BIZCOMMUNITY

Of boats, friendship and spines

By Danette Breitenbach

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Adam Morgan, founder of eatbigfish and the Challenger Project, popularised the phrase 'Challenger Brand' and he was one of the speakers at the recent Discovery Leadership Summit that was held in Sandton, Gauteng.

Morgan says the phrase Challenger Brand was coined out of sheer frustration. "In the '90s there were plenty of case studies on the market leaders, but no information available on Challenger Brands, so I began to research them," he says. Previously there were only two Challenger Narratives - David vs Goliath and The Game Changer, but Morgan developed a more defined set of 10 common narratives.

Today, the term Challenger Brand is almost mainstream and the narratives are as relevant to the world if not more. "Markets move very quickly today, but besides this a company can be the category leader or the largest in its category, but still be challenger brand. It can have a Challenger mentality or culture," he explains.

His latest project is a book, A Beautiful Constraint, which looks at how individuals and enterprises make apparent limitations a source of renewal and growth, rather than a cause of restriction and asphyxiation.



Adam Morgan. (Image extracted from eatbigfish.com

He explains where the inspiration for the concept came from. "I started thinking about this after an interview with Dan Wieden, co-founder of Wieden+Kennedy. Wieden was tasked with coming up with a new communication for Nike that could not be traditional advertising. He told me that he pinned up a picture of the legendary Haile Gebrselassie 'and thought what would I like to say to him'."

Two questions

Morgan says there are two questions a brand must ask itself: "What do I need to challenge to succeed; and what is the constraint I need to embrace to succeed. Only once a brand does this will we see a more interesting and richer communication."

Why is this necessary? "With the platforms available to brands today, it can be argued that everything and anything is possible. However, the danger is that everything remains the same. As I was told once, if you place a group of game developers in a room together and ask them to come up with a game idea, giving them an open brief, they will all come up with the same game concept," he explains.

There is also the real danger of throwing everything out. "By this I am referring to the popular notion that the consumer is in control of our brand. I agree that transparency is very important, but a brand needs to know what it stands for and have values. The idea that you can remove your spine and just hand it over to me is extraordinary. A brand must know its fixed truths, and then it can engage with the consumer," he states.

A crisis in marketing?

He maintains there is a tension between what remains the same and what changes. "Is there a crisis in marketing today? We were told there was one 15 years ago, but no one has yet come up with a new model. We are on a journey with no map and so we are making it up as we go along."

He uses this analogy to explain this. "Imagine a crowd of people on the top deck of ship. Someone spots something off the port bow and everyone rushes over to port. This causes the boat to lurch to the port side. To balance the ship some people

move to the starboard side. But then the call goes out that something has been spotted on that side so the crowd rushes over and the boat tips in that direction. And so it goes on. You get the idea. This what the industry is doing at the moment and it is because no one is as confident as they want to be, so there is a sense of rushing from one side of the boat to the other."

We are living in an age where there is an inversion of things that we have been starved of he says. For example, the idea of community is an old one but it is manifesting itself in modern ways. "So new business is being made out of relooking old concepts. For example, www.airbnb.com, which was started in 2008, is a community marketplace where people can list accommodation or look for accommodation. When the founder told his father about the idea, his father said it was a ridiculous idea. His grandfather, on the other hand, thought it was a great idea."

The notion of friendship has also changed enormously. "In the modern meaning of friendship a brand can relate to consumers in the social media space. This space has allowed people to participate with brands, and many are avid fans of brands and have a strong relationship with a brand."

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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