

CHAPTER 1

The New Era of Marketing

The distant sound of a motorbike revving up signalled the impending arrival of the postman. As a young girl playing in the front yard for hours on end during school holidays, one of the highlights of my day was fantasising about what might be in the bright yellow bag on that bike. Something for me, perhaps? For a few short minutes, as the sound of the engine drew closer, the anticipation would grow, until I would run down the big hill to collect the mail.

I was the kind of kid that had “pen pals” (who remembers those?) and so it was fairly usual for me to receive a colourful envelope complete with glitter and scratch ‘n’ sniff stickers all over it. One of those was usually enough to make my day.

The best surprises were the letters from faraway family members, complete with the familiar handwriting of a loved one, news from their life, and that warmth, love and connection that was felt as the letter was read. My favourite, however, were the letters from grandma, with the decorative cursive font on the envelope and the occasional memento slipped into the

envelope. But those days were few and far between. I'll always remember that feeling of disappointment running down the hill only to find bills.

To this day, these memories still remind me of how we relate to brands – whether they are business brands or people brands. There are plenty of brands and messages we block out, even if they are legitimate. BUT there are also others we can't wait to hear from. It's not always about the content in those messages, it's most often about how they make us feel.

The tone, feeling, value, and consistency in the way they show up, and the commitment to share something fresh, insightful, and motivating – caring, even, is what stays with us. Just like my letters from grandma, these are the brand messages I most look forward to.

Too often, marketing is transactional, impersonal, and forgettable. In a sea of electricity bills, be a letter from Grandma.

Marketing is in Flux

The traditional marketing playbook is no longer working.

Before we discuss how to adapt and evolve our marketing, it's essential to understand WHY so much has changed. This will help us understand the importance of a different approach behind building an authentic personal brand that resonates and inspires people to action.

Every single person is trying to process a raft of challenges that impact at both a global and deeply personal level.

There are three distinct areas of “more”.

Traditional methods of marketing are no longer cutting it. If you feel like you’re slogging through mud, talking to an audience of crickets, or feeling confused and flustered you’re not alone. With people tuning out, feeling fatigued, and becoming more selective about how they spend their time and money, and where they put their attention, the appetite and tolerance for marketing messages has plummeted.

But here’s the good news: people are still open to connecting. They want to feel seen, heard, and supported, and they’re looking for brands that can deliver that emotional connection. To do that, we need to shift our approach. Our audiences are not just numbers to be marketed to, and each interaction is not just a “lead to be converted”. The key to success is establishing meaningful connections with your audience, as people.

So, how do you establish meaningful connections? It’s not just about having “useful” information to share, fancy photo-shoots, or whiz-bang copywriting skills. The secret is to connect with your authentic identity in a deep way, so that everything you do with your marketing is congruent and strategic. When you successfully do this people don’t just notice you, they form a deep bond with and are drawn to you.

This might sound odd if you’ve only consumed mainstream internet marketing gurus over the last few years. But as a marketer of almost three decades, I can tell you that this is where we are right now.

The marketing that makes YOU feel good is also the marketing that will resonate with your audience.

MORE CHANGE than ever before.

The world has changed. Society has changed. People have changed.

In the last few years we've had the greatest health, economic, and humanitarian crises that hopefully any of us will see in our lifetime. The economics textbook has been thrown out because conventional knowledge has met unprecedented circumstances. Identity politics has polarised opinions and even families. Rates of depression, anxiety, burnout, and fatigue are skyrocketing. There is deep concern and uncertainty about how AI will shape our professions and lives.

Each of these is another track that's playing in our minds.

Our mental bandwidth has shifted. As we juggle more, feel more, and change more, it's clear we're in the midst of a revolution that's changing the way we think, feel and make decisions. This means we need to do things differently for our audiences as well. People's habits, mindsets, and purchasing behaviours have changed drastically in the last few years alone. However much we might want it to stabilise, in the words of Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada: "The pace of change has never been this fast, yet it will never be this slow again."

This pace of change is critical to factor in when marketing our products or services, particularly in a digital environment. The need to "think different," as Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, often said, and being ultra-strategic has never been more

important than it is today. It's important to note that this isn't just a knee-jerk response to specific shifts such as the post-lockdown world, or the proliferation of artificial intelligence. It's a way of thinking that's curious, open and adaptable, so that we are able to evolve as the world around us is evolving.

I discovered the power of this co-evolutionary mindset at the height of my marketing agency's success in 2018. Braveda, the marketing agency which I founded in 2000, was achieving industry recognition, being awarded *Marketing Agency of the Year* at the *Australian Marketing Excellence Awards*. We had a large focus on content and strategy as well as top-notch execution and were devoted to developing top talent in our industry. But it was then that I also realised that much of traditional marketing was missing the mark. This led me on a journey of exploration that opened a whole new trajectory.

In 2019, I made the decision to transition away from running a traditional style marketing agency and began to reduce staff and clients. And in 2020, I hung up my marketing agency boots after 20 years of being in service to brands around the globe, helping them create an impact. It didn't make complete sense to anyone, apart from myself.

Many felt that the recent accolades I had received in the years prior would be a springboard to creating a bigger agency. I had just won *Marketing Agency of the Year* and the same year I'd won *Certified Practising Marketer (CPM) of the Year (Vic)*. And it wasn't that there isn't a place for marketing agencies anymore. On the contrary, I train and mentor many of them today! But for me, the decision was driven by something different.

What motivated me was realising that despite my more than twenty years of running an agency, as well as my professional development, marketing experience, teaching and implementing, working on my own marketing, content, and systems – something was lacking. And I had a deep desire to find and explore it.

The missing piece was the role of *identity* – and not just organisational identity, but personal identity. People were separating business and personal, but it became clear that the two were enmeshed. Business was deeply personal.

So, I wound down a business that was at the peak of its game to pursue a deep dive into exploring the art and science of building an impactful personal brand for commercial purposes. I now teach this to businesses, marketers, and leaders around the world.

MORE NOISE than ever before

Most people in the world are exposed to thousands of marketing messages each day, even though we only register a few and filter the majority out. This includes various types of advertising such as online (in a multitude of different types, everything from pop ups to banners, and social media ads), out of home (billboards, transport and signage), television commercials, product placement, email marketing, content, radio, print materials, and product packaging, among others. With the increasing use of digital media and the proliferation of mobile devices, the number of marketing messages is continually increasing.

Over and above marketing messages, the number of people in our sphere (definitely online, maybe offline too) has likely increased. We are expected to be present in more areas of life and keep up with an ever-changing world, meaning our brains are constantly making decisions, whether we realize it or not. Which information do I let in? What do I screen out? Who can I trust? What do I need to know? What about those I'm responsible for? How do I preserve my sanity through it all?

MORE INFORMATION than ever before

Imagine you're standing in the middle of Times Square as an unending rush of bright, flashy billboards vie for your attention. Each one louder and more insistent than the last. The intensity of the lights, sounds, and movement overwhelms your senses with an onslaught of information from every direction. The reality is you don't need to go all the way to New York to experience that, you just need to have a phone and a laptop. There's a ceaseless onslaught of information bombarding us from every corner of our digital lives, 24/7. We're all living in Times Square.

And this "content overload" is only going to get more intense in the years to come, as it becomes technologically possible for more brands to reach bigger audiences, and as more and more people (and machines!) clamour for our attention. As a result, our ability to retain volumes of information is diminishing as so much of it is coming our way each day. This is important to keep in mind as we are building a presence that is visible to more people. Simply being aware that your message is likely

mixed in with thousands of other messages coming at them simultaneously is essential.

Regardless of where your audience is located, there isn't a place on earth that hasn't been turned upside down in the last few years. People in general are cynical about many of the old ways of becoming visible, especially when it comes to content and messaging, and they remember less of what they see and hear. Therefore, our approach needs to change, as messaging precision and emotional connection become vital ingredients in being seen, heard, and remembered.

So, what does this mean when it comes to marketing?

“Adding value” is no longer the gold standard, especially when it comes to content creation.

(If you skimmed over that previous line, I'll repeat it, it's important!)

“ADDING VALUE” IS NO LONGER THE GOLD STANDARD

We are now in an era where there is “value” everywhere we look – Google, YouTube, infographics in your social feed – heck, even the local library! Free valuable information on every topic imaginable is widely available and no longer hard to find, there is more than you could ever consume in a lifetime. What is lacking is the ability to interpret that information and break down which of the gazillion ideas is worth applying, and what is genuinely helpful to an individual's unique situation at a particular point of time.

On top of that, making this accessible and actionable for the average person with a business, or a job, kids or pets, who values self-care, relationships, and their sanity, is an even bigger challenge. The volume of information we desire to be aware of increases, but our mental bandwidth to process it diminishes due to the myriad of things competing for our attention. When people are tuning out because of too much on their mind, we need to stop playing the volume game.

Relieving anxiety with the content we create, not creating more of it, should be the goal. So that instead of that feeling of being a constant stream of paparazzi flashes in the eyes of our audience, who are struggling to take it all in, our content is more akin to the trusted lamp of an air traffic controller in the night, clearly visible and showing the way to the runway and helping them take off and get to where they want to go faster, and safely.

In a world that's obsessed with value and volume, audiences just want to be shown the way.

The Authenticity Filter is ON

Humans are very smart, yet we are created with an instinctual nature, which extends beyond the rational.

The rational mind has served us very well for a long time. But right now, the sheer volume that our already-overloaded brains are trying to process on a day-to-day basis can be

overwhelming. Not to mention the newest wave of considerations – is this originating from a human or an intelligent machine? Is this real, true – or is it made to look like this to get us to pay attention? And the vastness of information coming at us, and the volume of micro-decisions that we are required to make is not slowing down. So – what’s a human to do?

Something we’ve been doing for eons, when our rational mind doesn’t have access to all the information, we need to make a logical decision. We rely on our *intuition*. The part of us that “just knows” if something is legit or not. It’s always been there and some people have operated in it more fully than others. Of the many changes that humanity went through during the most recent pandemic it was an elevation in perceptiveness – at a much wider-scale that saw more people lean into their intuition, spirituality, and emotions as they made decisions.

This is the reality of marketing that all brands need to contend with. And it’s only going to be more prevalent in the future as the current flow of information becomes untenable and people opt-out even further with heightened sensors around what they’re prepared to “let in” to their world.

Ditching FOMO & Scarcity

After a rough few years globally that pushed mental health, resilience, and hyper-awareness to new levels, people are craving security, comfort, and hope and so are now generally resisting fear-based, scarcity and pressure-led messaging that was commonplace in the decades prior. Not all brands operated

this way, but many did as a means to create demand for their product or service.

These days, with the proliferation of new brands entering the marketplace, using old-school tactics to clamour for attention, the average person has become so jaded and as a result, averse to pesky people with flaky marketing, obtrusive offers, problematic products, and fear mongering. So many brands (especially in the online space) who led with this type of marketing are now being pushed away and ignored, and rightly so. Because, while the struggle may be real, people don't need to be reminded of it over and over again.

Our inboxes, news feeds, mainstream media, social feeds, and web browsing have had way too much:

- Scarcity,
- FOMO,
- Worst-case scenarios,
- Grim statistics,
- Fake/outdated testimonials,
- Bot generated “insights” masked as personal content,
- ...the list goes on.

Getting attention, attracting the right audience, building trust, and turning fans into customers has become more of a challenge than ever before for many brands – both personal and business brands.

This is especially the case because the old playbook isn't working like it used to and trying to deploy outdated tactics

and get ROI on them often leaves anyone building a personal brand feeling frustrated and depleted – this can be a major energy suck.

This is doubly unfortunate as it is occurring right at the time when it's critical to conserve and use our energy wisely. Because when we are the brand, we need it for our personal wellbeing more than ever!

Our collective brain is craving relief, comfort, and gentleness and so, for those who are leading with a different approach, there is huge opportunity.

When it comes to building a personal brand, it's important to avoid the following:

1. Doing the same as you did in the past.

The tactics may still be effective, but they may have passed their “best before” date in their old-school format, so if you're doing them the same way you did a year ago, with similar content and messaging, and it isn't working, don't be surprised.

2. Hiring someone who knows little about your business to “produce content” in the effort to be seen.

This is a sure-fire recipe to waste time and money and leave you frustrated. Good content just isn't enough when you're a personal brand – these days it needs to be content that emanates from YOU, to stand out and attract people to engage with it.

3. Doing an assortment of random things, hoping people will just find their way into your world.

It's tempting to think that activity alone will generate results but it can actually be damaging to your brand, not to mention your personal energy. While you might get lucky, the majority of people don't, and chances are you'll end up feeling jaded after putting in effort for that things aren't working and yielding commercial results.