

Imagine yourself wandering through a bustling marketplace in a distant exotic land when a wise old man pops out from behind a streetside curtain holding a small bejeweled golden tube in his gnarled hands. He beckons you to take the tube and look through it. Hesitantly you pull it from ancient withered fingers and do as he asks. Raising it to your eye, with the old man straight in front of you, you look through the glistening tube and are astonished by what you see. You are peering *into* the old man's head, but instead of pulpy tissue in convoluted folds you see the most amazing landscape. You suddenly realize that you are seeing the thoughts of a human mind in pictures as they form. *It's like watching a movie.*

What company would not pay a king's ransom for a magical eyepiece that can look into customers' minds? This fable is not that far from reality and there is no need for you to barter away a kingly treasure.

Through the miracle of neuroimaging, brain researchers can now eavesdrop on the goings on between a person's ears as thoughts are being formed and decisions made. While they don't exactly see pictures, what they do see is radically changing our thinking about how motivations form, free will works, and information moves from our sensory receptors through the brain into the conscious mind.

Such new discoveries about the workings of the human brain and mind are driving a paradigm shift in how we see ourselves that may well equal in scope one set in motion over 400 years ago by Copernicus's revelation that the Earth was round and revolved around the sun, not flat with the sun revolving around it. That radical discovery did more than just change how people viewed the planet on which they lived. It led to revolutionary changes in how they viewed God, their rulers, themselves, and life itself.

What is being learned about human behavior in brain science, as well as in the hotly developing field of genetics, will inevitably change how companies view those who work for them and those to whom they

market and sell things. However, it is not only genetics and brain science that will be changing how companies see workers and customers. Developmental psychology, which is a treasure trove of information about human behavior, though rarely drawn on in marketing, stands to assume an elevated role in business, especially in marketing.

Marketing revolves around predictions of consumer behavior. The primary purpose of consumer research is to get information that enables predictions of what consumers need, want, and do. However, developmental psychology, which delves deeper into the human psyche, offers crucial insights into consumer behavior that cannot be fathomed by traditional consumer surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In fact, developmental psychology may help resolve an ironic problem present in current marketing strategies: Despite information technology that provides us with more information on customers than ever before, marketing success rates have fallen over the past decade.

Part One of *Ageless Marketing* shows why marketing and consumer research have become increasingly less effective despite exponential increases in the amount of customer information. Chapter 1 is the attention-getting equivalent of hitting a mule upside its head with a two-by-four to get its attention, the answer to the classic question, “How do you get a Missouri mule to start plowing?” This “two-by-four” chapter, based on facts that stand beyond rational challenge, tells why continuing preoccupation with youth and young adult markets makes no logical sense in scores of product lines and for thousands of companies. The emergence of a new customer majority comprised of people 40 and older is the answer. This seasoned group of consumers is 45 percent larger than those between the ages of 18 and 39 (123 million versus 85 million), and will become even more numerous over the next decade and a half. A fact overlooked by the prevailing Madison Avenue mindset is that the majority rules in the marketplace as well as in politics. This New Customer Majority, not youth and pre-middle-aged adults, is the primary source of today’s leading views, values, and behaviors in the marketplace. This historic change in consumer behavior has made much of what once worked in marketing obsolete. It has changed the rules of marketplace engagement.

Adapting successfully to these circumstances requires a different mindset than the one that has long governed marketing. As many thought leaders in business have already recognized, marketing success increasingly

depends on abandoning the traditional *quantitatively* framed product-centric mind-set to adopt a *qualitatively* framed customer-centric mind-set. However, not many yet have figured out how to do this. Customer relationship management (CRM) was supposed to be the silver bullet to accomplish this, but has failed miserably. Part One provides a previously unrecognized explanation for CRM's widely chronicled failure—changes in the leading behaviors in the marketplace at the hands of the New Customer Majority. Its dominance has nullified many fundamental assumptions that underlie CRM as well as consumer research and marketing in general.

Part Two provides a behavioral foundation for viewing customers that transcends traditional statistical renderings represented by such terms as eyeballs, seats, lives, end users, and other dehumanized representations. In this new view, customers are seen from perspectives that are not accessible via traditional consumer research. With new information from brain science with which to work, this part of *Ageless Marketing* pulls back the veils of the conscious mind to reveal the very origins of customers' needs, motivations, and behavior, a feat that is simply not possible in conventional consumer research methodologies.

Part Two integrates new discoveries about human behavior gleaned from genetic and brain research with time-tested tenets of developmental psychology. In doing this, Part Two responds to a long-standing deficiency in marketing that costs companies tens of billions of dollars annually due to misleading research and marketing blunders. Unlike nearly all other major disciplines, marketing has no unified foundation to guide practitioners in their tasks. As a result, everyone with something to sell can claim without hesitancy to be an expert in marketing. There are no universally accepted benchmarks to challenge such claims. The lack of a common, empirically derived foundation unduly subjects marketing decisions to unfortified opinions much of the time.

Part Two concludes with Chapter 7 in which customer behavior is viewed through the prism of human development science. The spectrum of refracted images that results makes it crystal clear why consumer behavior has become less materialistic (less product-centered) and more metaphysical (more experience-centered). This has occurred because for the first time ever, most adults are in the years when the forces of self-actualization needs exert decisive influences on lifestyle aspirations, buying decisions, and overall consumer behavior. The marketer who gains

an understanding of the dynamics of self-actualization will have a decided advantage in today's markets over the marketer who doesn't.

*Ageless Marketing* changes pace with an Interlude that questions the value of labels like "boomers," "Gen X," and "Gen Y," arguing that such labels inhibit critical thinking, are barren of significant meaning, and thus usually convey little of value when used. Interestingly, marketers put the term *boomers* in circulation in 1981, when the oldest boomers were 35 years old! Thus it seems that boomers lacked generational identity until the eldest were nearly halfway through their anticipated life spans.

Part Three features Value Portraits<sup>®</sup>, a summary of proprietary research developed by J. Walter Thompson and Market Strategies, Inc. Authored by Robert E. Snyder, a JWT senior partner who heads J. Walter Thompson's Mature Market Group, the two chapters of Part Three draw psychographic profiles of consumers in the second half of life. Seventeen Value Portraits have been drawn from surveys and interviews involving more than 7,000 respondents aged 45 and older. The first rounds of research involved people 62 and older while people 45 to 61 were studied in subsequent rounds. Members of each Value Portrait group are represented as sharing a mind-set that reinforces a predisposition to behave in certain ways and that this mind-set underlies specific attitudes, for example, towards purchasing certain products.

The central premise underlying Value Portrait research is that people generally have certain dispositions (values) that tend to remain the same throughout their lives, and that these values psychologically predispose a person's worldview and the general direction of his or her lifestyle behavior. One highly interesting dimension of the Values Portrait research is how a person's self-assessment of health is a strong indicator of consumer behavior even though, by objective reasoning, a person's current health picture should have no influence on his or her consumer behavior. Part Three reveals the self-perceptions that people in each of the two age groups studied have of their values, views, needs, and behavior. Of course, their self-perceptions may be flawed or even altogether false, but it is important for marketers to know about these perceptions and take them into account under the durable advice that people's perceptions are their reality.

Part Four opens with a discussion of a crucial missing focus in most marketing—customers' life satisfaction. Companies spend many millions

of dollars annually researching customer satisfaction; that is, they research customer satisfaction or the lack thereof with companies and products. However, the stronger experiential foundations of consumer behavior in the New Customer Majority makes life satisfaction, which either can be set back or advanced by the customer experience, more salient to marketing success.

Part Four concludes with a discussion of three lifestyle stages of adult life, each of which is characterized by lifestyle aspirations that form the foundation of a person's buying behavior. Thus far, marketing remains rooted primarily in the materialistic values that generally hold the most sway over people in the pre-middle-age years of adulthood. Because of this, many members of the New Customer Majority feel marginalized by companies and their marketers. Perhaps no other single factor has done more to reduce the effectiveness of marketing.

Part Five offers fresh views on how to create receptiveness to marketing messages. Chapter 13 tells why, with due apologies to Gertrude Stein, a rose is not always a rose in the New Customer Majority. How a brand is perceived and what a marketing message means is more subjective in the older mind than is usually the case with younger minds. In fact, the older mind tends to be more resistant to marketers' attempts to fully define the meaning, benefits, and values of a brand. As Maslow put it, the older, more mature mind "resists enculturation." This disposition calls for subtler and more deferential approaches in addressing older markets. This is made more challenging by the fact that unlike the young who tend to perceive matters in more absolutist black-and-white perceptions, older people tend to perceive matters in shades of gray. Absolutist perceptions of reality are easier to play to because they are generally more closely tied to social consensus. Shades of gray perceptions are more subjective, thus pose a fuzzier target to hit among members of the New Customer Majority.

Chapter 14, the penultimate chapter, proposes that empathy—*identifying with and understanding another's circumstances, emotions, feelings, and motives*—is the very core of an authentic customer-centric mind-set. The final chapter, Chapter 15, positions the last season of life as a more fortuitous stage than many younger people believe is possible. The blessings that can be one's good fortune to experience in the winter of life at higher levels of psychological maturation include entry into a new dimension of human existence from which comes a steady flow of lofty expe-

riences—what Maslow called *peak experiences*—and in which there arises enhanced coping abilities for dealing with any later life declines and losses that are inevitable. Of course, not everyone reaches such an advanced state of maturation. Nevertheless, because these aspects of self-actualization reflect perennial desires in life's second half, the marketer who understands them is more likely to connect most deeply with the more than 123 million people who make up the New Customer Majority.

The range, number, and depth of new thoughts that appear in *Ageless Marketing* due to the influence of genetic, brain, and behavioral sciences on the brain's development presented a major writing challenge—how to cope with the brain's bent for erecting defenses against new, possibly mind-changing information. A brain tends to shut down when its owner's threshold of tolerance for new ideas is reached. The positive side of this bent is that it helps us maintain stable, coherent pictures of the world. But on the down side, it slows adaptation to new challenges that cannot be grasped through old ways of thinking. The brain's first response to new mind-changing information is often to generate fight-or-flight responses because fight-or-flight responses are as readily triggered by threats to what we believe as by threats to life and limb.

In Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, mathematician Valentine declares that "Everything is in disorder," as he observes that only a few times in history have we experienced changes on the scale we are experiencing today. As participants in business enterprise, we can catch the mountainous waves of change beating at the shorelines of old mind-sets and ride them to bountiful ends. Or we can stay ashore, safe for the moment, and refuse to participate. Individuals who don't participate will not experience the breathtaking wonder of it all, and that may not matter to them. But companies that chose not to participate will be putting their futures at grave risk.

These are the yeastiest of times. They challenge us as nothing has since the Age of Enlightenment when the medieval metaphysical order was dissolved by the science-based order of modern times, an event that led to the radical transformation of human societies and paved the way for modern democracies, the Industrial Revolution, and free enterprise. Many in the first ranks of power resisted the coming of a new order—especially royalists and church leaders. But even the untutored common man got into the act, as memorialized by the apocryphal English worker Ned Ludd. He supposedly destroyed factory machines in the early years of

the Industrial Revolution to preserve jobs. We now often refer to those who resist changes wrought by progress as Luddites. Luddites always wage a losing battle, for pursuit of change through progress is as inextricably developmental for the human species as it is for the individual, who from the moment of conception to the end of life is incessantly driven to be more today than he or she was yesterday and more tomorrow than he or she is today. The relentless urge to be ever more is a function of human DNA. It works on us as individuals and it works on us collectively to set the directions of our societies and cultures. We cannot escape this force of nature, we can only adapt to it.

So, once more we are being drawn inexorably toward a portal of epochal change. Beyond that portal lies a landscape wholly unlike the one we've been traveling through since the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment. The signs of how this will change our lives swirl all about us amid frequent confusion over what the signs mean. *Ageless Marketing: Strategies for Reaching the Hearts and Minds of the New Customer Majority* is my attempt to illuminate and clarify the meaning of these signs to business enterprise, to highlight new opportunities they signal, and to propose ways and means for successfully navigating the most challenging times that companies and their marketers have experienced in a long, long time.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To the extent *Ageless Marketing* seems coherent and well paced, Jon Sims of the Winston-Salem Interpublic Cos. agency Mullen LHC deserves much credit. In February 2003, feeling the need for a new headspace to facilitate the book's completion, I took the manuscript to Bottle Creek Lodge on the Caribbean island of North Caicos with my wife Linda as guests of Howard and Cheryl Gibbs. Before I left for North Caicos, Jon reviewed the manuscript and came up with many valuable suggestions—including *reorganizing the book*. I groaned, but took his advice, and *Ageless Marketing* is all the better for it. Special thanks, Jon.

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Writing a book that veers off the beaten tracks of the mainstream, as *Ageless Marketing* frequently does, is done not without trepidation, for new ideas will always draw disagreement from the mainstream, including from academe. It is the business of academicians to challenge, and I welcome their honest challenges. However I do so with the comfort of having a good friend, Raj Sisodia, Trustee Professor of Marketing at Bentley College, whose capacity for critical thinking is such that when he approves of an idea I have, I feel intellectually safer.

The support over the years given me by Ron Sugarman, Director of the Center for Customer Intelligence, a part of the Interpublic Cos. network, has often given me comfort that I'm on the right track in my takes on the ad business. Thanks, Ron, and also thanks for introducing Linda and me to Chin Chin's, home of the best Grand Marnier shrimp in Manhattan.

An article I wrote for the February 1998 *American Demographics*, which challenged the assumption in most consumer research that customers are the best sources of information about their motivations, drew



the largest response in the magazine's history. Some readers became good friends and colleagues, including Gerry McDonough of Booth Morgan Consulting. We have worked on a number of projects together, along with his partner Rick Frazier who has become one of my most valued sounding boards. A number of ideas developed in *Ageless Marketing* are more mature as a result of our many conversations, Rick. Thanks.

No idea has intrinsic value. Ideas only have as much value as imparted to them by people who put them to practical use. Mike Baumayr, managing partner of Lavidge Baumayr for the Del Webb Sun City brand, has a number of my ideas to practical use. Because clients tend to be conservative about accepting ideas that take them away from familiar ground, Mike has more than once gone out on a limb with an idea I shared with him. Thanks Mike, for having the courage to pursue what you believe is best for your clients even when they fight you.

Ten years ago, 45 people met in Minneapolis and founded The Society, a family of friends working primarily in 40-plus markets. It is perhaps the first virtual trade organization in the nation. The most important virtue of The Society, which has neither bylaws nor dues, is that it allows its members to be vulnerable. Everyone has the freedom to *safely* bring issues of professional and personal importance to the table for discussion. My colleagues and friends in the Society have been my strongest source of moral as well as intellectual support.

Dick Ambrosious (Praxeis) is the closest the Society comes to having someone in charge. Without Dick, The Society might not have endured to enrich the lives of its members. Thanks, Dick, for that, and for many years of enduring friendship.

Several years ago, Society members pitched in to send Linda and me to North Carolina's Outer Banks to reinvigorate our spirits. Thanks, Vicki Thomas (Thomas & Partners) for organizing and surprising us with this marvelous gift of friendship from our Society friends—it worked! We came back with renewed vigor. And thank you to for many years of friendship.

Former NPR reporter Connie Goldman (Connie Goldman Productions), another Society member, has been a wonderful source of inspiration and guidance. Author a number of inspirational books, including her most recent book, *The Gifts of Caregiving*, Connie is affectionately known by Society members as Mother Wisdom, which these words from PBS *Newshour* host Jim Lehrer endorse:

Connie Goldman is on to something. It's called life. Life for all of us who used to be considered on the other side of the hill.

Other Society members to whom I am indebted include James Weil (Lifecare, Inc.) for his many years of encouragement to stay my course, and for being an exemplar of self-actualization whom I have drawn on in this book to describe the highest levels of human development; Mike Sullivan (50+ Communications) for all his moral support during difficult times and for new business opportunities he has created for me, and for helping to validate my work; Gary Solomonson (The Solomonson Company), whose stories told with great humanness have entertained as well as enriched us all; Rick Moody (Chairman, Elderhostel) whose intellectual depth enriches me in every conversation I have with him; Pat and Leyla Mason (Carolina Living) for years of support including several new business opportunities; Jim Gilmartin (Coming of Age) who truly honored me when he organized his company around my core ideas; and Tony Edwards (Bernstein-Rein) who is never hesitant to call me for advice but always gives me something back by way of new insights.

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Finally, I cannot adequately indicate in words my gratitude to everyone one in my family for how they have enriched my life. Aside from giving me the usual pleasures a family offers, each of my children have given me insight into some particular virtue: Sabrina, dedication to goal achievement; Laura, persistence in creative problem solving; Karen, authenticity in relationships; Brian, balance and equanimity; Michelle, social consciousness; Stephanie—through six years of single parenthood

she taught me more about human development than any life experience I've had outside of book sources. And she has often made what I have read in books more real.

I end these acknowledgments by recognizing the person who has been my most creative sounding board, my best friend, and a continuously flowing source of renewal—my wife Linda. Five months ago, she gave me the freedom to take on a mistress—*Ageless Marketing*. Nothing has so commanded my attention in many years as the writing of *Ageless Marketing*. Without Linda's patience and understanding, I would not have been able to type the last period, on the last paragraph of the last chapter on March 24, 2003, a week ahead of the publisher's deadline. Thanks, Linda, for being such an understanding life partner.

David B. Wolfe

