your products, services and activities anyway, you have no option but to embrace the flaws in each. Through the

examples in this book I hope to give you some practical ways that show how you can embrace and even celebrate your flaws.

Being **Flawsome** is ultimately about having a mindset to which consumers can relate; a mindset that is open, honest, trusted, and will be respected.

BUT...

I need you to solidify one thing in your mind before we proceed. It's something to which I'm going to keep coming back. Every flaw needs to be presented in a desirable light because:

Flawsome without the 'awesome' is just flawed.

DIFFERENT IS NOT THE SAME AS WRONG; UNPOPULAR IS NOT THE SAME AS UNSUCCESSFUL

Our first example of a **Flawsome** brand is *CB I Hate Perfume*, started by a perfumer based in New York, Christopher Brosius. Described as one of the most innovative perfumers of the 21st Century, Brosius has won a number of awards, and his work is featured in museums. His background includes working for the *Demeter Fragrance Library* and one of the world's largest and most successful cosmetic retailers, *Kiehls*.

According to Brosius, his inspiration for *CB I Hate Perfume* was inspired by his experience as a cab driver. In his promotional video (do a quick *Google* search to find it, it's worth watching) he describes how most of the women who would pile into the back of his taxi to go out for the evening were drenched in perfume, which he called "horrible crap". He describes how twelve hours later in the freezing cold dawn, his eyes would still be watering and his stomach churning.

Brosius describes most perfumes as "an arrogant slap in the face from across the room" and "a lazy and inelegant concession to fashionable ego". The ethos of this perfume company ironically reflects the founder's opinion of mainstream perfume: "People who smell like

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everyone else disgust me.” The variety of scents *CB I Hate Perfume* developed are inspired by his childhood memories. One of the first perfumes he developed was named ‘Dirt’ and was inspired by one of his greatest childhood pleasures: digging among the vegetables, herbs and flowers in a small garden on his family’s farm. He says: “I loved the smell of the fresh clean earth and decided to bottle it.”

According to the company, the *CB I Hate Perfume* range is quite subtle and has been carefully crafted to reflect particular memories like dirt and dandelions, vegetable gardens, walks in the autumn woods, snow, wet rocks and fresh home-made cookies. Brosius probably isn’t one of the first people to find powerful mass-produced perfume repulsive and offensive. Judging by his brand’s immense success, it’s safe to say a whole bunch of people feel the same way. His company was born out of the flaws of an industry and profession he loved dearly. He saw more beauty in the flawed and honest smells of life than in the harsh abrasive fragrances for which the perfume industry is known.

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Perhaps one of the most extreme, examples of a **Flawsome** brand is *Heart Attack Grill* in the US.

It could be argued that fast food outlets, such as *McDonald’s*, that are releasing healthier food choices are **Flawsome**, and that having healthier options implies that the other items on their menu are not healthy. In the wake of Martin Spurlock’s movie

'*Super-Size Me*', *McDonald's* chose to add healthier options to their menu. *Heart Attack Grill*, on the other hand, has taken an entirely different approach, which has seen the company create a new and expanding empire.

Heart Attack Grill is a hospital-themed restaurant criticised for serving up an extremely unhealthy menu, including massive burgers, and having waitresses dressed in provocative nurse outfits. Even before entering the grill, customers are warned of the unhealthy temptations waiting for them inside. A large sign reads: "Caution: This place is bad for your health." The restaurant's motto is "a taste worth dying for". Unlike *McDonald's*, the company warns off anyone concerned about their weight and is proud to let everyone know there are no diet options available.

The burgers are named after open-heart surgical procedures including Single, Double, Triple and Quadruple Bypass Burgers, which range from half a pound (226 grams) to two pounds (900 grams) of beef. Each meal also includes unlimited 'Flatliner' Fries, which are cooked in lard, along with full sugar cola, cigarettes without filters, and only the strongest liquor. *Heart Attack Grill's* crown jewel, the Quadruple Bypass Burger, contains around 8,000 calories (33,600 kilojoules). To put that in perspective, an active adult's recommended daily intake of calories is around 2,000 to 3,000 calories...that's in one day, not one meal. On April 13th, 2012 *Guinness World Records* presented the *Heart Attack Grill* with an official certificate proclaiming that this burger was the "world's most caloric burger".

Is that the sound of your jaw hitting the floor? Wait, there's more!

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As a hospital-themed restaurant, the *Heart Attack Grill*'s build-ings look like a local doctor's clinic and the company's promo-tional vehicle looks like an ambulance. Customers are called 'patients', and are given hospital-inspired name bands for their wrists and encouraged to wear hospital gowns as bibs. A spe-cial wheelchair service is provided to customers who finish the Quadruple Bypass Burger and includes the 'nurse' of their choice wheeling them back to their car.

Here's the really ironic part: the restaurant was actually founded by a nutritionist, Jon Basso, who for years ran a *Jenny Craig* weight loss diet centre! He founded the controversial res-taurant in 2005 and calls himself 'Dr Jon'. He isn't under any illu-sions and freely admits that eating this way can end up sending you to the emergency room, which is where he got the idea to give the restaurant a hospital theme.

"I founded the *Heart Attack Grill* as a simple place where a guy can get a good burger, a cold beer, and not worry about being on a restrictive diet," Dr Jon said. "I run perhaps the only honest restaurant in America: hey this is bad for you and it's going to kill you."

The chain ran an exploitative advertising campaign in which it offered free food to morbidly obese customers. It announced that *Heart Attack Grill* would pick up the bill for any patron who weighed more than 25 stone (almost 160kg) and hired a forty-six stone (292kg) man, Blair Rivers, to star in a tongue-in-cheek commercial promoting the special offer. In the ad, Dr Jon said with a smile: "I personally guarantee a stable upward progression of body weight while you're enjoying great tasting foods. Along with a cold beer and cigarette, it's a diet you can stick to for life." The advertisement then stated the side effects

from eating *Heart Attack Grill* food “may include sudden weight gain, repeated increase of wardrobe size, back pain, male breast growth, loss of sexual partners, lung cancer, tooth decay, liver sclerosis, stroke, and an inability to see your penis” and that “in some cases mild death may occur”. Due to the popularity of the ads in late 2010 *Heart Attack Grill* became the number one globally searched internet term.

In February 2012 the inevitable happened and an onlooker captured video of paramedics wheeling a man, thought to be in his forties, out of the fast-food diner. Apparently the customer (I mean ‘patient’) suffered a cardiac arrest in the chain’s Las Vegas branch. He had apparently been eating a Triple Bypass Burger, which contains three slabs of meat, twelve rashers of bacon, cheese, red onion, sliced tomato and a ‘unique special sauce’. Can you imagine the Quadruple Bypass Burger?

I suppose one of the unofficial war-cries of **Flawsome** could be “any publicity can be good publicity”. The restaurant remains extremely popular with people looking for unhealthy meals, and is never out of the spotlight for long. In a recent interview, Dr Jon said: “Not a single week has gone by without me having given an interview with some radio, magazine, or television station somewhere in the world.”

Now let’s stop for a second. I don’t endorse this business. I personally find it disgusting and if I wasn’t open-minded, would automatically say it’s downright immoral. Perhaps the only redeeming feature is that *Heart Attack Grill* doesn’t sell kids’ meals. It sells to consenting adults and doesn’t mislead people. Who are we to judge these customers? They can make their own decisions in relation to their bodies and their health.

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Regardless, I think there is something we can all learn from the success of this business:

1 Don't be afraid to niche

Re-evaluate what you consider to be the right or wrong way to do business. There may be people out there who want the polar opposite to what your competition is doing.

2 Embrace your customers for who they are

The rest of the world is judging the *Heart Attack Grill's* customers. They already cop a lot of flak for being overweight or obese. This is a place where people can come and be glorified for the reasons others put them down. They can indulge in what makes them feel happy, and not feel ashamed about it. People will travel far and wide for a business that can make them feel accepted and loved.

3 People are naturally rebellious

I think most of us dislike being told what to do. Society can be harsh, especially when it comes to eating. We are told what we should eat, and what we shouldn't. The *Heart Attack Grill* is a great example of a company that cautions people about eating there, even discouraging them...and yet, customers flock to it. If that's not **Flawsome**, I don't know what is.

4 Tell it like it really is

Don't lead people to believe your products are something they're not. Don't give your customers unrealistic expectations. Your customers will reflect

your own attitude towards your flaws. If you can be proud of your weaknesses, people won't necessarily view them as shameful things.

5 Controversy = Free publicity

The media thrives on drama and controversy. Standing in line and being just like everyone else is a fantastic way to remain unnoticed. It's the unnoticed brands that end up paying the most for attention. If you're not annoying someone you're probably boring everyone else.

The *Heart Attack Grill* isn't scared of offending some people. The company realises that if you want people to love what you offer, you also have to accept that others may hate it. It's better than having a weak brand which no one remembers or talks about. I love this quote from Bill Cosby: "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."⁶ As my mum used to tell me growing up: "Sometimes it doesn't matter how hard you dance, some people just aren't going to clap."

When I started, I was willing to do business with everyone and anyone who had a dollar in their pocket. With increasing experience and education, I've started to realise that the money isn't always with 80% of potential customers, but with the 20% who match your own ethos. The stronger the personality of your business and more solid a foothold you have on your branding position, the more you increase the likelihood of encountering people who really don't like what you offer. The only way to escape opposition is to avoid taking a stance on anything. To lie down and accept the world as it is. Without delivering a history lesson, our entire human existence is rife with atrocities committed by people just following orders, trying to

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keep their peers happy. Those who have changed this world or left a legacy in history are the ones who didn't join the lines, but started their own.

If your business doesn't stand out, if you don't stand up, your message won't make much of an impact.

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During the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996 *Nike* ran a controversial ad campaign. The campaign slogan was: "You don't win silver, you lose gold." *Nike* has created a culture unabashedly built around winning, and if you can't take the heat, you're not in the club. People mostly love the brand for it. However, a few dislike it, but do you think the people running *Nike* lose sleep over it?

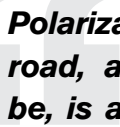
In a similar campaign, *And1*, a popular basketball shoe and apparel brand, addressed the meaning behind its name. The company basically said: "If you don't know what it means, we don't want you wearing our shoes." It's a 'street ball' expression, apparently. I don't know what it means, I don't wear the shoes. I do know that outside the NBA, *And1* is the biggest brand in basketball today and has an almost religious following through its fan base.

These two sports companies have both developed a culture that is only a dream for most brands. Are these kinds of corporate cultures **Flawsome**? Absolutely! Will it appeal to everyone? Nope. Does that mean they are losing business? Maybe a little, but I don't see either of these companies flinching in the slightest. Much more stands to be gained than lost.

Every strong and focused brand, just like every strong and focused person, creates this love/hate dynamic to some degree. If a brand annoys you, that's okay, you are not the target audience. If we complain about them, we're only adding fuel to the fire and reinforcing their brand's values. Remember, any publicity can be good publicity.

A colleague of mine, who teaches branding, once said to me that one of the biggest challenges he faces is getting his students to comprehend how niching will increase their business. It seems counter-intuitive, but the narrower you target, the broader you can catch. Brands that have a narrow target generally stand for something, while brands that target too broadly, often don't.

In his article entitled 'Why Your Brand Should Piss Someone Off', Austin McGhie, author of 'Brand is a Four Letter Word', stated:



Polarization is good. Travelling the middle road, as broad and tempting as it may be, is always and unequivocally bad. Like people, brands are defined by the company they keep. But they're also defined by the company they don't keep."⁷

You don't have to set out to provoke negative reactions in order to stand out, although sometimes that will happen whether you want it to or not.

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Taking negative feedback and improving your product is somewhat **Flawsome**, but what if you didn't do anything with the feedback and instead took a different approach? I'm not talking about ignoring naysayers, but rather embracing them? Embracing your 'haters' is part of another new trend called 'Acknowledging a Disconnect', which is basically a 'take us or leave us' approach.

Miracle Whip is a white salad dressing made popular in the US by *Kraft* as a sweeter alternative to mayonnaise. It's one of those things you either like or you don't. It's not really *Kraft's* fault, it just comes down to individual taste preference. I have never actually tried it, but what I do know is that their latest marketing campaign is sheer brilliance. Early in 2011 the company came out with a new slogan: "We're not for everyone. Are you *Miracle Whip*?" The campaign encouraged people to try the product and decide whether they liked it or not. It asked potential customers to "Keep an Open Mouth". The brand's *YouTube* channel featured celebrities expressing their love (or disgust) for *Miracle Whip*, while viewers could vote for whether they loved or hated it. A year later 60,000 people had 'loved' the brand while only 4,000 had 'hated' it. It may have appeared to be a division of the population, but really it brought people together in good spirit. It allowed the company to have a conversation with people who otherwise would have given them a wide berth.

Vegemite, as we know it, had a **Flawsome** beginning because it was originally invented by accident. It was a German scientist who discovered that brewer's yeast could be concentrated, bottled and eaten. In 1902 his formula gave rise to the popular UK spread *Marmite*. *Vegemite* followed in 1922 when the disruption

of British *Marmite* imports after World War I inspired an entrepreneurial Australian food company to develop its own version, which was later acquired by *Kraft Foods*.

Due to a slowly diminishing market share, *Kraft* tried to launch something new – reinventing the popular spread by blending it with cream cheese to create a monstrosity briefly known as *iSnack 2.0*. It's still around, it's now known as *Vegemite Cheesybite*, but its reception has been uninspiring. *Kraft* later tried to tone down *Vegemite*'s pungent flavour in a bid to recapture the taste buds of children, and address some of the high-salt health concerns that were putting off young mothers. It created a lower-salt, vitamin B-rich mild version of the spread aimed at infants, which the company called 'My First *Vegemite*'. An even bigger failure, it was pulled from supermarket shelves just over a year after its launch due to poor sales.

I wonder how different the success of their campaign would have been if *Kraft* had taken a page from *Miracle Whip*'s books? *Marmite*, on the other hand, did just that.

Facing the same diminishing market share, *Marmite* in the UK was also trying to encourage a new generation of consumers to try the salty product. Rather than softening *Marmite*'s taste and compromising the brand image, they 'Acknowledged the Disconnect' and instead celebrated the difference of opinion about the product with a new slogan: "Love it or Hate it".

When entering the new *Marmite* website you're asked "Who are you?" and given the opportunity to enter as a Lover, or a Hater, of the spread. Enter as a Hater and you'll be welcomed like this: "Eat *Marmite*? You'd rather rip the wings off live chickens. You'd rather be stripped naked in public. You'd rather swallow

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rat's tails and snail shells...Enough already! We get the picture. And yes, you're in the right place..."

Once you're in you'll find "10 ways to ruin a sandwich", one of which is called "4 Steps to the Perfect Road Kill Roll":

- ❶ *Take a couple of slices of old bread and spread with butter.*
- ❷ *On one of the slices spread your Marmite on top of the butter (we'd recommend 4g, or about the end of a knife).*
- ❸ *Now attempt to mask the flavour with your favourite dead animal, scavenged from the side of the road (e.g. hedgehog, cat etc.).*
- ❹ *Finish off with some rotten salad vegetables and close this vile concoction with the other slice of bread.*

Others include Cheese and Vaseline Roll, Musty Offal Stew with Emmental Cheese, Jam, Sand and Cheese Ciabatta, Toenail Cheese Surprise and Battered Bogey Bap. All of which are food concoctions that are 'ruined' by adding *Marmite*. The website also allows people to share their experiences of *Marmite* and they are actively encouraged to fuel this debate with an 'I Hate *Marmite*' registration form and the 'I Hate' forum.

If you enter as a Lover, you'll be given ideas on how to eat the spread, but there's humour here too. Their welcome message is: "Eat *Marmite*? You don't just want to eat it, you want to bathe in it, wallow in it like a hippo in mud, slather yourself from head to toe and wrap yourself in bread and butter...And you know what? That's fine. Just fine. Completely normal in fact..."

Marmite has created renewed momentum through social media by creating 'love it' and 'hate it' pages on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. The campaign built so much momentum, in fact, that it resulted in the coining of the phrase '*Marmite effect*' or '*Marmite reaction*' for anything which provokes such strong and polarised feelings. As in the example of *Miracle Whip*, this kind of marketing is brilliant.

A series of humorous images (known as Internet Memes) that have been shared on *Facebook* contain the words "Haters gonna hate" and nothing could be more true. If people are going to either love or hate your product no matter what, you may as well take control of the conversation and move it somewhere that it can be monitored and monetised. Remember the **Flawsome** war cry? "Any publicity can be good publicity."

Oh, and by the way, *Marmite* is now selling merchandise and guess what? It is selling 'Hate' merchandise to customers they never would have had traditionally. How cool is that?!

So what can we take away from the advertising genius of *Kraft Foods* (the UK division)? If you have a polarised market, ask yourself how you can strike up a conversation with your product 'lovers' and 'haters' alike. Being **Flawsome** is when you're unpopular with a percentage of the marketplace, and you turn it to your advantage.

THAT'S A MATTER OF OPINION

Have you ever worried that if you're too outspoken, you'll kill your brand? Well, you might be surprised to know you could be doing more harm than good by *not* showing what you stand for.

It wasn't too long ago that there were only a handful of TV stations and each had a single news show. Now, with the advent of cable TV and the internet, the world of news has never been the same. Objective reports have been replaced with subjective opinions and those leading the ratings seldom allow facts to get in the way of a good story.

Having an opinion is great, it's the spice of life and helps us to keep growing and developing not only as people, but as a nation. What happens when others don't agree? Freedom of speech doesn't come without its drawbacks and risks. We've all seen the backlash that can be caused by an off-handed remark made by a politician or celebrity.

In this world of increased job insecurity, major corporations are petrified of shareholder backlash and now shy away from igniting anything which may lead to a lawsuit. They've become so petrified of causing any kind of conflict that many opt for that safer 'middle of the road' attitude. There may be risk involved

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for companies that express opinions, but there's an even bigger risk involved in taking the middle road. The risk is in being seen as boring and meaningless and also appearing faceless and disappearing into the heavy traffic already clogging the marketplace. For some forward-thinking businesses, taking a stand on social issues is part of their culture and having an opinion is built into their marketing strategy.

The ice-cream company, *Ben & Jerry's*, actively promote corporate social responsibility. In the 2008 presidential election, it openly took sides and celebrated with the flavour 'Yes Pecan', echoing Obama's 'Yes, we can!' slogan. A year later, in perhaps one of its most controversial and well-known campaigns, the company showed its support of same-sex marriage by changing the name of the 'Chubby Hubby' ice-cream flavour to 'Hubby Hubby', complete with packaging that featured a cartoon image of two men marrying beneath a rainbow. Even though controversial, *Ben & Jerry's* believe in expressing the values of the company.

Opinions by and large always meet with controversies, regardless of which side you take. For example, Dan Cathy, president and chief operating officer of *Chick-fil-A*, one of America's largest family-owned fast food chains, spoke on radio against those who advocate same sex marriage. His family's long-held opinions on preserving the 'institution of marriage' did not go down well with many people and actually affected his restaurant's image. Public relations professionals deemed the decision by *Chick-fil-A's* management to voice its opinion a colossal misstep. The original radio statement and subsequent statements thereafter ignited anger and disgust from many who opposed their ideals. Yet the company continues to thrive. Though they offended some people, the controversial statements drew them even closer to those who shared their beliefs. Dan Cathy's opinion has brought the lesser-known

restaurant into light (both nationally and internationally) and the business has since seen a 2.2 per cent increase each year.

Another brand which thrives on having an opinion as a part of their marketing strategy is Italian fashion empire, *United Colors of Benetton*. Its focus has always been more on promoting a message than selling a product. Many of Benetton's ads show support for issues such as homosexuality, disbanding racism, and fighting world hunger, or display the brutal realities of life including birth and death. The company's co-founder and chairman, billionaire Luciano Benetton, said: "We did not create our advertisements in order to provoke, but to make people talk, to develop citizen consciousness." The campaigns have scored the company a position in the list of one of the world's most controversial – and successful – brands of all time.

Brands today typically take a mediocre outlook and rarely have real opinions, ones that have the potential to shape our beliefs and change the world. Wouldn't it be awesome (or **Flawsome**) to never again have to walk on eggshells? Deliberately polarising your brand gives you the freedom to communicate naturally and say what you really mean. By taking a stand and having a distinct brand personality, you'll attract a consumer base of advocates who love what you do, and will begin to spread your message for you. Just by being you, you'll build an environment that also lets your customers be themselves – as we've already discussed, that's an incredibly powerful thing for gaining customer loyalty.

We all have friends in our lives who we disagree with at times; brands are no different. Just because your opinions might be different to those of some of your customers, doesn't mean you can't still be 'friends', so to speak. Relationships can thrive on differences when there is a culture of respect.

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When *Whole Foods* CEO, John Mackey, published an article concerning healthcare reform, it caused a controversy among *Whole Foods*' customers. As a company that has embraced social media, *Whole Foods* wisely kept to its **Flawsome** social media philosophy and encouraged comments on Mackey's opinion (both positive and negative). People might not have liked the opinion, but the company remained open to hearing different views and criticisms. It's that kind of openness which earns respect.

So how can you effectively weigh the risks and rewards of having an outspoken opinion as a company or brand? Every successful brand in history is unpopular with a distinct demographic, but it certainly hasn't hindered the company's chances at success. Take for instance the Coke versus Pepsi campaigns of the nineties. Do you think Cola sales went down or up (in general) during that period? If done well, controversy attracts attention and media exposure and can benefit all involved; regardless of which side you're on. If your business doesn't care about something, your potential market won't care about your business. If anything, having an opinion can attract fiercely loyal fans and an audience that will stick with you through thick and thin – which is what every brand needs to survive and grow.

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Having an opinion can sometimes attract some opposition, as we've discussed. The next question is how to deal with opinions which differ from your own.

Often our natural reaction is to be defensive when under the

impression that we're being criticised or when we think the truth will be threatening. It's all too easy to quickly justify our own words and actions and fob off naysayers as being ignorant or stupid. Though I've put a lot of emphasis on standing up for yourself in this book, it often takes a lot more guts to look in the mirror and be candid about your own motives.

When defending ourselves against feedback which doesn't feel good, we typically do so in one of two ways: overtly or covertly.

To do it overtly would be to argue, undermine, counter-attack, attack pre-emptively, sneer, mock, and even recruit others to back us up. Though 'overtly' is probably the way that does the most obvious damage to our reputation and hurts others the most, 'covertly' is the most toxic and self-harming. Defending ourselves covertly breeds cynicism and resentment. The covert approach is when we hide our reactions. Instead of openly arguing with the person we argue silently by thinking about the extent to which they are wrong. We judge, dismiss, and avoid them and their feedback. Whether it's covert or overt, our defensiveness shouts, "I don't want to know!" Most people will see that reaction and decide not to share their opinion. The result is that we could be blocking the truth, or obstructing the flow of helpful and important information.

What's the solution?

When people say things you don't like, whether it is to your face or via things like reviews, ratings and online comments, set aside your defensive reactions. Instead be curious and ask questions to encourage more detailed feedback. Imagine you are not invested in your own viewpoint and be determined to learn from the criticism. Focus entirely on understanding, keeping in mind the real possibility that you may have misunderstood. Decide that you

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will not judge their viewpoint until you have understood it completely and don't just pretend to ask questions so that you can learn when you really intend to trap or undermine the person, or make them look stupid. Be curious, fascinated and inquisitive.

Learn to love feedback. Bill Gates has said: "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."⁸ The more you resist feedback, the more you risk stunting your professional growth.

When we're being curious and asking questions of people, we can't expect the truth without first making it safe for them to be honest with us. Many companies say they're open when they're not. A manager may ask for feedback and then cut down the first person who speaks. An employee may raise an issue and then be vilified for speaking. If you ask for more truth, you have to make it okay for people to speak it. Never put someone down for having an opinion, instead probe deeper to better understand them. Your curiosity must be genuine if you're truly going to cure your defensiveness and use feedback for business growth.

Andrew Horabin is the creator of the ironically successful comedy character, Mick the Demotivational Speaker. Horabin himself is a professional speaker, trainer, facilitator, comedian, author and award-winning songwriter. He has written an incredible book called '*Bullshift*', which is a must read. It's about the 'BS' we say and do in our daily lives and particularly in the workplace. In this book Horabin offers some quick tips on awareness of your own behaviour and reactions:

- Watch your behaviour like an external observer.
- Ask yourself why you're reacting that way.

- Ask what would happen if you were relaxed and completely yourself.
- Your deeper motivations should start to show up.
- Either choose to continue – knowing your motivation – or choose a different response, working at being more authentic instead.⁹

Being **Flawsome** is also about being open-minded, and it's impossible to be that way if you continue to let your unconscious motivations get in the way.

I really get a kick out of watching movies and reading articles which challenge my perspective and what I consider to be the truth. When we are young the world seems black and white, as we grow we realise there really are so many grey areas. People who grow up clinging to the black and white of life are often the most rigid. They are the ones in life, and business alike, who struggle with the fast-moving times. Today's businessperson needs to have an open mind and accept that the right way of doing something today, may not be the right way of doing that same thing tomorrow.

There are four steps to being more open minded:

- 1 Choose an opinion.
- 2 Identify and own your investment in it.
- 3 Remove the investment.
- 4 Review the opinion.

TURNING KRYPTONITE INTO GOLD

In 1949, more than a decade after the first ‘*Superman*’ comic book, the publishers decided that the character had become a bit *too* unbeatable. As a result, the Man of Steel’s great weakness, kryptonite (first encountered in a single episode of the radio serial six years earlier), was introduced to the comic. Pioneering female editor, Dorothy Woolfolk, claimed she brought kryptonite to the comics. In August 1993, she told the Florida newspaper *Today* that she had found Superman’s invulnerability dull and thought that DC’s flagship hero might be more interesting with an Achilles’ heel.¹⁰ The vulnerability made him more ‘human’ so it was easier for readers to sympathise with him. I suppose it’s safe to say it worked, considering Superman’s popularity to this day.

That brings us into our next look at embracing customer feedback, and the reality that as business owners we can no longer hide behind a façade of expertly-fabricated perfection. Customers can now discover all aspects – both good and bad – of your business online, whether you like it or not. Slowly, but surely, brands have embraced this idea along with the ‘if you can’t beat

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‘em, join ‘em’ mentality, accepting and even showcasing unfiltered, consumer-created, social content.

Review sites have now become sort of ‘industry bibles’ for educated consumers. *Nielsen* research¹¹ suggests that 71% of Australians look at web reviews from other members of the public. For example:

- *Trip Advisor* for travel
- *Yelp* and *Urban Spoon* for restaurants
- *Rotten Tomatoes* for films
- *Amazon* for books

It’s worth remembering that 68% of consumers trust reviews more when they see both good and bad scores, while 30% suspect censorship or faked reviews if there aren’t any negative comments or reviews. From this we can conclude that a lot of people are sick to death of overly positive testimonials. To combat this feeling, many brands are incorporating reviews directly from third party sites into their own, thus avoiding any hints of impropriety or massaging. With people continuously venting on social networks, there are already tools which allow savvy users to see any comment relating to products or services, however or wherever they are uttered. Not bringing this information to your customers is just inconvenient (and not very **Flawsome**).

Countless brands have started to incorporate reviews, comments and public responses into live websites. The *Four Seasons* luxury hotel chain overhauled its website in early 2012 to include customer reviews from *Trip Advisor* plus comments from *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Comments are placed prominently for all to see and users can click through to external content.

Starwood Hotels also started publishing customer reviews directly through its website in 2011, instead of using external review sites such as *Trip Advisor*. This can be a scary thing for a business to do at first, but if consumers are going to comment, why not have them do so in a controlled environment, where you can see, hear, understand and, best of all (or most **Flawsome** of all), respond to them? Use it like a focus group and turn those bad reviews around with great customer service.

Of course, there may always be a bad apple in the bunch who just wants to give a scathing review or hurtful comment – but just know that other consumers see right through those kind of comments and may stand up for you, actually embracing your message more.

A number of theatres are experimenting with reserving special seats in the back row to be called ‘Tweet Seats’ where Twitterhollic audience members can discuss the performance via social media as it’s happening. That might seem like the most direct way a customer can spread their feedback for all to see, but there’s an even better one!

Domino’s Pizza’s Times Square campaign is possibly the greatest act of bold transparency and incredibly visible customer feedback we’re likely to see. The company took atrocious reviews and bad press and used them to improve sales and customer perception. It’s new website slogan, ‘Order. Track. Review’ was a novel idea to encourage people to let the company know what they thought about *Domino’s* pizza and service. The company took the concept one step further though. *Domino’s* put a scrolling LED sign in Times Square which displayed reviews from customers in real time, in plain sight of everyone in NYC’s busiest intersection for foot traffic.

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It all started in 2009 after employees posted a negative *YouTube* video, which sparked *Domino's* to take a long hard look at the company and start monitoring the feedback it was getting from customers on social networks like *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Management took the feedback on board and made some changes to their pizza recipes and the way they were prepared. The company then created a candid five minute *YouTube* video entitled “The Pizza Turnaround”, which documented the changes it was making in response to the negative feedback that had been received online. It was accompanied with a by-line: “Did we actually face our critics and reinvent our pizza from the crust up? OH YES WE DID.”

The videos start with snippets from actual tweets which included: “pizza was cardboard”, “mass produced, boring, bland pizza”, and “microwave pizza is far superior”, followed by *Domino's Pizza's* president, Patrick Doyle, saying: “There comes a time when you know you’ve gotta make a change.” It then goes on to show top board members all cringing with a sombre realisation as they were presented with the video results of customer focus groups. I question the authenticity of the video because it is very cheesy and manufactured (no pun intended). It comes across as sincere, but possibly faked. Kind of like an infomercial testimonial. Regardless, the fact still remains that it’s refreshing to see a large corporation admit its faults openly and make promises to fix them rather than making slight adjustments in secret.

In another step forward, *Domino's* then shifted people’s focus from the negative feedback it was getting and created what it called the ‘Think Oven’, which is basically a massive online suggestion box. The company encouraged people to submit their ideas for how *Domino's* could improve other aspects of the business, not just the pizza. The pizza outlet wanted to know how it

could improve service, uniforms, stores and anything else people could think of. The company then showed customers that they were really valued by producing a video which starts with the words: “It really does make sense to get ideas from our customers –they’ve got the best ideas and they know what they want *Domino’s* to be.”

Here are some quick tips when getting feedback from customers:

Don’t use social media to continually flog stuff

I see too many businesses abuse their fandom by only sharing information about products and services via social media. The problem is that promotional tweets and *Facebook* posts don’t typically generate useful conversations with fans and that’s definitely NOT **Flawsome**. It’s not all about you, you, you! Instead, post *stuff* – contests, polls, and questions – but most of all, keep your posts fun and casual. Let your customers know they’re valued and help them get to know your company’s personality.

Crowd Sourcing – Ask for new ideas

Customers love having the opportunity to influence the direction of companies, but they’re unlikely to provide valuable ideas without being prompted first. Think about proactively posting or tweeting questions that ask for customers’ thoughts on specific product ideas, marketing strategies, or anything else that is relevant. Don’t just accept the feedback and be on your merry way. When people answer you, dig deeper and get into a conversation, try to create some real dialogue. I know I keep harping on this, but companies need more than positive feedback to help drive progress. Try to pose questions which encourage feedback rather than

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testimonials. Ask things like: “What clothing designs do you want to see next?” rather than, “What are your favourite designs?”

Do something with the feedback you’re given

Often, the people taking care of social media for larger organisations are completely removed from decision making within the company. It’s easy to understand why valuable ideas don’t get put in place when they never get to the right people. If you’re serious about embracing social media as a feedback mechanism, think about putting systems in place to make sure the feedback from customers is passed along and considered seriously. Once the customers realise that their ideas are being turned into reality, it will only strengthen your dialogue and relationship with them.

Domino’s Pizza did all of these things and took a five-step process I think we can all learn from:

① Gain customer feedback

First, collect the negative feedback, present it to your decision makers and key staff, and then filter it down through the organisation so everyone is on the same page.

② Admit your faults publicly and candidly

Let people know you’re listening by admitting to the faults they brought to you. It will establish an instant connection. They will be hooked in and eager to find out what you’re going to do with their feedback.

③ Publicly commit to improving them

It’s not enough just to admit your faults without either attempting to change people’s perception about them (which we’ll talk more about later) or

making changes to improve them. Recognising your faults and doing nothing will make things worse than if you'd simply ignored them.

4 Improve it and prove it

Make your changes and provide evidence to prove that you've done it. The changes can't be subtle or generalised – detail everything.

5 Shift the focus

Domino's did it by launching the 'Think Oven' suggestion box. The company distracted people from the negative reviews about its pizza and focused on the service and other aspects of the company. This time management was taking control of negativity and directing it in a more constructive, empowering manner. They disarmed their 'haters' by getting them on board to help grow and improve the company. It's pure marketing genius.

Clearly social media is as potentially valuable as it is potentially dangerous. It's inescapable, so it makes sense to turn it to your advantage. Below are *Intel's* Social Media Guidelines – consider using them as a checklist for yourself when making branding or marketing decisions.

- Be transparent.
- Be judicious.
- Write what you know.
- Perception is reality.
- It's a conversation.

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- Are you adding value?
- Your responsibility.
- Create some excitement.
- Be a leader.
- Did you screw up?
- If it gives you pause, pause.

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It requires a certain amount of confidence to take negative feedback on the chin. It takes even more humility to embrace it and admit faults freely. With the Australian 'Tall Poppy Syndrome', it's hard enough for most people to talk about their strengths for fear of being cut down, let alone admit their weaknesses. Ironically, knowing how best to talk about weaknesses can be one of our greatest strengths.

A job interview is a great scenario for illustrating how best to talk about your flaws and weaknesses. Marketing is like a job interview; we are answering silent questions about what makes us so great, in an attempt to win people over. The inevitable question commonly asked during interviews is, "what is your biggest weakness?", and though it may go unsaid, our customers are asking the exact same question. Like an employer, they are just trying to get a wholistic view of what they are investing in – both the good and the bad.

The two most common mistakes I've encountered when people first try to be **Flawsome** and answer this question is

that they replace a weakness with a strength, or they are a little too honest. Often our attempts to be clever, or adopt a blatant 'honesty is the best policy' mentality can end up doing more harm than good when influencing the decision of an employer or prospective customers. Have you ever caught yourself using this response when asked your greatest weakness in an interview and thought you had outwitted the interviewer? "My biggest weakness is I'm a perfectionist." Ironically, by answering the question in this way we are making it more difficult for the interviewer, if they hire us, to put us in a position of strength. In other words, in an attempt to sound strong we increase the likelihood of being weak.

Perhaps you know someone who's just a little too honest and says something like, "I'm really disorganised", "I've been told I keep a messy work space", or "I have kids and may need to leave in the middle of the day if they're sick". The first step when talking about your weaknesses is honesty, no doubt. Remember though, **Flawsome** without the 'awesome' is just flawed. Instead of saying, "I'm addicted to *Facebook* and find it a big distraction when working alone", try something like: "There is nothing I love more than working with others, the back and forth of ideas. In contrast, you won't get the best work out of me if I'm always on projects that require me to work alone." Rather than saying, "I'm a little disorganised at times", try something like: "I'm a forward thinker and in the past my forward-thinking has enabled me to contribute some really valuable ideas and insights which helped my previous employer to increase profitability. In contrast I have a tendency to lose sight of short term medial stuff and am best suited for project planning rather than organising roles."

In the marketing arena, when addressing your pricing structure

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and answering the question, “Why are you so expensive?” try: “We don’t take our prices for granted. We know we are more expensive than most which is why we work so hard to make sure you get value for money. We found that if we worked on a budget that was too tight, we couldn’t deliver our best efforts and give our clients truly memorable service or give our projects the attention to detail they deserved for a remarkable finish. You get what you pay for in life and you will notice the difference with us.”

Remember too, a little bit of humour can go a long way. Perhaps we can take a leaf from Dan, a web designer from *alittlebitofsomething.co.uk*, who instead of saying, “I’m often late and bad at sticking to deadlines” said:

It takes me longer than it should to build websites because I’m all picky about things being proper. I’m a bit like the furniture maker who sands and varnishes the underside of a cabinet. Yes, that’s right; it’s a bit stupid and isn’t a ‘viable business model’. I wish I could be ruthless and churn out rubbish, but I can’t, which is why I eat out of bins and can’t afford to put the heating on.”

By showing honesty and humility we are more relatable and trustworthy, characteristics that are held in high esteem by customers and employers alike. The worst thing you can possibly do is lie in order to project what you perceive to be a ‘better’ version of yourself. This will only set up unrealistic expectations and lead to disappointment. Talking about weaknesses is one thing, dealing

with them is another. There are two ways of dealing with weaknesses and flaws:

1 Identify the cause and correct it

Gain customer feedback or do some self-reflection to reveal your flaws. Spend time identifying what is causing them and put processes in place to correct them, like *Domino's Pizza* did with their 'Pizza Turnaround' campaign.

2 Change your perspective

I like this one the most because it means you don't have to change a thing. All you have to do is reframe how you think and feel about it.

If your weakness or flaw is something you can fix without a lot of effort, then fix it. If not, is it something that can be turned around to work in your favour? How can your weakness be seen as your strength? Albert Einstein said: "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one." There really is no truth but in the eyes of the beholder. What appears as a flaw to one person may be an asset in the eyes of another. Some men find women with big butts attractive, while many women complain their butts are too big. Many men work hard in the gym to build larger muscles, while some women find overly muscular men repulsive. It's likely that somewhere in the world there is someone who would be attracted to the very thing you believe is your greatest flaw.

In the spirit of being **Flawsome**, it is entirely possible to make a flaw awesome by changing your perspective about it. Not only that, it can then extend to influencing the perspective

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of your customers, so that what they may have thought was a negative aspect of your business, they start to see as a positive feature.

Isaac Newton said: “To every action there is always an equal and opposite reaction.” In this context, life is a balance of equals and opposites. It is impossible to have one side of a coin without the other and if you could, the coin would simply cease to exist. With that irrefutable fact in mind, it’s reasonable to assume that for every weakness, there is a strength that explains or provides context for that weakness. You can’t have one without the other. When addressing a weakness with strength, do so within the context of why that weakness exists. In other words, what strength caused that weakness? Perhaps turn this into an exercise. The first step would be to list everything you perceive to be a flaw and then take a close look at these flaws and list an opposite in the same context. For example, the opposite of “I’m not very creative”, might be “I’m very straight forward and practical”. Then think of the strength behind that opposite – it might sound like: “I’m very straight forward and practical which means I’ll never sell you something you don’t need and I will produce results you can rely on.”

Leo Babauta, creator and writer for *Zen Habits*, which is one of the top twenty-five blogs and top fifty websites in the world, wrote a blog post in September 2008 entitled ‘*Attack Your Limitations: Turn Your Weaknesses Into Strengths*’.¹² In it he gives some fantastic examples on how we can reframe our perception about our weaknesses and so-called flaws. He writes: “The more you practice this mindset, the better you’ll get at it.”

Here are just a few examples he gives which I've adapted to fit the context of perception:

- **Not a good public speaker**

You're an intimate communicator and are great at talking to small groups or one-on-one instead. You talk in ways that connect with people – that draw them to you.

- **Not a good writer**

You are a people person instead. Rather than writing a great proposal, make it in person. Instead of writing a report, do a great presentation. Instead of writing a great blog, you do video blogs or podcasts. Most people are visual and will relate to you better in person or by video anyway.

- **Don't have a lot of money to start a business**

Small is actually an advantage in business. You can develop products without bureaucracy, with a quick turnaround, without too much planning or too many meetings. You can market using guerrilla tactics. You are faster and more nimble than a larger competitor. You can adapt faster.

- **You aren't fast**

You are deliberate, thorough and more thoughtful. You work on important stuff instead of cranking out a lot of rubbish.

- **Don't have a large blog audience**

You build stronger bonds with the small audience you have. You can really get to know every new

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reader and you have fun with your audience in a way bigger bloggers can't.

- **Not a people person**

You work on brilliant stuff alone. You are the creative driving force behind the scenes and make amazing stuff using your talents. You find people who ARE people persons to promote your stuff for you.

- **Not organised**

You're a creative genius instead of a diligent organised person. You keep things simple and highly productive.

- **Not good with tech**

Working with paper or simple text files will allow you to concentrate more on your work rather than always being online, trying out the latest tech stuff, learning new coding methods or whatever. You let others figure out technology for you.

- **Don't have enough time**

You take what limited time you have and use it to maximum effect. Limitations are good — they force you to choose, and in so doing, force you to choose what's most essential. That increases your effectiveness.

Got the idea? Now when you take a candid look at yourself and list your flaws, keeping this mindset, write how they can benefit you and others. Once you've done that, you can pick the relevant ones to market to your perspective customers or prepare **Flawsome** responses to customer concerns.

Ruffles Chips in Brazil dealt with customer concern very successfully using this exact process. Customers were often complaining on their company *Facebook* page about the ratio of chips to air in each packet. In response, *Ruffles* created an 'infographic' (illustrated explanation) showing the chips' journey from factory to store, explaining how the air was actually intended to act as an airbag for protection, not a way to rip customers off. Sometimes people make assumptions based on their own ignorance. It's not their fault though, if *Ruffles* customers were never told the reason for air-cushioning it would be totally reasonable to assume the company sneakily pump the bags up to make it look like customers were getting more for their money than was really the case. Sometimes all it takes to change a perception is a little education.

Avis, the car rental company, started in 1946 with a grand total of three cars. In 1963 it launched a bold advertising campaign stating 'We're only No.2. We try harder'. It's now acknowledged as one of the ten best advertising slogans of all time and regarded as the very essence of the company's culture. Today, *Avis* worldwide operates in over 4,000 locations in an impressive 114 countries.

With so many companies competing for the number one spot, this proves you don't have to be the biggest or the best, and, in fact, being the opposite can be just as effectively marketed. You can emphasise that because your company is smaller you are able to develop a more individual relationship with your customers and can give a more personalised service with attention to detail.

Another example of someone reframing people's perceptions was Ronald Reagan during the 1984 US Presidential election. He was seventy-three at the time and experts regarded it as his biggest weakness when coming up against a much younger candidate in Walter Mondale. When asked if he expected to have

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trouble “keeping up” during a televised debate, Reagan slipped people’s concerns right back on to Mondale by responding: “Not at all. And I want you to know that I will not make age an issue in this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent’s youth and inexperience.” Not only did Reagan get a laugh from the audience (and his competitor Mondale alike), he won the election in a landslide totally debunking the age issue. Perhaps it could have easily gone the other way if Mondale had been more **Flawsome**. If, like me, you are much younger than your competitors, you could positively capitalise on your age by pointing out that you have the most recent education in the newest techniques and use the latest technology.

I didn’t go to university and have learned mostly through experience. Developing my design skills from an early age, I have always had an eye for detail; particularly when it comes to advertising and branding. Many would consider the lack of formal education a weakness. I turn this around by pointing out that I have a “fresh and unique” perspective on design because I’m not bogged down by the standard old way of doing things. I present myself in a way which highlights being ‘new’, ‘unique’, ‘fresh’ and other words that appeal to buyers who don’t want the same old thing; who want to impress others with outstanding design. Needless to say it works for me as an entrepreneurial Gen Y.

You might not know it, but Academy Award winning actor Sir Anthony Hopkins, famous for playing the role of Hannibal Lector, is also a successful painter. He has even been commissioned \$136,000 for one of his paintings (with the proceeds going to charity), yet he is untrained. When asked about his success as a painter, despite his lack of academic qualifications, he said, “I don’t care about criticism or rules, because I don’t know the

rules and therefore am not bound by them”. He then quoted Henry Miller who said: “Paint as you like and die happy.”¹³

If you are having difficulty handling a perceived negative or trying to set yourself apart from your competition, flip your weaknesses into strength. It may just turn into the biggest strength you have!

PERCEPTIONS, REALITIES AND CUSTOMER CARING

At a business networking breakfast

I attended a short time ago, the guest speaker shared how she had built a multi-million dollar business after moving to a new country (Australia) with no money, no prospects, and knowing very little English. During her talk she said something which really got me thinking. She asked us: “What is excellent customer service?” There were a few answers, things like “making a promise and keeping it”, “going beyond the call of duty”, “caring about your customers” and so on. Whilst she acknowledged that they were all great responses, she said the real answer is very simple. Drawing a line on a board (actually it might have been a *PowerPoint* presentation...but play along), she said, “this is your customers’ expectation”. She then drew a second line just above it stating, “and this is what you deliver”. That’s excellent customer service.

So we can assume meeting your customers’ expectations is good service and anything below that is bad customer service.

It played on my mind for a couple of days and I kept coming back to it. There was one thing about that simple formula which

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intrigued me...where did that expectation come from? I could only come up with two possible sources:

- ❶ Previous experience with another provider (you're being compared to someone else).
- ❷ You told them, either directly or indirectly through your sales pitch and marketing materials, what to expect from you.

Even if someone has had previous experience with another provider in the past, your marketing still sets their expectations. I remember another thing my mother, who has an international organisation with a multi-million dollar annual turn-over, used to tell me: "Always under promise, and over deliver." I'm most interested in how people's expectations are set because I believe it's the key consistently satisfy customers. How many of us are making our jobs harder by setting our prospective customers up with unrealistic expectations? I don't actually think customers are getting pickier and expecting more for less on their own, it's this Bigger/Better syndrome brought on by advertisers trying to out do each other. It's also partly due to the overwhelming competition which stems from the economic climate.

Customers expect more because companies are promising more.

What if we only made promises we could easily keep and out-perform? What if we could weed out the customers we don't want and attract the ones we do want, right from the start? What if we could turn our flaws into benefits? Here's that word again...what if we could be totally **Flawsome** and have people love us for it?

Dan, who I mentioned earlier, is a website designer in Cornwall, UK. From the perspective of a fellow designer, I find his website ‘*A Little Bit of Something*’ hilarious. I’ve sent the url to many friends in the industry and they all get a kick out of this guy. Dan says the things we all wish we could. His single page website with oversized fonts breaks all the rules of ‘correct’ website design and sales copy letter writing I’ve ever heard of. It is such a brilliant example of how it’s possible to set your customers’ expectations in your favour.

I’ve transcribed the entire thing here for your convenience. Enjoy!

I create websites.

Not shit websites.

Good websites.

Things I have made by wiggling my mouse.

[Portfolio of images]

And yes, that’s very astute of you. I can do more than just design websites; I can do branding and illustrations too. I can also do a great impression of an injured monkey, but now is not the time nor is it the place.

You are not a web designer. I am the web designer. You wouldn’t tell Mr Marks of Spencer how to make slacks or Mrs Audrey Audi how to build motor cars, would you? So please, Sir, don’t tell me I should “bevel” things. Get back to

doing what you do best and let me do the web designing.

If you take control, you'll end up with a huge lump of dog muck, and people will laugh at it behind your back. Youths will point and say:

"That man didn't listen to the web designer and his website looks shit."

All I need from you is a brief. And no, the logo doesn't need to be bigger. Pipe down and have a biscuit. Leave this to me.

I need some new brogues.

You need a website.

I often get asked, "How much does a website cost?" Some people would respond, "How long is a piece of string?" I don't respond like that because it's a shit expression. The people who say that probably have long nasal hair and wear socks with sandals.

The price depends on what you want me to build. Here is a clever chart I have created that should give you an idea if you look at it with your eyes.

[Price scale which reads:

- * Up to £500 – Logos & Brands
- * Up to £1000 – A simple website
- * Up to £2500 – A website with a bit where you can login and change the words and pictures on the pages.
- * Over £3000 – A larger website where you can list things and sell them

* Over £4000 – A mucky website with videos of muffs, knockers and winkies*

* I've never built one of these really, I just threw it in for a bit of 'spice']

I don't take cheques, they're shit.

I am not a horse.

I am a male human. For over 12 years, I have designed websites. Prior to that, I was a shepherd on a remote island in the Pacific. I wasn't. I was a recruitment consultant; people spat at me in the streets and shouted, "You're nearly as bad as an estate agent, you knob."

I live in Cornwall in the UK. I work from an office at home. I generally sit here in my tracksuit pants with a crap patchy beard and listen to Billy Joel whilst I work.

But none of that matters really, does it? I mean, you wouldn't be bothered if I wore a ladies blouse and PVC boots as long as I built a good website, would you? What's that? You would? Oh, I'm a pervert, am I? We'll see about that; put this mask on.

It takes me longer than it should to build websites because I'm all picky about things being proper. I'm a bit like the furniture maker who sands and varnishes the underside of a cabinet. Yes, that's right; it's a bit stupid and isn't a "viable business model". I wish I could be ruthless and churn out rubbish, but I can't, which is why I eat out of bins and can't afford to put the heating on.

I like to think I'm fair and honest, a bit like Mike from the

garage who shows me the parts he's replaced and tells me about his athlete's foot, except I won't go into my fungal infections. I'll just charge you a fair price and do the job properly.

And yes, I'm the same idiot who sold a used wetsuit on eBay for £9,000.

“Call me on the line” – Blondie 1980

There are many ways to get in touch with me. You could attach a note to the collar of a fox and tell him about the loose lid on my bin.

Alternatively, you could call me on my telephone by dialling the number [go to www.alittlebitofsomething.co.uk to find out]

Or perhaps call me on Skype?

Or even send me an email to dan at [alittlebitofsomething](mailto:alittlebitofsomething.co.uk) with a “dot co dot uk” at the end.

I'm not posting my address here because I'll end up on a mailing list for some weird religious group that needs money for new robes.

I don't have a fax machine anymore. I threw it out in 1991 along with my Joe Bloggs jeans and a double cassette album called Deep Heat.

Remember how we said controversy = free publicity? Well the same goes for humour, especially the tongue-in-cheek variety. Dan hasn't had to spend a dime on SEO or internet marketing. His website has had over 200,000 visits, and at the time of writing

this has almost 17,000 likes on *Facebook*. Where most websites have two or three Google +1's, he has had over 6,000. *Twitter* was buzzing with comments about the website when he launched it, and guess what? Now I've told all of you about it too and who will you tell?

This tactic isn't going to be one which works for all businesses; it's extreme to say the least. What can we take away from his copy writing skills if we're not brave enough to say it like he does?

- **Put yourself into your copy**

If you're the only one in your business and it's probably going to stay that way into the foreseeable future, don't say 'we', 'us' and 'our'. People will see right through it and it makes you less relatable anyway. See it as a benefit, not a flaw. Use 'I', 'me', and 'my'. Plus, try to give your opinion rather than stating facts.

- **Be casual and relatable**

Talk as though you're in the room with them. In addition to making you appear more approachable, it will also make your content much more engaging and intriguing for people to read.

- **Be candid**

While I do think spelling and grammar are important for professionalism, everything you write doesn't have to be perfectly worded or politically correct. Speak in plain English; avoid jargon and clichés like the plague.

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● **Be self-deprecating**

This is about the underdog mentality and tall poppy syndrome. If you're arrogant and put yourself too high on a pedestal, people will want to cut you down. If you put yourself down, people will have your back and try to lift you up. Get people on your side by not being afraid to poke fun at yourself.

● **Be humorous**

Life is serious enough as it is. People appreciate anything which can make them laugh and are more likely to share it with others. Provided your website doesn't personally offend people, adding humour is a sure-fire way to get noticed. It's even more **Flawsome** if you can make jokes about your own industry; people will love it!

Needless to say, Dan's website '*A Little Bit of Something*' has offended some people. In his own words though, Dan has said: "The funny thing is the general public 'get it', they see my tongue in cheek approach and recognise I'm not actually an arrogant arse hole. I've secured new work as a result." The only people Dan reports as being upset with him are his peers. There are plenty of people in his industry envious that someone with inferior design skills (Dan freely admits there are people better than him) has ended up driving massive traffic to his website with an unconventional approach.

While everyone else is spending thousands of dollars and countless hours on search engine optimisation, internet marketing and social media campaigns, Dan just posted a link on *Twitter* to a site that was *worth* sharing.

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One of the companies which kept popping up in my research was the online American shoe and apparel store *Zappos*. It is a cutting edge company with some really unique marketing methods and an incredible like-minded team behind it. CEO, Tony Hsieh (pronounced Shay) is quoted regularly about customer service among other things. He originally joined *Zappos* as an advisor and investor, eventually becoming CEO. He helped the company grow from near zero sales to over \$1 billion in gross merchandise sales annually. *Zappos.com, Inc.* was acquired by *Amazon.com* in a deal valued at \$1.2 billion on the day of closing and has been named in *Fortune Magazine*'s annual 'Best Companies to Work For' list.

Zappos is definitely a **Flawsome** company. It claims that one of the things which make it different from a lot of other companies is that *Zappos* values being fun and a little bit weird. Management decided early on to be unconventional and avoid becoming one of those big companies that project a cold, corporate and boring facade.

A lot of time and resources have been invested in establishing *Zappos*' company culture which is a large part of what's made the brand so successful. The diversity of staff, as well as customers, is celebrated and embraced and each person's individuality respected. Management encourages staff members to express their personality in their work and interaction with customers. They don't want cookie cut robots which, when compared to most companies their size, might come across as inconsistent or weird. They believe that it's important for people and the company as a whole to be bold and daring. They encourage people to take risks (without being reckless) and make mistakes, as long

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as lessons are learned from the blunders. Zappos' management also believe in the fundamentals of **Flawsome**: open, honest relationships and communication. This is what they have to say about it on the company's website:

At Zappos, we embrace diversity in thoughts, opinions, and backgrounds. The more widespread and diverse your relationships are, the bigger the positive impact you can make on the company, and the more valuable you will be to the company. It is critical for relationship-building to have effective, open, and honest communication.”

In his recent book 'Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose', Tony Hsieh gave away a few secrets about the company's 'unusual' customer service, which he claims to be a fundamental part of their success.¹⁴

1 Customer service time = marketing expense

Hsieh says to “flip the equation on your accountant” by putting the cost of customer service time in the marketing column. Market research is a key component of most company's marketing efforts and interaction with customers should be seen as a part of that. This will keep the pressure off your customer service people to be fast, and helps them focus on quality interactions. Think of the customer service department as the whole business. We can use any interaction as an

opportunity to form a bond with a customer and listen to what he or she really wants. If you take a little more time with each customer and really listen, you'll get ideas on how to better your products, cut your costs, improve your service, and more.

2 Get rid of bad customers

It's called the 'Pareto Principle' or the '80/20' Rule. Basically it says that 20% of customers/products/distributors are producing 80% of the profit. Tim Ferriss talks about this in his book '*The 4-Hour Workweek*'¹⁵ and points out that you should focus on the 20%, rather than on the 'bad apples' that consume your time and don't buy much. These 'bad apples' often have the highest expectations, and want the most amount of value for the least amount of money. They are typically the abusive ones and any customer service person will tell you that handling them is the worst part of their job. He suggests increasing the price for them, or somehow removing yourself from these people. Just let them go!

3 Go unscripted

We know when service people are reading a script from a screen. As a customer, I find it annoying and impersonal. It certainly doesn't make me want to listen to what they have to say. Tony suggests giving customer service representatives talking points and just let them be themselves.

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Zappos' approach toward customer service is summed up very well by its social media policy for staff:

Be real and use your best judgment.

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It's **Flawsome** to use a marketing campaign to set customers' expectations when you don't control the outcomes. It requires a lot of faith in your product – but if you don't have faith in it, how can you expect anyone else to?

Chevrolet, the American car manufacturing company, began a **Flawsome** marketing campaign back in 2010. It created a show called 'Car Hunters' for online TV channel *HGTV* and commissioned independent research company *GfK* to test drive *Chevrolets* and compare them to similar *Honda* and *Toyota models*. *Chevrolet* had no idea what was going to come of it. *GfK* used ninety-six prospective new car customers who had no clue that a commercial was being filmed and each car was subjected to 70 tests. Of the ninety-six test drivers, fifty-nine of them chose *Chevrolet* and the company also came out on top in forty-three out of seventy tests. It could have swung any way, though I suppose if it had been overwhelmingly negative, *Chevrolet* may not have published the results at all. Needless to say the company provided customers with a realistic and unbiased look at their cars to help them make an educated buying decision.

Giving a wholistic view might weed out 20% of your customers, but they are most likely the 20% you don't want anyway.

According to *LoyaltyOne's* 2011 COLLOQUY report¹⁶, almost a third of consumers (31%) say they are more likely to tell family, friends, and co-workers about a bad experience with a product or service than a good one. Remember we want isolated negative reviews, not heaps of them. The best way to avoid excessive negative reviews is to avoid the customers who are likely to give them. Like Tim Ferriss of *'The 4-Hour Workweek'* says: "Poisonous people do not deserve your time. To think otherwise is masochistic."

American insurance company, *Esurance* (whose approach can be summed up in its unofficial slogan 'Insurance for the modern world') released a new campaign in late 2011 asking "what makes a company trustworthy?" The commercial suggested that "hearing what a company's customers have to say" provides the most reliable answer, and encouraged potential customers to check out the brand's *Facebook* page to see what its current clients really thought of their service (oh, and FYI...apparently when fans post negative comments, *Esurance* is virtuous about responding in a timely manner).

Lay your cards on the table. If 'haters gonna hate' anyway, let them weed themselves out before they even start business with you. Stop trying to chase anyone and everyone, instead let the ones you want come to you. They'll be your biggest raving fans and attract more like them to do business with you. Plus you'll enjoy working with them more.

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We've spoken about embracing your flaws and how you can influence both your own and your customer's perception of your weaknesses, turning them into strengths. Let's take a look at the other side: what about embracing the flaws of your customers? What about changing your customers' perception about their own flaws?

While the rest of the world is judging the *Heart Attack Grill's* customers for being overweight or obese, the restaurants are a safe place where people can go and be glorified for the reasons others put them down. They can indulge in what makes them feel happy, and not feel ashamed about it. People will come far and wide for a business which makes them feel that way.

Silver screen icon Audrey Hepburn is noted as having said: "We all want to be loved, don't we? Everyone looks for a way of finding love. It's a constant search for affection in every walk of life."¹⁷ Flawsome companies don't just embrace their own flaws – they embrace and encourage the flaws of their customers. It's this kind of unconditional love we expect from our family members, which now transpires between customer and service provider.

A great example of how a company embraced the flaws of its customers is *BGH* in Argentina. In 2010 the company ran a campaign promoting a new line of air conditioners, which were believed to provide the purest air using five stages of air filtration. *BGH* thought the people who could most appreciate the new system and its pure air were people with big noses. The campaign was launched on TV, online and in print, and the communication

directed people to the retail stores where they would find a Nose-O-Meter, which *BGH* developed with *Del Campo Nazca Saatchi & Saatchi*. The in-store device was a giant nose on a stand erected at about head height. The space behind the device was large enough to place your face and if your nose was big enough to touch the sensor, a flashing light and alarm sounded with the words “Big nose, big nose, big nose...” You also won a 25% discount off the price of their new air-conditioner line.

The company website, bignosebgh.com, allowed ‘the big noses’ (as *BGH* called them) to upload a profile picture where a software would measure the size of a nose and if the measure was successful the system directed individuals to the nearest retail store with a Nose-O-Meter installed. The website of course included a gallery of notable big noses.

BGH’s ‘Big Noses’ campaign turned what could have been just another boring air conditioner promotion into an entertaining promotion that engaged their customers and made heroes out of otherwise marginalised people. Needless to say the campaign was on everyone’s lips. Thousands of noses were put to the test and some 500 people won 25% off. The popularity of the ad was only amplified by the chatter online. The company also experienced massive exposure when celebrities with big noses came out of the woodwork and had something to say. Famous NBA player Manu Ginobili tweeted to all of his followers joking about the size of his nose and the discount he would win. *BGH* saw a big jump in brand preference and in a highly competitive playing field like air conditioners, that’s nothing to be sneezed at (sorry, I couldn’t help it).

Celebrities are brands of their own and their fans could instead, easily be called customers. Tyra Banks, famous African-American

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catwalk model, now creator and host of reality TV show *America's Next Top Model*, was probably one of the first to coin the word **Flawsome**. Often ridiculed for the size of her forehead, she posted a photo of herself on *Instagram* mid 2012 saying to her fans, "I challenge you to a big forehead contest! You know I got that win on lock!"

In an interview with a popular American tabloid, *Us Weekly*, Banks talked about her imperfections openly when she said: "This is who I am! I'm Tyra Banks and I have cellulite! That makes me **Flawsome** because I own it as part of what makes me unique. Don't get me wrong: I don't think my cellulite is beautiful, but I think it's **Flawsome**."¹⁸

While cellulite may not be unique, what she is doing is being open and honest about her flaws, reframing the way she feels about them and ultimately how her fans feel about themselves. Banks said that for her, **Flawsome** is about "being flossy (apparently that means showy, cool and stylish), amazing and awesome with our flaws and celebrating those, too". Her new honesty and authenticity has seen her empower young girls to embrace what she calls "the very qualities that make them special". She claims that her main mission is "to get girls to realise their inner and outer beauty and have high self-esteem with both". Banks told *Us Weekly* that she chooses girls that are covered with freckles or "super-duper pale" because to her, those things are really beautiful. She wants to continue to spread the message that those are the things that make us unique. Banks went on to host a gala, which she dubbed the "Flawsome Ball", in October 2012 to benefit *Tzone* (a weeklong camp she started in 1999 to help girls with self-confidence issues).

There has always been a growing concern about the moral

issue behind falsified perfect bodies in the media and how they are affecting the self-image of teenagers and adults alike. I think even the celebrities and marketing execs are feeling the pressure of upholding their own perfect images. I guarantee that in the future you will hear more idolised celebrities like Tyra Banks start to encourage people to embrace their flaws as being what makes them unique and beautiful. Celebrities and their fans can often share the same relationship as business owners and their customers. Making our customers feel good about themselves is possibly the best way to establish a strong personal connection and get them on our side.

Of course, it's not just about embracing their physical flaws. It also comes down to how we treat them. Often when we start out in business we try to be everything to everyone and go beyond the call of duty to make sure our customers are 100% satisfied. After all, the most powerful form of advertising is still word of mouth and social media has only amplified it. According to Nielsen's 2012 'Global Trust in Advertising Survey' 92% of consumers around the world say they trust word of mouth above all other forms of advertising and that less than half of people worldwide said they trust what we might call 'conventional' advertising on television and radio, or in print media.¹⁹

As new business owners start to attract more than enough clients, their hunger to please quite often diminishes. At first many are naïve and trusting, but for every client who takes a mile from the inch they are given, business owners gradually value their own time more and more – sometimes to the point where they value their time more than their client's patronage. It's all too easy to become complacent and grow increasingly cynical of clients or customers. It's happened to me, I've seen it happen to other businesses, and I've been a customer on the receiving end

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of the cynicism many times. I personally have to remind myself of the importance of giving good service and re-evaluate my own motives behind tightening the metaphorical belt on the time I invest with clients.

As a high school teenager working at *Red Rooster*, I was taught ‘the customer is always right’. I resented it and never really understood it. As a teenager who ‘knew it all’, I was the one who was right, the customers were the ones being selfish and unreasonable. Since running my own business, and having realised the value of a satisfied customer, I’ve reframed my thinking about that statement. The best thing you can do to reinvigorate your business and passion for serving people is to work with this **Flawsome** attitude: the customer is always right, **EVEN** when they may be wrong. Even if you’re right, love and serve them anyway. They are your livelihood and you owe them the utmost gratitude for every cent they choose to spend with you.

A fantastic quote, allegedly by Mahatma Gandhi, which I think all business owners and customer service staff should take to heart, reads: “A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.”²⁰

Embrace the things that frustrate you most about your customers. In the same way we can flip our perceptions about our own flaws, we can also flip our perceptions about our customer’s flaws. List what you dislike about your customers and if you can’t put processes in place to help them adjust their behaviour to better suit you (not likely), adjust your perception on how their

flaws actually help you and others. If you make your customers feel valued and overlook their flaws, they will overlook yours. A customer who has had great service in the past, has a personal connection with you and has been treated respectfully, will always forgive you for your mistakes much quicker than those you've treated as a burden. You'll get more leeway in your deadlines, less tension over price and more willingness to accept your advice, reducing your stress and theirs; making business so much more enjoyable for everyone. Give it a go!

LOADING... Please Wait

We spoke about how people want to feel loved and appreciated for who they are, but it's not just that – they also want to be validated. In an age of celebrities and corporate monoliths, the people we see on TV are so far removed from our reality that it's hard to relate to them as real people. These big companies are like the popular kids at school, we know who they are and everything about them, but they wouldn't have a clue who we are. Even if you were the popular kid, imagine what it would have been like to be on the other side and have a popular kid recognise you by name.

In 2011, trendwatching.com released a brief about one of the greatest things a company can do to validate their customers and show they care: Random Acts of Kindness (which they referred to as RAK). They believed that RAK came about because of customers' distaste for 'distant, inflexible and self-serving corporations'.

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A Random Act of Kindness is when a company unexpectedly sends gifts, responds to publicly expressed moods, goes out of its way to help, or just shows a customer that they care somehow. The most well recognised and talked about RAK in history was in 2004 when Oprah Winfrey told her stunned audience that they would each go home with a brand new *Pontiac G6* as part of her season premiere giveaway. She refers to it as one of her “all-time, favourite, happiest moments ever” and did it again in 2012 giving away over 275 brand new Volkswagen Beetles to her audience as a part of her farewell show.

Social media, blogs and other online interactions mean that it’s never been easier to get to know our potential customers and surprise them by reacting to their needs or desires in innovative or even personalised ways. In October 2010, internationally recognised flower delivery service, *Interflora*, monitored Twitter for users that needed cheering up and contacted them to send a bouquet of flowers as a complete surprise.

It’s not just the big guys with huge budgets and a wide reach who are doing this. *Ribar Floral*, a small florist based in Detroit, gives away a free bouquet to any local who has been nominated by their fellow residents for doing good deeds. The florist regularly updates the recipient list on its *Facebook* page and people are talking about it.

In figures released by *Facebook* in February 2011²¹, 500 million active *Facebook* users share over 30 billion pieces of content per month. Social media allows us to listen to and engage with our current and potential customers, but more importantly, it’s a massive pond where the ripple effects of our actions can touch thousands, if not tens of thousands of people. With the most frequently shared pieces of content being the ones people find

interesting, meaningful, funny, or uplifting, that makes Random Acts of Kindness possibly the most likely of your marketing strategies to go viral.

RAKs can bring unexpected delight to consumers and not only enhance a brand's reputation but truly make an impact on people's lives. Unfortunately, if it's done the wrong way, it could annoy or quite possibly freak people out. A few tips from [trendwatching.com](#) on how to get it right:²²

- **Be genuine**

RAKs should demonstrate a brand's attitude, not be a welcome exception to it. Any cold-hearted, stuck-in-the-past brand that thinks it can fake it will be unmasked in today's transparent marketplace.

- **Be personal, but not too personal**

Audiences will like RAKs that are aimed at their individual circumstances or needs, but equally don't want to feel like a brand has been stalking them. Brands should ensure that their acts of kindness are appropriate. A light-hearted gesture at the right time will be appreciated; intruding into personal issues certainly won't be.

- **Be compassionate, not crass**

RAKs from 'human' brands are welcomed because they are just that, acts of kindness, rather than purely self-serving corporate marketing stunts.

- **Make it shareable**

Give someone a reason to share their RAK with their friends and family – even better if they have

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something to share, whether it is an extra ticket, or an online video.

- **Be generous**

Yes, people appreciate any brand generosity, but it's better to be really generous to a few people than kind-of-nice to lots of people.

- **Have meaning and purpose**

Encourage consumers to engage in their own RAK, and then publicly reward them for it.

- **Get real**

Want to really surprise people? Then deliver Random Acts of Kindness directly to them, in their daily lives, surrounded by family, friends, or colleagues. While people will share RAKs online, offline acts will always have a big impact too.

- **Don't intrude, be pushy, or sell**

This isn't about you or your brand; it's about showing the recipient you care.

- **Don't make RAKs too frequent**

Customers shouldn't feel upset if they don't receive something.

In the US, *Wheat Thins* (owned by *Kraft Foods*) launched a campaign and *YouTube* Channel called 'The Crunch is Calling' which featured a *Wheat Thins* van tracking down and surprising tweeters who had mentioned how much they loved the crackers with a whole pallet of the product. The campaign was such a success it saw the company's *YouTube* channel receiving over 1,500,000 views. It doesn't always have to be people who are already fans of your product though. The UK division of *L'Oreal*-owned skincare

brand *Biotherm* offered free product samples of their ‘Skin.Ergenic’ anti-fatigue range to not just their followers, but any *Twitter* users who complained about being tired.

Don’t misunderstand *Wheat Thins* and *Biotherm*’s RAK. These acts of kindness are not just about rewarding customers for ‘tweeting’ about or ‘liking’ the product or giving away lots of free samples. They are about totally random and unexpected acts for the sake of delighting people. The marketing benefits are obvious, but it should be done first and foremost because you actually care.

A Random Act of Kindness can be completely unrelated to your product. Instead simply enhance the service you give. In a campaign entitled ‘How Happiness Spreads’, Dutch airline *KLM* went online to find out more background information about its passengers to help decide on suitable gifts and then gave something to the respondents before they flew. One traveller tweeted that he would miss a PSV Eindhoven football game while he was in New York. In response, *KLM* gave him a *Lonely Planet* guidebook of NYC with all the football bars highlighted in blue. Only a month after *KLM*’s act of kindness in New York, Spanish airline *Spanair* collaborated with a creative agency called *Shackleton Group* to surprise passengers when they most needed it: after a late Christmas Eve flight. As the passengers waited to pick up their luggage at the carousel, instead of sending out their luggage right away, the airline sent out personalised presents to everyone who was on-board as a way of celebrating the holiday.

My partner and I are regulars at our local Indian take-away, Miss India. The outlet is always throwing extra stuff into our orders for free because they recognise us. It’s that special treatment which keeps us coming back. Plus there’ve been times

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when we've enjoyed free stuff we normally wouldn't have tried and added it to our orders in future. An act of kindness doesn't have to involve giving something away though. Sometimes just a little bit of simple appreciation can go a long way. To celebrate reaching one million 'likes' on *Facebook*, *Heineken* beer employed a group of Dutch female models to visit bars in Amsterdam and hug male lager drinkers. The company produced a short film, entitled '*One Million Hugs*' which it shared with fans. The video ended with the line, "Thanks a million".

The most powerful form of RAK is the one which encourages individuals to pay it forward to others. In September 2010, *Kleenex* launched their "Softness worth sharing" campaign during which participants could send a free packet of tissues, send friends a virtual *Kleenex* on *Facebook*, or design and print a custom label to stick on a box of tissues to give to someone. At the end of the campaign over one million packages had been sent. A month later *Emergen-C* (a vitamin drink) launched a *Facebook* app where users tagged a friend who was having a bad day and *Emergen-C* mailed that person a free sample packet.

The most honourable RAK is the kind where the company has nothing directly to gain but a little exposure; ones that simply contribute to the happiness of the community. Early in 2012, the Canadian branch of international confectionary giant *Mars* launched what it called 'Random Acts of Chocolate'. The campaign had the tagline: "An act of kindness, big or small, can bring a little joy to someone's day." The aim was to grow a community of kindness ambassadors who would commit to 50,000 acts of kindness. Each act was measured by a 'Kindness Meter' that would serve as the 'kindness pulse' of the nation. Participants were encouraged to share their stories of kindness and nominate

local community organisations for a chance to win one of three \$10,000 donations.

The beauty of the RAK marketing tool is that it doesn't have to be expensive or lavish, you simply have to care. People are sick of dealing with companies that are inflexible and unwieldy. We are seeing a massive shift in the number of customers choosing to deal with businesses that are more compassionate and charismatic instead. With consumers capable of sharing their experiences far and wide, these RAKs are the campaigns most likely to go viral and gain exponentially more exposure than the investment. Plus, what goes around comes around, often tenfold.

Take what you can from the above examples, put it into practice in your own business and turn Random Acts of Kindness into an effective part of your **Flawsome** marketing strategy.

MAKE 'EM LAUGH MAKE 'EM BUY!

Driving home from an appointment recently I was listening to a presenter on the local radio station talk about a **Flawsome** fish and chip store, called *Grilled Fish*, which had opened down the road from him. The presenter was telling everyone about the website and what was written about the business. The company has a nice logo and a very basic website. The homepage reads like this:

Home – Welcome to Grilled Fish!

No, we are not the best fish and chips shop in Brisbane. Nor are we the freshest. We are not the biggest. We're not the coolest either. But we do try our hardest to please.

If you have had a good experience with our service, you can help support us by “liking” us.

Apparently the owners printed 10,000 leaflets and paid a leaflet delivery company \$440 only to have the leaflets delivered to two streets and have the rest “go missing”. Amused by their sense of humour, and feeling sorry for their failed marketing attempts, the radio presenter encouraged his listeners to ‘like’ the *Grilled Fish*

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Facebook fan page. The page subsequently had almost 600 likes in only a couple of months, simply because they had a good sense of humour. Here is a transcript of what the company has to say about itself on the 'About' page:

Opening

Grilled Fish opened its doors on the 5th of April 2012, just one day before Easter Friday without any fanfare. Just next to no sleep and a lot of stress. It was the day before Good Friday after all!

When our first customer walked through the door, he asked for a hamburger. We replied "sorry we don't have it at the moment". Then he asked how about a steak sandwich. We replied "sorry we don't have that either".

Then he asked "how about...(we forgot what it was he asked for)". But we remember our reply. "Sorry we don't have that either, but we do have fish and chips."

Luckily he was nice enough to go that option.

Amongst some of the humour on the website is a menu link for 'Good Food Ideas' which goes nowhere. Instead of positive customer testimonials, it features a bunch of revolving quotes from the staff which read:

"How can I soar like an eagle when I'm surrounded by turkeys?"

~ Head Chef N.

(Referring to all the apprentices working under him.)

“They say you should never trust a skinny chef.”

~ Chef J.

Chef J. referring to himself.

“I am the chef and you are just an apprentice.”

~ Chef D.

Dismissing my complaint that his pass system didn't work for the kitchen.

“I use to be a chef.”

~ Delivery Driver

I have met many people who are now in a new profession after qualifying as a chef.

“Thai, for the love of the kitchen, you should work 3-4 hours free a day.”

~ Executive Chef T.

After my enquiring about overtime.

“You are a third year apprentice. You should know everything!”

~ Head Chef T.

After my being transferred to a new section under Head Chef T.

“Looks sh*t, taste great!”

~ Fellow apprentice Michael

After presenting a very shabby plate of food.

“You will never make it as a chef.”

~ Head Chef R.

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This is another example of the underdog mentality versus the tall poppy syndrome. The underdog mentality occurs when you put yourself down, which often results in people having your back and trying to lift you up. Tall poppy syndrome is what can happen when you put yourself too high on the pedestal, and results in people wanting to cut you down. If you can't beat them, join them. One of the best ways to disarm people who are criticising you is to join in and poke fun at yourself.

Right here in Brisbane we have the Norman Hotel. Rather than trying to compete with the likes of Char Char Char, Hog's Breath, the Breakfast Creek Hotel and others that claim to cook one of Australia's best steaks, the Norman Hotel is instead known by Brisbanites for the humorous slogan 'Brisbane's Worst Vegetarian Restaurant'. This catchphrase makes people laugh and sticks in their minds, but it also serves to qualify the hotel's niche market. While other restaurants water down their strengths by trying to cater for a wider variety of dietary requirements, the Norman Hotel sticks proudly to the fact that it is known as the go-to place for a good steak and big meaty meals. It first opened its doors in 1889 and is still thriving today – whatever the establishment is doing is working.

When *Innocent Drinks* (a UK based smoothie manufacturer) posted out a coupon that couldn't be redeemed because of an incorrect barcode, the company responded with an email apologising to all recipients, saying that they would replace the coupon with one that worked and finished by suggesting that customers could "keep [the old voucher] as a memento of our stupidity". Similarly, when craft brewery *Lagunitas* from Northern California in the US wasn't able to produce their popular 'Brown Shugga' seasonal ale in time for Christmas, they instead released a substitute called 'Lagunitas Sucks Holiday Ale: Brown Shugga

Substitute'. The company told customers: "We just ran out of capacity. There is nothing cool about screwing up this badly and we know it." The substitute came with a self-deprecating apology:

There is no joy in our hearts and the best we can hope for is a quick and merciful end. F*@\$ us. This totally blows. Whatever. We freaking munch mouldy donkey butt and we just want it all to be over."

Another company which shows a sense of humour is South African airline, *Kulula*.

Don't freak out if your air hostess announces during the safety briefing that if the plane is forced to make an emergency landing on water "all passengers who can swim please exit on the left-hand side of the plane; all passengers who can't, thank you for flying with *Kulula*". They're just joking.

Now known world-wide for its humorous in-flight commentary and tongue-in-cheek advertisements, *Kulula Airlines* is a low cost carrier operating in South Africa, and is owned by *Comair* (also operators of British Airways flights in South Africa). What makes *Kulula* unique is the company's branded service delivery. The staff's in-flight antics were a "great source of word-of-mouth references", according to Colin Jowell, strategic planning director for advertising agency, *Morrisjones & Co*, which worked closely with *Comair Limited's* executive manager of marketing, Gidon Novick. However, this relaxed approach was never allowed to undermine the professionalism of staff or the safety of their passengers. While humour was appreciated during times characterised by increased crime in South Africa, *Kulula* and *Morrisjones*

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& Co were well aware of the fact that not everybody would embrace their branded service and advertising campaigns with open arms. There were complaints from the public from time to time, but Jowell says: “If you feel 100% comfortable about your communication strategy, it probably is a good one, but not a great one.”

Historic booking rates since their inaugural flight on August 1st, 2001, speak for themselves and the strategy still remains today. *Kulula*’s reputation has won the airline numerous consumer awards and resulted in the creation of one of the most profitable low-cost airlines in the industry.

I can’t substantiate the kind of humour customers have reported from their flight crew on their flights, though *Kulula* confirms staff members were trained on how to deliver service that is appropriate to the attitude of the brand and encouraged to make the most of their natural personalities and sense of humour.

The flight crew make the in-flight “safety lecture” and announcements entertaining. Here are some examples that have apparently been heard or reported:

- “There may be fifty ways to leave your lover, but there are only four ways out of this airplane.”
- “Thank you for flying *Kulula*. We hope you enjoyed giving us the business as much as we enjoyed taking you for a ride.”
- “In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the mask, and pull it over your face. If you have a small child travelling with you, secure your mask

before assisting with theirs. If you are travelling with more than one small child, pick your favourite.”

- “Please be sure to take all of your belongings...If you’re going to leave anything, please make sure it’s something we’d like to have.”
- “Your seat cushions can be used for flotation; and in the event of an emergency water landing, please paddle to shore and take them with our compliments.”
- “As you exit the plane, make sure to gather all of your belongings. Anything left behind will be distributed evenly among the flight attendants. Please do not leave children or spouses.”
- “Weather at our destination is fifty degrees with some broken clouds, but we’ll try to have them fixed before we arrive. Thank you, and remember, nobody loves you, or your money, more than *Kulula Airlines*.”
- “Ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to smoke, the smoking section on this airplane is on the wing...If you can light ‘em, you can smoke ‘em.”
- When one *Kulula* plane landed and was coming to a stop at Durban Airport, a lone voice came over the loudspeaker: “Whoa, big fella. WHOA!”
- *Kulula* flights don’t have assigned seating, and apparently you just sit where you want. On one particular flight, when passengers were apparently having a hard time choosing a seat, a flight attendant announced: “People, people we’re not picking out furniture here, find a seat and get in it!”

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- On a flight with a very “senior” flight attendant crew, the pilot said: “Ladies and gentlemen, we’ve reached cruising altitude and will be turning down the cabin lights. This is for your comfort and to enhance the appearance of your flight attendants.”
- After a particularly rough landing during thunderstorms in the Karoo, a flight attendant on a flight announced: “Please take care when opening the overhead compartments because, after a landing like that, sure as hell everything has shifted.”
- On a particularly windy day, after an extremely hard landing on a *Kulula* flight into Cape Town, the flight attendant said: “Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Mother City. Please remain in your seats with your seat belts fastened while the Captain taxis what’s left of our airplane to the gate.”
- Another flight attendant’s comment on a less than perfect landing: “We ask you to please remain seated as Captain Kangaroo bounces us to the terminal.”
- Perhaps in response to a flight attendant’s remark, this came from a pilot during his welcome message: “*Kulula Airlines* is pleased to announce that we have some of the best flight attendants in the industry. Unfortunately, none of them are on this flight!”
- Part of a flight attendant’s arrival announcement: “We’d like to thank you folks for flying with us today. And the next time you get the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurised metal tube, we hope you’ll think of *Kulula Airways*.”

- Not everyone will like it, not everyone will even get it. Humour is like that. Some people love 'The 3 Stooges', some love Stephen Fry. Some love both, others don't like either. I'm convinced though that the people who like to laugh significantly outnumber the miserable souls who are reluctant to even smile.

Here are a couple of quick tips on using humour:

- ❶ It's okay to be rude.
- ❷ That said, be ultra-cautious about making jokes of a political or religious nature.
- ❸ Run your ideas past a few people to make sure your work is funny without being overly unprofessional, offensive or alienating.
- ❹ Never ever be funny at someone else's expense; it's just as easy to be funny without putting someone down.

If people see you're trying to be entertaining they're more likely to side with you. If your humour is self-deprecating (without totally undermining your business), well...that's **Flawsome!**

PC THAT IS THE PC QUESTION...

PC
OR
NOT

I'm certain that tongue-in-cheek humour appeals to people so much because of the politically correct world we live in. *Wikipedia* dictionary defines political correctness as:

"A term which denotes language, ideas, policies, and behaviour seen as seeking to minimize social and institutional offence in occupational, gender, racial, cultural, sexual orientation, certain other religions, beliefs or ideologies, disability, and age-related contexts, and, as purported by the term, doing so to an excessive extent."

One of the biggest killers of **Flawsome** today is political correctness.

Political correctness was essentially created so our actions or words would not offend or upset anyone. Do you remember the cute rhyme our parents taught us if we were ever teased at school? "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will

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never hurt me”. Today I think it’s more like: “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but offend me and I’ll sue you.” Political correctness isn’t really about being ‘nice to people’, tolerant and treating others with proper respect – that’s called good manners.

Some say common-sense is a thing of the past. If, for example, you catch a burglar in your house, then it’s probably best to help the poor soul by carrying your possessions to the front door lest he should trip and hurt himself and it’s you that ends up in court! I love how one blog writer from the UK put it: “Politically correct people remind me of ostriches – they bury their heads in the sand and then proceed to talk out of the only orifice that still remains above ground.”

I laughed when I came across the result of a contest at Texas A&M University for the most appropriate definition of a contemporary term back in 2007: “Political correctness is a doctrine, fostered by a delusional, illogical, liberal minority and rabidly promoted by an unscrupulous mainstream media, which holds forth the proposition that it is entirely possible to pick up a turd by the clean end.”

Below are some of the crazy examples of political correctness gone wrong. Maybe you’ve heard them too?

- The xanthorrhoea plant, once called a Black Boy, must now be called a Grass Tree.
- In schools it’s no longer permitted to refer to rubbish bags as black bags. I think they even changed the colour of the bags. I also remember having to call the black board a chalk board.
- Apparently the term ‘thought-shower’ replaced ‘brainstorming’ in case the latter was offending people

with epilepsy ('thought-shower' has a definition in the *Wikipedia* dictionary so it must exist!)

- You've probably heard of burglars suing dog owners if the criminals are attacked when trespassing on the owner's property?
- I read an article recently about how atheist shopping patrons were demanding that big chain shopping centres remove religious depictions from display windows because they were offensive.
- The word "gay" has been removed from *Noddy* books.
- Some childcare and educational centres have stopped children from wearing superhero outfits because it could promote violence.
- You might remember a story which broke in 2007 in Sydney, Australia, where Santa Clauses were refused the right to say "Ho, ho, ho" as it could frighten children and be derogatory to women. Why? Because it was too close to the American (not Australian) slang for prostitute. Instead, the Santas were instructed to lower their voices and say "Ha, ha, ha".
- There have been multiple events where parents have been refused the right to photograph their own children in public places, as well as at school and sporting events.

And the list goes on...

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Is it time we hardened up a little and stopped being so sensitive to people with opinions that are different to ours? Is it time we recognise our personal and ethnic differences and be okay with them?

A great example of a company with a little politically incorrect tongue-in-cheek humour is a Canadian yoga equipment manufacturer *Lululemon*, which released a video in December 2011 entitled 'Shit Yogis Say' – look it up on *YouTube*. In the video ad, *Lululemon* pokes a little good-natured fun at its own community, by featuring a young female yogi spouting a host of 'common' catchphrases anyone within ten metres of a yoga studio is likely to hear, as well some more obscure ones. Things like:

"I'm concerned about your aura."

"You know, carrot sticks are nature's candy and apples are actually nature's toothbrush."

"How do you say that in Sanskrit?"

"I need a coconut water."

"Let's go to the farmers market after class."

"This mat is recyclable."

"I love pigeon, it tastes like chicken."

"Holla for my Molla."

"I got total yoga hair."

"I got a blockage I'm working on."

"My chakras are so aligned."

"Wanna see where I can put my leg? You want to see where I can put my leg!"

"I feel so balanced right now."

“My hips are so open right now.”

“I just bought some really cool eye shadow for my third eye.”

“Let’s do wheat grass shots after this.”

“Hey, do you wanna do infra-red sauna after this?”

“Did you hear that hemp milk is the new almond milk?”

(Cough) “I lost my voice last week from oming too much.”

Of course, Namaste is repeated frequently to the point of annoyance and the video ends with shocking, yet hilarious: “Namaste Mutha-F#@kah.”

Yes, it upset some people. Some have even suggested boycotting the brand entirely. However, with under 250 dislikes and almost 10,000 likes out of well over two million views the campaign has generated a whole lot more momentum and a stronger fan base than some airy-fairy feel good ad promoting the function and comfort of their clothes.

Is it time to lighten up and realise that being offended by something says more about us than it does about the person affronting us? I think it’s time to say what we mean, and, if possible, do it with a sense of humour. People love it when brands push the limits of political correctness.

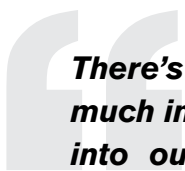
When growing up I was told, like many other people, that honesty was a virtue and an honourable way of life. Honesty should be the easiest thing in the world, right? It’s not. We can’t just go around saying exactly what we think and feel. But

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why can't we just 'tell it like it is'? When it comes to this issue, there's no better authority than Andrew Horabin, writer of the incredible book 'Bullshift' to which I referred earlier. 'Bullshift' is about the BS in our daily lives and particularly the workplace. BS is basically when we don't mean what we say and don't say what we mean for a whole host of different reasons, the main ones being:

- We don't want to offend anyone.
- We don't want to risk appearing inadequate.
- We don't want to get 'in trouble'.
- We don't want to take responsibility for what has already happened or might in future.
- We don't want to say 'the wrong thing' and miss out on something.

Essentially Horabin's approach is that BS is about avoiding something we don't want instead of taking responsibility for our thoughts, feelings and actions. It's typically due to a lack in self-confidence or self-worth. In Horabin's own words:



There's too much in our workplaces. Too much in our lives. There's too much going into our eyes and ears and too much coming out of our mouths. We have to shift the bull."

If you get the chance, I suggest you read 'Bullshift' to get some of the valuable information I've left out. It's only short, he has a remarkable talent for presenting his information in a clear and

concise manner which cuts out all the fluff and gives pure golden information.

LOADING... Please Wait

Being politically incorrect doesn't always have to be about being bold and controversial; sometimes it can be about a subtle and humorous choice of words. The proponents of grammatical correctness sometimes seem as dogmatic and humourless as the PC brigade. Misspelling, made-up words and incorrect grammar can go a long way to effectively communicating what you really mean, and grab people's attention, making them think a little.

Following the path laid by *Domino's* 'Pizza Turnaround' and *McDonald's* gourmet burger range, *KFC* also launched a campaign in February 2012 as a response to an overwhelming swell of people who constantly complained about the quality of fast food. Building on their previous positioning statement of 'So Good' (which they claimed to be the only way to describe the 'world's best chicken'), they launched a new advertising campaign called 'The Goodification'. *KFC* explained 'The Goodification' in a promotional video, in which it was stated that although good is still good; they've decided to "make good, gooder". The campaign presented a scale of goodness, with 'good' at the bottom, then 'gooder', which was followed by 'gooderer', and then 'goodest' (where they want to be). *KFC* says that the scale could go on forever, "but that's the plan, we call it goodification".

People love when companies can be light hearted and not take things too seriously. Sure, this may annoy the grammar Nazis, but



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we know often the most annoying ads are the ones which stick in our heads and eventually become synonymous with the product being advertised. Made-up words actually have a name, neologism (I swear I didn't make that up). It's defined as a newly coined term, word, or phrase, which may be in the process of entering common use, but has not yet been accepted into mainstream language.

The other cool thing about neologisms is that they are easy to trademark and if they take hold in common language can become their own self-perpetuating and infectious advertising campaigns. *Taco Bell*, a popular Mexican-inspired fast food outlet in the US, adopted 'melty', tacking it onto the 'Beefy, cheesy, crunchy, and spicy' adjectives they used to describe their tacos. *Snickers*, the chocolate bar, have created words such as 'substantialiscious', 'peanutopolis', 'nougatocity', 'satisfectellent', and 'hungerectomy'. *Apple* claims the *iPod touch* is "engineered for maximum funness" and that the most recent generation of *iPod Nanos* have been "completely renanoed". *Budweiser* cleverly advertised that the *Bud Light* product has "drinkability" – and implied it was something the competitors' light beers didn't have.

It might upset the English language purists, but if you have a new word that people love and automatically associate with your business, isn't that just '**Flawsomatic**'?

IT HITS THE FAN WHEN

Believe it or not, a crisis can actually be one of the best opportunities a business can experience. Customer loyalty is the holy grail of CRM (customer relationship management). Getting a customer is one thing, satisfying a customer isn't that hard, but keeping them forever is a whole new challenge. World renowned author, salesman and motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar is quoted as having said: "Statistics suggest that when customers complain, business owners and managers ought to get excited about it. The complaining customer represents a huge opportunity for more business."²³

There are lots of ways to build customer loyalty, but correct crisis management is one of the most powerful. Research has confirmed that customers whose complaints are well-handled are even more loyal to the company than they were before they encountered a problem. *Technical Assistance Research Programs (TARP)* conducted a study for the White House Office of Consumer Affairs way back in the 1970s, revealing that customers who had problems but did not complain were less loyal than those who did and had their issues resolved.²⁴ Subsequent studies over the last twenty years have continued to confirm

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these findings and have found that, in fact, every crisis presents an opportunity to enhance both loyalty and word of mouth support.

McKinsey and Company, a global management consulting firm and trusted advisors to some of the world's leading businesses, governments, and institutions, have revealed some surprising figures to prove how effectively managing a crisis can increase customer loyalty. The company found that customers who have major problems, but don't complain about them have a re-purchase intention rate of about 9%, versus those who do complain (regardless of the outcome), who have a re-purchase rate of about 19%.²⁵

Michael LeBouf's book *'How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life'* was first published in the late 1980s and is still relevant today, having been back to press over thirty times. In the book he points out that a typical business hears from only 4% of their dissatisfied customers and that the other 96% just quietly go away (with 91% of those never coming back).²⁶ That's a massive loss of business for those who don't know how to address complaints and a lot to gain for those who do. LeBouf also said that seven out of ten complaining customers will do business with you again if you resolve the complaint in their favour and 95% will do business with you again if you fix it on the spot. A satisfied complainer will, on average, tell five people about their problem and how it was satisfactorily resolved. Disgruntled complainers will tell 25% more people about their negative experience. That's just word of mouth. *TARP* also found that 'word of MOUSE' is even more powerful with four times as many angry customers posting negative comments on websites or bulletin boards than those who spread positive comments. There's a

big difference between potentially gaining five customers versus losing twenty or more.

LeBouf points out that a typical corporation loses half of its customers every five years. However, by increasing the yearly customer retention rate by as little as 5%, companies can increase their bottom line profits from between 25% and 100%. Plus, the average business spends six times more to attract new customers than it does to keep old ones. With customer loyalty often worth ten times the price of a single purchase in most cases, it makes sense to invest in encouraging customers to complain, and to work hard to solve those complaints as quickly as possible.

The most vital time for any company to be **Flawsome** is during an organisational crisis. It's typically the time when most corporate leadership want nothing more than to shutter the windows, lock all the doors, grab Teddy and hide under the bed.

Social media has changed the playing field. Traditional public relations experts are being left behind with this newly accelerated spread of information. They used to calculate deadlines and manage a crisis by asking how much time they have to draw up a statement before the seven o'clock news. Now, information about a crisis can reach the public instantly via social media and spread exponentially as one person tells 200 friends and they each tell another 200. Not being prepared to deal with the speed of distribution of information is what leaves a lot of organisations in strife. There's not as much time now to prepare carefully constructed responses and politically correct apologies. Of course, it's unrealistic to prepare for unforeseeable events but businesses need to have policies in place so they can respond instantly and efficiently.

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In a great book entitled '*Tactical Transparency*' Shel Holtz and John C Havens describe the three major types of crises an organisation is likely to experience:²⁷

Meteor Crisis

Like a meteor falling from the sky, this type of crisis is completely unexpected and impossible to have foreseen. With no Bruce Willis to save you, it's usually characterised by randomness and senselessness. It is usually viewed as a terrible thing. Whether a company is perceived as complicit or innocent relies entirely on how quickly and effectively they respond.

Examples would be a shooting in a school or shopping centre, perhaps an explosion or even events like a stock market crash.

Predator Crisis

This is when someone exposes unsavoury practices within the company. Exposure is often from the inside, but not always. It's usually because a person is disgruntled and believes he or she has somehow been mistreated or the individual is seeking to take advantage of the company somehow.

From the company's perspective, these people are predators and are out to cause the company harm, but unlike a meteor crisis, the company is hardly a victim (there must be some kind of dirty laundry in order for a predator to air it). Examples of individuals who could lead to such a crisis include disgruntled employees who have been fired or mistreated, or outside influences such as sensationalist journalism.

Breakdown crisis

A breakdown crisis occurs when a company fails to perform. Product liability lawsuits, recalls, environmental disasters, manufacturing accidents, and financial scandals all fit in the breakdown crisis category. These are always the fault of the company and need to be dealt with candidly and apologetically if the company is to have any hope of recovering.

Company leadership should focus on achieving six main objectives when taking the steps toward handling any of the above crises in a **Flawsome** way:

- ❶ Maintain a positive image of the organisation.
- ❷ Present timely, accurate, candid, up-to-date information.
- ❸ Remain accessible.
- ❹ Monitor communication channels to catch misinformation early.
- ❺ Maintain constituent support.
- ❻ Survive the crisis.

No matter how painful it might be to admit a mistake and take the blame, it's during these times that we have to be open and candid. Address the truth behind the crisis. Being **Flawsome** during a crisis means putting all the pertinent details out there. Neglecting to include something which others might have thought was important will impact your credibility just as much as lying outright.

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Isn't it time companies learned that there is no choice but to take the blame? The difference is *how* a business deals with a crisis. Adopt the attitude: If crap is going to be thrown your way no matter what, you need to make sure it doesn't stick, or do whatever you can to clean it off. People are often willing to forgive those who apologise for their actions. Hiding yourself behind jargon will only show you have more to hide and will tempt people to pry deeper. A company appearing to lay itself bare can sometimes be a good enough reason for people to take what is being said at face value.

In Alaska's pristine Prince William Sound on March 24th, 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker ran aground and spilled eleven million gallons of crude oil. It remains a US record to this day, and would be regarded as a breakdown crisis. *Exxon's* chairman, Lawrence Rawls insisted he could do more by coordinating the company's response from his New York office than he could by visiting the scene of the ecological disaster. This gave the public a perception that he didn't care that his company's tanker had caused the deaths of half a million birds, nearly five thousand sea otters, fourteen killer whales, and a variety of other sea life. His response led thousands of customers to cut up their *Exxon* credit cards and mail them to the company's corporate headquarters.

Rawls' response was certainly the wrong one. A defensive posture, the shuttering of windows and barricading of doors in the hope that it will deflect attention and the crisis will go away, is the worst thing a business could possibly do. All the public really wants is a sincere apology and to be assured that the company is taking steps to prevent a repeat of the situation. Like Donald Porter, vice president of British Airways, is quoted as saying: "Customers don't expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong."²⁸

That was way back in 1989. You might think more companies would have learnt from *Exxon's* mistakes. *Dell* didn't. The company was one of the first to discover how technology had changed the way we can deal with crises. In the early 2000s, as part of a plan to reduce the costs associated with its customer service, *Dell* made the decision to outsource its technical support to India. The following year *Dell* saw its market share increase by 28.8% and the future was looking rosy.

On June 21st, 2005, a single post from blogger Jeff Jarvis became the catalyst for a two year saga of scrutiny and criticism of the computer company's customer service, now known as 'Dell's Hell'. Jeff's notebook computer was a 'lemon' – he had problems with the hardware, couldn't connect to his network, had issues with the central processing unit (CPU), and the machine continually overheated. Jarvis wasn't the type of person to tweak or fine-tune a computer. He was just a regular user with an entry-level machine. He wasn't a computer expert and didn't write a computer-industry blog, yet his criticism of *Dell's* customer service (or lack thereof) inspired others to come forward to claim that they too had suffered at the wretched hands of *Dell's* so-called 'customer support'.

Urged on by an increasing number of supporters, Jarvis published a total of twelve blog posts about *Dell's* poor customer service over three weeks. Each one was more damaging than the previous. He eventually gained hundreds of thousands of readers who collectively left thousands of comments. *Dell* didn't know how to engage online critics that numbered in the thousands because their crisis communications plan didn't cater for web-based attacks. *Dell* didn't know how to react, so it didn't.

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Does your company have a crisis communication plan that includes responding to online attacks? If you or your business were to face an online assault to your or its reputation, how would you react?

Dell typified what *not* to do by deciding to withdraw completely. It gave no official response and instead acted as if the crisis would vanish as quickly as it had started by simply refusing to pander to the complaints of a blogger and his following. *Dell* even closed its cus-

tomer support forum, a popular online destination for customers wishing to exchange comments and questions about *Dell* products. Whose idea was that?!

It took *Dell* almost an entire year before it realised that a head-in-the-sand approach to the crisis was not the best policy. Thankfully *Dell* management came to its senses and decided that the only way to repair and build back its reputation was to be **Flawsome**. Signalling the company's newfound desire to listen to its customers and learn from its mistakes, *Dell* launched the first of many **Flawsome** initiatives in mid-2006 called Direct2Dell.com. One of the first blog posts was entitled 'Real People Are Here and We're Listening'. The new website was intended to give *Dell* a human voice and to get rid of legal jargon and carefully constructed media releases. The company appointed Lionel Menchaca as digital media manager, and he went on to become the web community's spokesperson for all matters related to *Dell*'s customer service and product initiatives.

Customers just wanted a chance to be heard and have their issues addressed. By closing the door on them, *Dell* had only made things worse. 'Post-Jarvis', *Dell* launched blogs in multiple languages, created Studio Dell for podcasts and videos, increased

the number of *Dell*-supported forums, and even built its own social networking community, IdeaStorm.com. Bob Pearson, vice president of corporate group communications for *Dell* summed up the new attitude when he said: “We know our customers are having conversations about *Dell*, 24/7, around the world, in all languages – we want to be a relevant part of those conversations.”

Dell learned a hard lesson, and I hope that anyone who reads about it will gain the same insights. Don’t ignore a blog post, simply because the author is not relevant to your industry or doesn’t appear to have an audience with your customers. If only *Dell* had reacted quickly to Jarvis’s first post, they could have saved themselves a lot of heartache. *Dell* certainly deserves some credit. There isn’t a better example of a company that has learned the errors of its ways.

How did *Dell* benefit from its decision to become more **Flawsome** and open a dialogue with its customers? Since the launch of the Direct2Dell blog, the company’s stock price rose from a July 2006 low of around \$19 a share to a consistently held share price of \$25, until the Global Financial Crisis.

Unlike *Dell*, low-cost *JetBlue Airways* in the US learned what NOT to do from those who had faced crises previously and applied a more **Flawsome** approach right away when the airline faced a major organisational crisis in 2007. On Valentine’s Day that year, New York City was hit by an ice storm which meant many airlines with planes queued up for take-off had to return those planes to the gate. Unfortunately for *JetBlue*, a string of bad decisions, a communication breakdown, and understaffing led the company to keep its planes on the runway in hopes of getting the flights out of town, only to have the wheels frozen to the tarmac. The passengers were trapped on the planes for almost

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eleven hours. They experienced food shortage, and it would be an understatement to say that tempers were frayed.

Countless more passengers were stranded in terminals as flights in other cities were cancelled as a result. The situation turned into a runaway debacle for the company that had long been a darling of the travel industry. Most companies would have addressed the situation with the standard scripted apology, but not *JetBlue*. The response could have been to hide behind a barrier of lawyers and spokespersons, but instead *JetBlue Airways* CEO David Neeleman produced a video in which he spoke, unscripted and off-the-cuff, about his mortification at what had happened. He explained honestly how it had happened, apologised for it, and outlined what the company would do to prevent a recurrence. He also told viewers that the company would present vouchers to passengers affected by the delays.

The video has had almost half a million views and hundreds of comments, most of which were positive. The video was also copied and embedded into other blogs and websites as well as *JetBlue Airways'* own site where the company also posted a statement, labelled *An Apology from Dave Neeleman*, which began: "We are sorry and embarrassed. But most of all, we are deeply sorry." When was the last time you heard a CEO say that he or she is "sorry and embarrassed"? It's this kind of sincere regret which resonates with most inconvenienced customers. Apologising like this goes a long way toward improving a company's reputation and relations with its customers, the benefits of which far outweigh risks of being politically incorrect or making yourself legally vulnerable.

Beyond offering vouchers to those affected, *JetBlue* released what it called the customer 'Bill of Rights' which detailed specific

ways that *JetBlue Airways* will, in future, compensate customers in any number of possible situations that might occur. The airline wasn't off the hook though. While many people applauded Neeleman for his candidness and the speed at which he addressed the problems that allowed the crisis to occur in the first place, customers were quick to remind *JetBlue* of the promises it had made every time the company screwed up again, as, like any business, it inevitably did.

During another storm later that same year Neeleman updated customers on *JetBlue Airways'* decision to cancel flights. In the video he admitted that the airline still had further to go in implementing the changes he had initially promised, but also showed the company was working towards achieving them by listing some of the changes they had already made. Sadly, in the end *JetBlue* replaced Neeleman (also the founder of the company) with a new CEO. According to *JetBlue*, the change was based on the company's growth and the need for someone with more experience to handle day-to-day operations. The company recognised Neeleman for his communication skills, but how much skill did it really take? Or was he really just being **Flawsome**?

It's hard enough to give an honest explanation of what happened during a crisis and apologise for whatever part your organisation was responsible for, but you can't expect customers to truly forgive you unless you detail your plans to keep it from ever happening again. Compensating the complaining customer without addressing the core issue isn't enough, and though it may ease the hurt of the customer, it doesn't help the company to improve.

The actions of *JetBlue* and Dave Neeleman paved the way for other companies to deal with crises. When *Virgin America* upgraded its reservation system in November 2011, a bunch

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of their passengers experienced difficulties and complained via *Twitter* and *Facebook*. Some companies opt to delete negative comments, or just reply to all their followers with a single generic apology, but not *Virgin*. Staff replied to each and every customer personally, sending over 12,000 direct messages in the weeks after the upgrade.

Vodacom, a telecommunications company in South Africa, took a similar and even more personal approach than *Virgin* when its customers experienced communication problems in mid-2011. The CEO, Pieter Uys logged on to *Twitter* and addressed each disgruntled customer personally, continuing to tweet until the problem was fixed, well after 11pm that night.

Waiting for complaints during a crisis isn't always the best way to go. *MailChimp* (one of the world's largest email marketing providers) experienced an issue with some customers' signup forms around the same time *Vodacom* was having troubles. The company didn't know exactly which customers were affected or if they'd even noticed the error. Most companies would have just waited to see if any complaints came in so they wouldn't lose face unnecessarily. Instead, *MailChimp* sent out an email to anyone who they suspected may have experienced the issue and actually invited them to complain, asking them to contact the support desk and promising to "work with" customers "to find a way to make it up" to them. Knowing the value of being transparent, *MailChimp* also put a link in the email to its *Facebook* page so that customers could comment publicly. Not surprisingly the company received overwhelmingly positive feedback. People appreciated the transparency and it never became a big deal for anyone.

I don't think any company has taken a more creative approach

to **Flawsome** crisis management than France-based e-commerce fashion retailer, *La Redoute*.

On January 4th, 2012, the company published an advertisement on its website for children's beachwear, which featured four children frolicking arm in arm through the sand. That would have been fine if there wasn't a nude man casually wading in the background of the photograph! It was made worse by the fact that the image had a magnifying glass tool which enabled viewers to zoom in on the image for closer details. The image appeared on the website for several hours before visitors finally notified the company, and staff were quick to pull it down. It was all too late though. By then the image had already spread across *Facebook* and *Twitter*, sparking consumer outrage and criticism of *La Redoute*.

Closely monitoring consumers' reaction to the incident, *La Redoute's* e-commerce and community teams didn't waste any time swinging into action. They posted a video apology on the company's *Facebook* page. In the video, *La Redoute's* director of e-commerce, Anne-Véronique Baylac asked her teams to go through the thousands of photos on the site with a fine-tooth comb. As a counter-buzz, Baylac launched a game on *La Redoute's Facebook* page which enlisted the help of *Facebook* followers to help uncover any further errors on its site, offering "to clothe each winner from head to toe" as a prize. The company intentionally planted dozens of fake images, including one of an alligator in a family wading pool and another for a men's sweater marked down by 99% from 60,000 euros to 25 euros.

There was massive participation, and all of the errors were found in a single day. Even Baylac was apparently surprised by the results of the campaign. She said: "Our apologies were widely acknowledged and praised, and the tone, in general, was rather

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amusing and friendly.” The game actually helped the retailer boost its reputation: *La Redoute* experienced a 50% increase in visits to its site during the game, plus there was the press coverage it gained from the stunt.

La Redoute isn’t the only company to experience a boost in business after handling a crisis in a **Flawsome** way. A *Red Cross* employee accidentally tweeted about plans to get drunk from the *Red Cross Twitter* account instead of her personal account in February 2011. Rather than trying to hide it, the *Red Cross* responded by tweeting: “We’ve deleted the rogue tweet but rest assured the *Red Cross* is sober.” Later, the organisation admitted on its blog: “While we’re a 130-year-old humanitarian organisation, we’re also made up of human beings.” Its *Twitter* followers were overwhelmingly positively and funnily enough the organisation saw an increase in donations with many followers using the hashtag *#gettingslizzerd* to show their support.

To recap, there are three steps to dealing with a crisis which will help to ease the public’s reaction (which usually ranges from fear to outright anger):

- ❶ Give an honest explanation of what happened.
- ❷ Apologise for whatever part (no matter how small) your organisation was responsible for.
- ❸ Describe the steps being taken to address the issue and detail your plans to keep it from ever happening again.

It’s okay to plan a response and what needs to be said, but avoid scripting every word. If you’re truly sorry, why should you have to read the words “We are sorry” to remind you? We’ve all seen the

ritually scripted celebrity apologies, and most of us are cynical of their sincerity. **Flawsome** crisis management, like Random Acts of Kindness, works so well because it shows people you care. It shows you value them enough to want to make things right. Most importantly though, they have to believe you care. Here are some ways you can help them to believe:

- Be transparent.
- Be raw.
- Be humble.
- Be honest.
- Be sincere.
- Be heartfelt.

If you show that you're being all of these things, people will forgive you quickly.

Being guarded and hiding behind scripts and spokespeople will only inflame the situation and encourage people to dig deeper. People can quickly become obsessed with outing every dirty secret if you don't handle it in a **Flawsome** way right from the start. It is worth mentioning though, that organisational crises aren't always big cataclysmic events or total screw-ups. In fact most of us will never head organisations big enough to experience these kinds of catastrophes. What we will face, regardless of the size of our businesses, every week and sometimes every day, are micro crises.

Of course, there are obvious things like customer complaints, miscommunication or just the natural abrasion which comes with serving difficult customers, but I'm referring to even more subtle and often overlooked micro crises. Any time a call goes to

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message bank, that's a micro crisis, a mini breakdown in your customer service. Forgetting to attach something to an email before you send it, not replying to an email or text within twenty-four hours, or turning up late for an appointment, are all examples of micro crises.

Having worked in website design for a number of years, I relate these micro crises to a 404 page. A 404 page is what you see when you click on a link, or search on a website for something that doesn't exist. The website essentially can't find what you're looking for: either because it's been removed or never existed in the first place (the link you clicked on may have a typo in it).

Renny Gleeson, Global Digital Strategies Director for Wieden+Kennedy (a cutting-edge advertising agency handling clients such as *Nike*, *Nokia* and *Target*) delivered a TED talk comparing landing on a 404 page to the feeling of a broken relationship.²⁹ "What a 404 page tells you is that you fell through the cracks – that's not a good experience – it's like a slap in the face," says Gleeson. It's the same when you miss a phone call or reply late to an email. Most 404 pages say things like: "The page cannot be found – the page you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable." This is typically followed by more technical jargon and little or no styling or company branding to go with it. 404 pages are most often generic and grossly impersonal.

In his TED talk Gleeson refers to a focus group which started a project built around the experience of a 404 page. The group, in which Gleeson participated, collated a bunch of 404 pages from various websites and found the ones which gave the best user experience. He says, "Little things, done right, matter" and "Well-designed moments build brands". While most 404 pages make your site look unprofessional and only encourage visitors

to leave, a 404 page that is funny and memorable can have a huge impact on keeping visitors on the site. Do a quick *Google* search for ‘funny’, ‘memorable’ or ‘creative’ 404 pages to find examples. Most of these pages use wording like, “oops”, “uh oh”, “sorry”, “this is awkward”, “how embarrassing” and other more human expressions. Many have images, cartoons and even comic strips. Some embed *YouTube* videos, and a few have impressive videos produced just for the 404 page.

Apart from asking your web designers to do something more creative with your 404 pages, think about what you can do with the other micro breakdown crises in your business, which I like to call ‘404 moments’. Rather than making your 404 moments seem like big, bad ordeals, consider how you can be more **Flawsome**. Acknowledge them as breakdowns and turn them into friendly, positive experiences.

Microsoft has taken a step in the right direction with its new operating system, *Windows 8*. When users experience system failure (affectionately known as the ‘blue screen of death’), rather than inundate people with technical jargon of why their computer stopped working, the new system takes things in a more compassionate direction. It features a whimsical colon and open bracket ‘sad face’ emoticon and the words: “Your PC ran into a problem it couldn’t handle, and now needs to restart.”

Renny Gleeson finished his TED talk with a quote from one of his recent tweets: “A simple mistake can tell me what you aren’t. Or it can remind me why I love you.” Instead of ignoring the micro breakdown crises in your business and hoping people won’t notice, see them as opportunities to reinforce your brand, show people you care, and give a memorable service.

SO HARD SELL

THE NOTS

Flawsome can be applied in all aspects of a business. It can be used for marketing campaigns such as BGH's 'Big Noses', and it can be applied for branding companies like *CB I Hate Perfume* or *Heart Attack Grill*.

Flawsome can be used in your sales copy to set your customer's expectations as in the case of "*A Little Bit of Something*", it can be used to reframe your customers' perception about your flaws like *Ruffles*, and even used to engage people who otherwise dislike your product, as in the example of *Marmite*. So far we've looked at everything which comes before the point of sale, but being **Flawsome** can be used just as effectively for salespeople as it is for the marketing department.

Hands up who loves spam?! If your hand is up you're probably thinking of the tinned meat product or the classic Monty Python song. No, I mean junk mail and emails, flyers stuck to your windshield, and, of course, those annoying (I'm being polite and 'G' rated here) telemarketing calls. The hands quickly shoot right back down.

Remember earlier in the book we learned that the average Australian is exposed to around 3,000 advertising messages a day? Most of these messages tend to be an unconscious part of

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our day (glancing at a billboard or advertising banners on websites), but the ones we are more aware of are mostly invasive. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are being pitched to for a good portion of each day. While most of us claim we don't like being sold to, that's not actually the case. We love being pitched to because it means that someone thinks we're worth speaking to. Think about it. Even though at times some of us feel uncomfortable when we're just browsing and the sales person comes right up to us and offers to help, imagine how you'd feel if you were ignored completely. If you walked into a Ferrari dealership and the salesperson gave you a wide berth and instead talked to the guy in the immaculate Armani suit, how would that make you feel?

Let's have a look at one more irrefutable fact...if you're in business, you're a salesperson. A seller or salesperson is defined as "the provider of goods and/or services" and a business is "an organisation engaged in the trade of goods and/or services". Not much difference, is there?

I've given talks before where I've asked people to say what comes to mind when they think of a salesperson, and without going into detail, the general consensus is mostly negative. Even though you and I may not have the formal title of 'salesperson' in our organisations, we're always looking to influence someone to get what we need to get our work done. If we're not pitching a product or service, we're pitching an idea or a concept. A pitch isn't always to a prospective customer – it can be to a provider, a colleague, friend or family member. Getting someone to do something they otherwise wouldn't have done without your influence is selling (yep, even getting hubby to put down the toilet seat is selling).

If the concept of pitching or making sales is so commonplace, why do we despise telemarketers so much? Well, it's really quite simple...we don't like being *interrupted*. The difference between a simple request and an obnoxious sales technique is context. If customers ask to be told about our product or service, or if we prepare them beforehand for the pitch, they'll potentially be more open to buying than if they feel we've interrupted them.

At the start of this book I mentioned how so many companies are just making marketing 'noise' by talking about themselves and not really contributing anything of real value or uniqueness. I described how most people who start their own businesses have little or no formal education in marketing or sales, so they must be modelling themselves on what 'everyone else' is doing and how things have always been done. The marketing world is oversaturated and people are not only desensitised to it, they are fed up with traditional forms of marketing and sales, now known as 'interruption marketing'. Michael Port, author of *The Contrarian Effect: Why It Pays to Take Typical Sales Advice and Do the Opposite*, said in an interview: "This type of behaviour is basically saying I don't care about you."³⁰

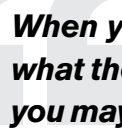
If you've ever been in a 'salesperson' role in an organisation, you'll know how easy it is to lose focus on building relationships with customers and instead think only about immediate income. It's all too easy to push our wares onto people in hopes of making our quota instead of actually caring about whether they need it or not. It's not necessarily the fault of the frontline sales staff alone. Companies often pressure their salespeople to focus all their training and education on 'closing a sale' rather than 'providing value'. The customer is dehumanised when a company prioritises an immediate purchase over a genuine relationship and it's these short-term gains that inevitably lead to an overall loss

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of integrity. The new generation of sales professionals and companies alike will have to take a very different approach.

In his book ‘*Permission Marketing*’, best-selling author on branding and marketing, Seth Godin, says that today’s consumers are bombarded with so many messages that they’re “just not listening any more”.³¹ He says it’s time to stop and try something else which doesn’t interrupt people’s time, space and peace of mind, instead realising that “treating people with respect is the best way to earn their attention”.

In ‘*Tactical Transparency*’, authors Shel Holtz and John C Havens quote Sean Bohan, advertising and marketing executive at a New York-based international marketing agency, as saying:



When you take them for granted, tell them what they want to hear, and get aggressive, you may win the battle but you will definitely lose the war. The hard sell, the bum’s rush, the used car salesman process is a waste of energy. It is not oriented to creating a relationship – it wants a sale at all costs. It makes the customer feel pressured, like they didn’t get a fair deal.”³²

Being a **Flawsome** salesperson is going to be the new evolution in sales. It’s time to do away with the out-dated and heavily fabricated sales techniques of the past and instead begin to build relationships with customers based on listening intently to their needs and genuinely investing in helping them to achieve their goals.



404

PAGE MISSING

Oh no! This is awkward.

It seems the page you were looking for doesn't exist.
It may never have existed, or it may have been deleted.
It may have changed its name or moved to the sunny
coast in hopes of achieving its life-long dream of
becoming who-knows-what.

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Before we go any further I want to put out there that I'm not saying all other sales methods are wrong. I totally believe Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques like matching and mirroring, traditional sales tips like arriving early, dressing professionally, using the potential customer's name frequently and so on will all amplify your sales.

What I am suggesting is that we remember the basics: people buy YOU before YOUR PRODUCTS. Building rapport and putting clients at ease about being sold to will give the largest portion of results. All additional 'techniques' and 'tactics' are icing on top for boosting your conversion rates. Being **Flawsome** is about going back to basics. It makes for a much easier and more enjoyable experience for everyone. These are the ten steps to being a **Flawsome** salesperson:

1

Feel okay about being a salesperson

The first step in being a **Flawsome** salesperson is to be honest with yourself and your customers. Realise that customers aren't stupid, they know your end goal is to sell to them, and you know you want to sell to them. You know what you're both there for so clear the air by feeling good about it.

Often people regard salespeople with such negative connotations that when it comes time for them to step into the role, all they try to do is be 'not like a salesperson'. It's the same as if I asked you not to think about a blue duck, what do you think of? Though we might avoid some of the things we hate about salespeople, constantly trying not to be something is only going to prevent us from being natural and comfortable (which is key to putting our customers at ease).

2

**Take the pressure off
(Detach from the outcome)**

Forget your looming quota and begin a relationship based on hearing your client's goals. If you're in front of a customer, odds are that there is at least a chance you could do business (otherwise you wouldn't even be having the meeting). Stop trying to force the situation. Let go of your own motives and focus on listening to how you can best fulfil the needs of a potential customer.

In traditional sales we are taught that the percentage of clients who take up our offer drops dramatically every day that passes after a sales meeting. Companies realise this and put pressure on their salespeople to close a sale in the first meeting. Therefore, as sales people, we put a sense of urgency on our offers and try to dazzle our clients with all the details we possibly can so they are able to make an 'educated decision' right then and there. It's like a first date where someone is trying too hard to impress – it's a turn-off. What's more, if we *do* pressure customers into a sale that they really didn't want to make, they will be left unhappy and bitter about being roped in. The profit you'd make from the one sale would pale in comparison to the profit gained from the repeat business of a happy customer and the business they refer.

It's also impossible to shake the fear of rejection when you're holding so tightly to the outcome and see every interaction with a customer as a 'sales process'. The only way to feel good about it is to turn that 'sales process' into a conversation; relax and be yourself.

The originator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series, Jack Canfield, often refers to an acronym SW-SW-SW-SW³³ which means: "Some will, some won't, so what...someone's

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waiting.” I take that to mean there’s no point dwelling on rejection. When you drop traditional sales techniques in favour of authentic communication you don’t have to go through the self-degrading analysis of, “Did I say this right? Did I do that...? I should have done this...blah, blah, friggin’ blah”. Every minute you sit and critically analyse your so-called ‘sales process’ is another minute you could, and should, be engaged with a new prospect. A great way to detach from the outcome is to adopt the mentality that you can’t say the right thing to the wrong person and you can’t say the wrong thing to the right person.

3

Engage in authentic communication

The third step to being a **Flawsome** salesperson is to realise that consumers all share a common concern of not being heard. They desire relationships with the people they do business with; companies that they can talk to versus ones that simply talk *at* customers. Clients want a dialogue not a monologue, a chat not a spiel, a conversation not a sales process.

Working with the biggest brands in Australia and the UK, Gary Bertwistle is regarded as a thought leader in innovation and creativity. Early in 2012 Bertwistle titled one of his renowned ‘Espresso’ newsletters (which I highly recommend everyone to subscribe to) ‘Talk To Me Not At Me’. In this newsletter, Bertwistle says we are sick of talking to machines, we are sick of jargon and clichés, we just want someone to talk to us.³⁴ There’s a sweeping trend in brands across the world which sees consumers and clients asking for authenticity. Too many of the leading brands don’t do this, too many leading companies don’t do this and too many

'leaders' don't do this. The best company directors and CEOs he's met talk it as they see it and talk with him and not at him.

Trying to solve a customer's problem with jargon, fluffing and smoke screens will just end up frustrating the individual. When you're talking with people, save the jargon, tell it as it is, keep it simple, and save your words. For some salespeople, this is one of the hardest things to do. It involves forgetting most of what we've been taught previously and dropping the refined sales techniques. Let go of the carefully scripted questions and instead just engage in conversation and see where it takes you. For others, it can be liberating. If you're the kind of person who feels overwhelmed trying to learn all the 'right' things to say and do, you can consider this as your permission to speak frankly and just be yourself.

4

Show you actually do care

Any pick up artist will teach you to ask lots of questions about your date to get him or her more interested in what you have to say. It was John C. Maxwell who said: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."³⁵ Spend 80% or more of your time talking about your potential customer and his or her needs and only 20% of the time talking about you and how you can help.

The most common mistake I see with people trying to be **Flawsome** salespeople, is going to a meeting unprepared. Admitting to a potential client that you know nothing about his or her business is not **Flawsome** and it displays a lack of professionalism. It takes all of five minutes to surf a company's website and get a basic understanding of what it does. Many sites

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now, through their content and design, reflect the culture and ethos of a company. If the decision maker you're meeting with had anything to do with the website, it's likely that the website is a reflection of that individual. Doing your background research and showing them you have done so by referring to what you've learnt about them shows that you actually care who they are.

5

Be passionate

On June 12th, 2005 Steve Jobs (who was CEO of *Apple* and *Pixar* at the time) delivered a commencement address for Stanford University in the US. In the address he said:

You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it. And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking until you find it. Don't settle.³⁶

Trying too hard is a turn-off, but being passionate about your product or service and its ability to solve a client's problem or transform their business is attractive. When it is your time to talk,

do it with passion and conviction. If you're sure you can help solve a potential customer's problems then get excited about it! Your enthusiasm will rub off, and speak much louder than the actual words coming out of your mouth. Don't try to be passionate about something you don't really like, people will see straight through it or at least get a sense that something is up. It's not **Flawsome** to fake it.

6

Make small talk big

The sales proposition and close are vitally important, but rapport building should be your primary focus. Look for how you can get past the banal niceties and find the authentic moments that connect you with potential clients. If they'll let you, find out what they do in their spare time, what their family is like, anything which is inspiring to them. You'll be amazed how the most cold-faced of prospective customers will light up and go from reserved to chatty once you hit on something they're passionate about.

Commenting on these things (where appropriate) demonstrates you have an attention to detail for things that matter to them, showing you care and are invested in their best interests. Remember that authenticity is the key – don't flatter and certainly don't pry.

7

Even when it's your turn to talk, listen

There's always a point during the meeting, usually after the small (now big) talk, at which your potential customer will indicate that

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it's time for you to begin your pitch. It's easy to get over-excited when it's your turn and take the reins completely. Don't try to get everything out at once, slow down, make sure to pause and let them interject with questions or comments as you go. Keep a dialogue going as before – don't launch into a typical sales monologue.

If you carefully took the time to 'make small talk big' earlier in the meeting, odds are there were times when you may have heard some buying motives amongst the things your prospect told you. This is the time to remind them of those motives and show that you were paying attention during the meeting.

8

Detail the good and bad about your product or service

People are naturally sceptical of deals without strings, and of perfect products. Keep in mind that potential customers are only ever asking two questions: "What's in it for me?" and "What's the catch?" Once they've figured out those two, they'll be in the right position to make a decision.

You don't have to divulge every dirty little detail, but just make sure you're not blindly dismissing or ignoring anything negative about your product or service in an effort to make it a 'no-brainer decision'. You could, in fact, be making it harder for customers to reach their decision without them knowing the factors 'for' and 'against'. If there's something about your product or service you think might influence them NOT to invest in it, be sure to mention it, and do your best to address their concern. Again, they're better off finding out about it now, than being an unhappy customer later.

9

Pre-frame your close and ask for what you want

When I sit down to consult someone on building a website for them, I sometimes start by stating why we are together and that at the end I'm going to be able to give them a really good idea of how much they can expect to pay for a website. I then say that I have a bunch of questions to ask so I can get really clear on what they're after so I don't try and sell them something they don't need. Essentially I'm pre-framing my close right at the start of the meeting. I'm basically saying "at the end of this meeting I'm going to sell you something". It plants a seed in the prospect's mind, clearing the air so I can get on with the presentation. This method means that as a salesperson, you won't ever have to feel nervous coming in for the close because you and the prospect are both expecting it.

Having pre-framed the close, you should be able to confidently ask for a decision after you actually make the close (if it's not the kind of product you need to draw up a proposal for first). If the prospect is not ready to make a decision, make sure you've come prepared with a 'next-step' offer. It could be information like a brochure that you can leave with them, or you might promise to send them a link to a website – whatever it is, be sure to let them know that you'll follow up with them for a decision at a suitable time. Start with forty-eight hours, but if they need longer, give them more time.

10

Make it okay for them to say “no”

When you're asking for a decision at the end of a meeting, or during your follow-up, make sure they feel comfortable enough to refuse your offer. It's easy to have built so much rapport that a person feels terrible saying “no”. As a result they'll be indecisive and can keep putting you off instead of turning you down.

I'm sure anyone who's been in business for even a short amount of time knows how frustrating and time-wasting it can be to have a prospective client lead you on and not commit to a decision. If you can't make a potential customer feel comfortable enough to say “no”, then just come out and say: “If you're not interested just tell me. It won't hurt my feelings if you say ‘no’. The last thing I want to do is badger you.” If you do badger the prospect for months, you might get the sale in the end, but is it really worth all the time which could be better spent prospecting someone else?

Remember also that bad reviews spread faster than good ones. If your customers are bitter about being sold to through clever sales tactics, your business may suffer in the long run. Ironically, being authentic, transparent, honest, and working to serve someone effectively is more motivating to a client than any scripted questions or tricks you could pull.

Whether you have a job title that includes the word ‘sales’ or not, remember that every person in a business interacts in some way with those who are current or potential customers. Whatever your role, you can be the deal maker – or the deal breaker.

No pressure. Just be honest, be attentive, and be **Flawsome!**

LOADING... Please Wait

A California-based fashion company, *Patagonia*, makes strong efforts to be environmentally-friendly, but doesn't want its customers to be under any illusions and ultimately hold the company to promises it can't keep. To give customers a realistic expectation of how environmentally-friendly it really is, the company developed an online tool called the 'Footprint Chronicles'. This **Flawsome** tool saw *Patagonia* lay bare 'the good and the bad' of its products along the supply chain. For example, the information for the *Wayfarer* board shorts states: "The fabric has no recycled content. We worked hard with our supplier to develop a recycled nylon fabric –and succeeded – but it's not commercially viable (a pair of shorts would cost \$75)."

Patagonia has also adopted a surprising **Flawsome** technique for their sales by asking their customers to buy fewer of their products. Teaming up with eBay, it created the 'Common Threads Initiative' which encourages customers to buy fewer new things directly from the company and instead participate in a dedicated used-clothing marketplace for *Patagonia* gear. Apparently it had always been an eco-conscious company interested in sustainability. In addition to giving 10% of its pre-tax earnings to environmental activist groups, *Patagonia* promises its clothing will be as eco-friendly and durable as possible.

Patagonia also offers a recycling service for items too badly worn to be resold. It has managed to recycle old clothes into new fibre and even repurpose what isn't recyclable, taking back 45 tons of clothing and making 34 tons into new clothes since 2005. With 85% of consumers worldwide expecting companies to become actively involved in promoting individual and collective

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wellbeing and only 28% of people thinking that companies are working hard to solve the big social and environmental challenges (according to a November 2011 report in *Havas Media*³⁷), it's no wonder that *Time Magazine* has suggested that *Patagonia's* strong environmental credentials attract *more* customers. *Havas Media* also reported in 2011 that the number of customers with these expectations has increased by 15% since 2010.

The motives behind *Patagonia's* clever **Flawsome** sales tactic are not all feel-good tree-hugging ones. A *Harvard Business Review*³⁸ pointed out the higher prices for *Patagonia's* merchandise were more easily justified by customers. By asking them to buy less, *Patagonia* are actually boosting sales, not to mention brand awareness, with more people sharing and thus wearing the clothing line. What's more, *Patagonia* is creating an untapped secondary market through eBay for its products. This essentially generates a self-reviving loop which can also attract new customers and increases the company's market reach.

There are two types of customers that could be more inclined to buy new *Patagonia* apparel as a result of these efforts: customers who make decisions based on sustainability considerations, and customers who can now sell their used *Patagonia* apparel for cash to buy new apparel. The customers who sell their old apparel online have enabled *Patagonia* to reach the buyer of the second-hand gear who may not have been reachable previously, or who may not have been able to afford the products originally. Plus, those who purchase the second-hand gear may enjoy it enough to purchase new *Patagonia* gear in the future.

Being **Flawsome** and doing the opposite of what everyone else considers 'the norm' can really pay off!

BEING FLAWSOME

Flawsome has so many applications in branding and marketing, as well as in our interactions with current and prospective clients. As pointed out early on, business is, and always has been, people driven. It's not so farfetched to consider that being **Flawsome** could benefit our personal lives as well – that is, during our daily interactions with friends, family and everyone else we meet, as well as with customers and colleagues.

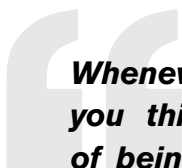
I truly believe that injecting the values of being **Flawsome**: openness, honesty, candidness, caring, transparency, tolerance, and the like, into our own lives can lead us to experience more fulfilling relationships. Everybody just wants to be loved for who they are, but that's impossible when our judgements of others prevent them from being themselves and when we protect ourselves from being judged in return.

Andrew Horabin spoke in his book *'Bullshift'* about how a company's progress can be hindered when people don't speak their minds in the boardroom. I feel this extends to the rest of life. When we are intolerant of the things that we perceive to be flaws

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in other people, we keep those individuals from expressing their opinions and ideas. Feeling insecure about our own flaws leads us to do the same.

Author, speaker and human behavioural expert, John F. Demartini, summed it up better than I ever could:



Whenever you have a fantasy about how you think your life should be, instead of being grateful for how it is, you split yourself in two. The fantasy appears to be more positive than negative and as a result you compare your reality to it. You then become sad and depressed whenever you perceive that your life doesn't match the unrealistic ideal in your mind."³⁹

So the real question is: where are we getting these fantasies and unrealistic ideals from? Well, you don't have to look far to find out. Try turning on the TV or flicking through a trashy magazine. Advertising companies and celebrity fixation have had us idolising false perfection. Romantic comedies give us unrealistic ideas of what our relationships should be like, magazine ads tell us how we should look, happy smiling families on TV ads tell us how our family should function. Is it really the fault of advertising execs for leading us astray? They are programming us to crave perfection, yet the popularity of reality TV proves that the public are actually craving more authenticity.

The problem is not just that we compare ourselves to the perfect people on TV, but also that we do the same to each other. Of course, there's the 'keeping up with the Joneses' attitude, but

it's much more than that. There is no denying we all have a moral compass and self-worth barometer. There is something within human nature which drives us to adjust our own behaviour to mirror the collective attitude of the society in which we live. We constantly look to each other, not just for validation and approval, but also to gauge where we are in life. Think about it. How successful would you feel in an alley full of homeless bums compared to a room full of billionaires?

The fact is we all have 'stuff'. No one, despite what they might tell you, has it all sorted. No matter how beautiful, rich, affluent, and successful people may appear, everyone is discontent with some aspect of their life. If you think anyone is truly happy 100% of the time, you obviously haven't lived with them. When we meet someone we say: "Hi, my name is ____ and my life is perfect." Okay, maybe we don't say it in those exact words, but most of us present ourselves in a way that doesn't truly reflect us, and why would we? No one really has to know that we're not speaking to our partners, our kids hate us and that rash is driving us crazy, do they?

Am I saying that we should be 100% honest and dump our 'stuff' on others? No. My point is that we all put on a brave face and it perpetuates an illusion. Person A looks at Person B and says: "Wow, they've got it together. Why am I so screwed up?" As a result Person A puts on a brave face. Person B looks back at the brave face and thinks the same thing of Person A. We compare ourselves to others, but we're really only getting half the picture.

Maybe it's time we all get a little more **Flawsome** and real with one another. For example, when people ask about being self-employed I might tell them: "It's really great. It can get stressful and there are times I've wished I could just work nine

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to five and shut off, but I really enjoy the freedom of working from home.” If they ask how my business is going, I’ll say: “Not as busy as I’d like, but it’s given me time to work on some of my own projects, which is good.” Or I might say: “Really busy, it gets overwhelming at times, but that’s a good problem to have.” I’m not suggesting that you talk like this all the time, just that you be more conscious of the image you’re putting out there. Are you giving people a balanced perspective? Don’t do it for yourself; do it for them. Also, when you see someone you can’t fault, know that they are as flawed as everyone else, they just don’t show it. They are awesome despite their flaws, and you are too.

A short while back I was at a business networking event where I heard an amazing duo talk about how they have inspired a massive support network of women by being raw and honest about the crap in their lives. It began with a magazine, and grew into an international blog, a book and more. In a relatively short period of time they grew an amazingly successful business and experienced incredible positive changes in their own lives. Their story was so in line with the **Flawsome** concept that I asked them to share it in this book. So here, in their own words, I present Alli and Genine:

Truth be told, we didn’t mean to be **Flawsome**. In fact, until Ryan labelled us with the awesome title at one of our public speaking gigs, we’d never even heard of the word.

But as soon as the word left his lips it made sense. Complete sense. **Flawsome** is exactly what we, *Alli & Genine*, are, and what we strive to be. Up until that point, we’d happily pinned our hopes for business success on always being “real, raw and honest”, and that’s how we still operate today, professionally, as a brand and business, and in

our personal lives. What you see is what you get with Alli & Genine – warts and all, and often it's a case of "far too much information".

Sadly, in society today we are all too often made to feel inadequate for failing, for stumbling, for falling over and for having to start again. We are taught to fear failure. Frankly, it's baloney. Instead, we should be embracing our challenges and shouting them from the rooftops, because to become a success after stumbling so many times along the way makes our stories even more inspiring. After all, we are but human.

With backgrounds in the corporate world, in marketing, the media and publishing, we saw a major hole in the way women, in particular, were being portrayed in magazines and other written media. We wanted to tell the stories of amazing women doing amazing things. From our backgrounds we knew we were good at telling a story and sharing a yarn. Our goal was to inspire women and make them feel better about themselves, but we weren't going to be all warm and fuzzy about it.

We wanted to do something this country hadn't seen before. We wanted to write stories that would slap you across the face with the real, raw and honest truth about the story subject, about the struggles, challenges, issues and triumphs of everyday women.

One day it dawned on us. Wow, we were really doing something good here. We were showing people that it's okay to fail, it's okay to go through hardship and challenges – in fact it's normal. It's okay to have issues...we've all got them! We showed people that, no matter how big the

challenge or hurdle placed in front of you, you can make it through, get to the other side...that I am not okay and you are not okay, and that is okay!

Our magazine only reached a small market in Queensland and we had visions of a world by women, for women, supporting women. We wanted to take our message global and encourage women all around the world to join in the conversation and contribute their stories so they might inspire other women with similar challenges. But how would we do this? How could we ask women to put their trust, and their issues, in the hands of a couple of chicks from South East Queensland they hardly knew? Well, we decided to take a 'me first' approach to sharing. We simply had to go first – to share our real, raw and honest problems, challenges and issues with women everywhere. And it all started with a blog: www.alliand-genine.com.

You name it, we put it out there. Not so hard for Alli, a crier who likes to shop, has emotional issues stemming from being adopted, is onto her second marriage and at thirty-four became a first-time mum (who is riddled with mummy guilt), but certainly a challenge for Genine – a corporate go-getter who doesn't cry, is a control freak, hates to spend money, and suffered through three miscarriages before finally giving birth to baby Jack – a child she didn't even know she wanted until the age of thirty-seven when she first 'accidentally' fell pregnant. Nonetheless, it happened, and it created quite a stir.

Women read it. Women shared it. Women got it. Our blogs did their job – they made women feel less alone,

they gave them perspective (and often a giggle or two in the process), and they sent the message that anything is possible. That you should not fear failure, you should not be ashamed of your issues, because we've all got 'em!

We pile so much pressure on ourselves to be perfect and unflawed that we can't help but place the same if not more pressure on the other people in our lives. It's like a giant game of emotional dominos. I can't tell you that I'm flawed and have issues, because your life is obviously so void of challenges. In fact, I'm piling the same amount of pressure back onto you, take that! And the cycle continues, each of us afraid to speak out for fear of embarrassment. If you knew the truth you might think I'm a failure and we can't have that, can we?

So, this became the core of our world – the real, raw and honest world of Alli & Genine. Our 'me first' approach to sharing our issues gained traction quickly, and within a few months we had launched our first book called *'Issues? What Issues?'*. The book is a compilation of some of our most popular blogs and new stories about our perfectly flawed lives.

Our real, raw and honest approach to creating our brand worked – we were **Flawsome**, without even realising it at the time! We were building a business based around the premise that people will put more trust in a brand that is open about its flaws than one that puts on an unauthentic facade. It's all about the trust bank – the more deposits you can add to that little baby, the more security you have if you need to make a desperate withdrawal during a challenge or crisis that might impact your business or your brand.

The best part is that if we go down one path, give it a crack, bugger up and turn around, we are quickly forgiven. Instead of being labelled failures our followers and supporters acknowledge that we are brave and bold. As we know, fortune favours the brave. Because we are honest about our flaws, people can better relate to us, to our brand, and even to our products and services. Boy, what a journey it has been! If we'd started out pretending to be someone we are not, we wouldn't be where we are today.

For us, it's everything we do, and in just twelve months we created a successful and unique business. Our message started with a blog and a presence in the social media world (which is still going strong today), and grew to include a book which is in bookstores around the country, as well as a weekly radio show throughout regional Queensland, aptly called '*Alli & Genine's Issues? What Issues?*'. We have become highly sought-after public speakers who travel the country inspiring women (and men) and quite accidentally, our success gave birth to our business coaching service when people kept asking us how we got so far in such a short amount of time.

We have a gaggle of corporate partners who realised that our real, raw and honest approach was an excellent way to reach their target market, women! Our biggest achievement to date is the creation of our *Big Girl's Panties Enterprises* brand – a separate business that is focused on creating products to support women, in a cheeky and fun way. Our first *Big Girl's Panties* product is our own wine label. Yes, a wine label!

As Ryan has already shared with you, one of the keys to being **Flawsome** is asking for feedback and accepting criticism. We ask our target market for feedback and accept when and where we got it wrong. Some decisions we have made didn't go over so well and that has been a-okay with our supporters, because, well, at least we asked!

Every day we exist to support, inspire and entertain people, and they let us do just that, because we speak to them in just the right way – we're authentic, we don't sweep anything under the carpet, and we are open about life and how bloody challenging it can be. We are incredibly proud of it.

The best part is that we have given ourselves permission to be just us. Actually, we have to be, because if we are not authentic, if we aren't perfectly flawed, our followers and fans will know. They will sniff it out, and quickly. Occasionally we swear (because that's who we are, but mostly we keep it nice), we call "bullshit" when we need to, we admit to our failings and we share intimate and sometimes embarrassing character flaws. We are proud of our flaws as they make us who we are, and we encourage other people to better understand *their* flaws and how they can be intrinsically woven into the fabric of their brand for the betterment not only of their businesses, but their lives as a whole.

It's incredibly liberating and cathartic sharing your issues. Honestly – try it! Be real, admit to failing, share something you wouldn't normally share, and I bet your 'me first' approach opens the floodgates to a big, fat share-a-thon! That's certainly what happens in our world, and we often

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leave speaking gigs or receive feedback from our readers that we make them feel “normal and less alone”. Mission accomplished!

Looking back, we probably underestimated the impact our real, raw and honest approach would have on the growth of our business. We are where we are today because of our transparency and authenticity, and we truly believe that each and every success we celebrate will be because we have lived by these values. Some days we get it wrong, and that’s okay, because being flawed is not only normal, it should be embraced, as long as you mix it with just the right amount of awesome.

And maybe we’re just a little bit jealous that Ryan uncovered the concept of being **Flawsome** before us, but that’s okay, we’re more than happy to jump on board and, from firsthand experience, sing the concept’s praises. So get out there and embrace your awesome flaws.

Alli & Genine

www.alliandgenine.com and www.biggirlspanties.com.au

CONCLUSION? **FLAWSOME DOESN'T END!**

It is always important to move with the latest trends in business, but in the case of **Flawsome**, it's essential.

We live in a time that demands greater openness. Whichever way you look at things, your only options are to embrace transparency or appear opaque and behind the times. Being truly **Flawsome** is not a single moment or initiative, it's a mindset – a mindset which is honest, authentic, and willing to engage in conversations (even when those conversations are about things that are not exactly flattering for the company). Just doing what you already do on a day-to-day basis, but with this new mindset could see massive positive changes start to take place in your business and life.

Just how **Flawsome** should you be? Not all companies have done it well, some have had it backfire. It's important to note that web data is forever and anything you've said or done can be found at any time, often just with a *Google* search. So here are a couple of quick tips to help prevent a backfire:

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- ❶ Don't ever reveal private details about your staff or customers (duh!).
- ❷ Be self-deprecating, not deprecating of others.
- ❸ Don't be overly self-deprecating. Too much and you risk becoming a whinger and a victim – and no one likes a whinger. You also risk people believing that the bad outweighs the good in your business.
- ❹ Don't laugh off a crisis or problem and do nothing about it. It's okay to diffuse upset with humour, but then fix it, don't ignore it.
- ❺ Never be rude to your disgruntled customers. You might get the support of your other customers, but it's just bad manners and guaranteed to backfire on you one day.
- ❻ NEVER invent a few 'flaws-that-aren't-really-flaws' in an attempt to 'connect' with consumers in an 'honest' way. That's just deceitful and definitely NOT **Flawsome**.

Lastly, shine light on the benefits behind every flaw, because **Flawsome** without the awesome is just flawed.



WOAH!

PLEASE WAIT A SEC!

**In the spirit of being FLAWSOME,
I'd really appreciate your honest
review of the book.**

**If you'd be happy to, please go to:
www.flawsomebook.com/reviews**

THE AUTHOR

Ryan is a rising star as a visual branding strategist, graphic artist, web designer, cartoonist and illustrator. He's a Virgo, who wishes he enjoyed long walks on the beach and could play the flute. His company, Younique Creation, helps start-up businesses establish a unique, attention grabbing image and already established businesses to develop stronger connections with their target market through re-branding.

If you would like to stay up to date with the latest case studies and research findings on the practical applications of **Flawsome**, be sure to check out www.flawsomebook.com and visit the blog. If you would like Ryan McDonald-Smith to speak at your next conference, training or business networking event, please email speaking@flawsomebook.com

To find out more about Younique Creation and Ryan's design services, please visit www.youniquecreation.com and be sure to check out his extensive portfolio.

You can connect with Ryan McDonald-Smith by 'liking' his fan pages:

FLAWSOME

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You can also connect via Linked In: www.linkedin.com/in/rmcsmith

Ryan doesn't typically accept invites to connect via LinkedIn from people he doesn't know, so please be sure to include a message saying that you have read this book when asking to connect.

ENDNOTES

1. Read more from Dave Ramsey on his website <http://www.daveramsey.com/>
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3. <http://www.havasmedia.com/meaningful-brands/>
4. Research conducted by Revoo is available on the company website <http://www.reevoo.com/resources/research/>
5. Research report available at <http://www.maritzresearch.com/shared-content/e24/TwitterPoll.aspx>
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8. <http://sourcesofinsight.com/lessons-learned-from-bill-gates/>
9. Andrew Horabin's book *Bullshift* is available on his website <http://andrewhorabin.com/>
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14. More information is available on the website <http://www.deliveringhappiness.com/>
15. See <http://www.fourhourworkweek.com/>
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19. <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/reports/2012/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages.html>
20. You'll find Mathatma Gandhi's quote at <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/128116-a-customer-is-the-most-important-visitor-on-our-premises>. However, the authenticity of the quote is debated. You can read more about the origin of the quote here: <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/08/02/gandhi-customer/>
21. <http://www.trendwatching.com/trends/rak/>
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23. <http://www.texas-quality.org/SiteImages/125/Reference%20Library/Manage%20Complaints%20to%20Enhance%20Loyalty.pdf>
24. As quoted in Jill Griffin's book *Customer Loyalty: How to Earn It, How to Keep It*. For more about Jill Griffin's work see <http://www.loyaltysolutions.com/>
25. For more information about Michael LeBouf see <http://www.michaelleboeuf.com/>
26. Extracted from *Tactical Transparency* by Shel Holtz and John C. Havens, pages 94-107
27. <http://www.customerservicemanager.com/101-inspirational-customer-service-quotes.htm>
28. http://www.ted.com/talks/renny_gleeson_404_the_story_of_a_page_not_found.html
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