# Ep 134 - Interview: Andy Nairn, author of Go Luck Yourself, on why brand archeology beats originality.

**Andy Nairn:** [00:00:00] The, the answer's not always total reinvention. In fact, very often I think our jobs is about archeology and finding what is this amazing thing that you've got sitting in your attic that you could use and repurpose and make more relevant than ever today.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** That was Andy Nairn, and as you'll hear, Andy took what looked like a problem and turned it into a campaign platform that was voted one of Britain's favorite ads of the decade.

One of the things that I enjoyed most about the conversation with Andy is that he challenges a belief that sits at the heart of modern marketing. Many assume that great marketing comes from discovering something new, but Andy made the case that some of the most effective ideas come from looking at what you already have differently.

In this conversation, we'll explore why marketers often overlook the assets sitting right in front of them, and how some of the most powerful growth opportunities come from rediscovery. Andy is the founder of the agency Lucky Generals, author of Go Luck Yourself, and has helped create over [00:01:00] 20 IPA award-winning effectiveness campaigns over the last two decades.

And now, onto our show.

Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and practical marketing. Every week, we sit down and go deep behind sci- the science that powers great marketing today. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

**Richard Shotton:** And I'm Richard Shotton.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** And today we're sitting with Andy Nairn, brand strategist, author of Go Luck Yourself, and founder of The Lucky Generals.

Let's get into it. Andy, welcome to Behavioral Science for Brands. We're so very excited to have you.

**Andy Nairn:** Hi. Thanks for having me, and I'm really excited to be here too.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** We are on this little mission, this hunt, to bring great thinking and marketing to our listeners, and having our little chat before we got started today, we just [00:02:00] think this is gonna be a really great, engaging conversation.

And you've been kind enough to play a little round of rapid-fire questions. So Andy, what do your friends and family think about your passion for marketing, brand building? What's their take on your love of this industry?

**Andy Nairn:** None of them really understand it, and when they ask me what I do, I just lie usually and tell I just agree with whatever definition they give me.

If they say, "Do you make the ads?" I say, "Yes, I do make the ads."

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Good enough. Good enough. Yeah. It gets the job done.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah.

**Richard Shotton:** Andy what's something that you once believed strongly but you've now changed your mind on?

**Andy Nairn:** Oh, wow, that... God, that's a really difficult one. I really believed strongly As a football fan I used [00:03:00] to beli- you know, I used to have hope usually, and years, decades now of various teams letting me down.

I've had that all crushed out of me.

**Richard Shotton:** You're a Hearts fan. I,

**Andy Nairn:** I just go- I find that it's an easier way to approach sporting events now, to just assume you're gonna get battered and and then any- anything over and above that is a nice a nice little thrill.

**Richard Shotton:** An optimistic pessimist. I like it.

**Andy Nairn:** Yes.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** If you had to think about all the things you've learned about building brands over the years, what do you think something that's criminally misunderstood or criminally underused?

**Andy Nairn:** I think it is I think we'll probably talk about this. It's about simplicity, I think. One of the, one of the things that people do is overcomplicate what should be an incredibly simple job. And I, I find that [00:04:00] is particularly true if I may say of strategists, and there'll probably be a few strategists listening to this.

And I feel that we sometimes overcomplicate things and try to be very philosophical and overthink things when actually the hardest thing to do is to simplify things. So it's not an easy common sense is in very short supply, isn't it? But usually most of the best things have to involve a bit of an element of simplicity and common sense.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Thank you so much for that. So you're the author of Go Luck Yourself, and maybe let's jump into this concept of simplicity. You started us off on this. Maybe tell us, like, why is it so hard for people to wanna communicate simply, to wanna simplify down?

**Andy Nairn:** I guess it's because people and it's that old adage, isn't it?

If [00:05:00] you had ... That it takes longer to write something very short, and it's our human desire to ... And perhaps there's a little bit of peacocking and showing how intelligent we all are. And also there might be a little bit of corporate procrastination. The longer you talk about a problem, and the bigger words you use, and all that kind of thing the further it is away from actually having to do anything to solve the problem.

So there's there's ... I guess there's ... Little human ticks like that. And we perhaps value and make the mistake of adoring people who can talk very good games and say things that sound complicated. Especially if you have a funny accent, right?

That can also sometimes help. But actually the kind of the the simplicity is something that is overlooked, I think [00:06:00] and is actually it's in short supply.

**Richard Shotton:** I wonder if there's a economic incentive for agencies and consultants not to simplify. So there's- Of course

there's an amazing idea sometimes known as the labor illusion or the illusion of effort, and summed up brilliantly in an anecdote that Dan Ariely often talks about. So he talks about a locksmith that he met, and the locksmith told him that when he ... At the beginning of his career, and now he was, like, right at the end.

Beginning of his career 16-year-old, wasn't very skilled. Would turn up to a house, take, I don't know, an hour to get the lock out. Often would damage the door. Wouldn't do a very good job, and he ... But he got lots of tips. Now he was in his 50s, he was an absolute expert. He turned up, he whipped the lock out in five minutes, but he said he never got any tips even though he never damaged the door, did the job really quickly.

He never got any tips. And his argument was people aren't judging his value from his [00:07:00] skill or the quality of the work he did, it's the amount of effort that went into it. They use effort as a proxy for quality.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah.

**Richard Shotton:** So you're in a bit of a conundrum- Yeah ... if you're an agency or a consultant and you give someone a really simple answer.

Even if it's massively valuable to the brand, they might begrudge paying for it 'cause it felt quicker.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. Oh that's very common, isn't it? Especially because a, a lot of the payment systems in our industry are based on the hour, payment by the hour and that just exacerbates exactly what you've just talked about there.

And especially I find that as being get- getting on as an older strategist these days, you do ... The only advantage you have is that you come to your thinking much quicker. And but then that somewhat disadvantages you because as you say, you can have an idea you ... Because you've been through quite a lot of challenges of similar order or magnitude before you, you can actually get very almost it looks [00:08:00] stupidly quick sometimes.

And I'm, I don't just mean myself, by the way. Other people o- that have got e- experience of decades. And there's that old thing, I can't remember who it was, I think it was David Abbott, who's obviously one of the greatest copywriters. Somebody co- es- expressed astonishment about him solving a very complicated brand problem in a couple of hours and said, "Oh I can't believe you did that in a couple of hours."

And he said, " I didn't do it in a couple of hours. I, it took me about four years." and that- ... that is the truth of all these things. That it's exactly your locksmith friend's problem and then the payment system almost requires that you have to stay schtum about that idea for don't tell anybody about it. Just let it percolate at the back of your mind and then come back with it in a month's time.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Yeah. It's interesting how the incentive structures that we set up can either help facilitate the [00:09:00] outcomes that we all want. I don't think we know a brand in the world that doesn't say, "I want the best work as fast as possible." I have not met a client yet that does not ask for that. And yet, as you say, Andy, the incentive structures are often the exact opposite of that, which creates this tension.

And the- and and as Richard said, this human insight that, man, it happened so quick. Is are we f- are we sure that's the best answer? There's a little bit of doubt when it, when you hear Arthur Brooks calls it crystallized intelligence. When you hear, like, all of those years of experience come together and then you get one answer.

Ooh like it, it can be jarring if if you're not ready for it.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. No, that, that's exactly right.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** In your book, you talk about the need to appreciate what you have. I thought Richard and I were talking about that. It's such a, it's s- it's such a big concept. C- [00:10:00] can you share with everybody what you mean by that?

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah, sure. So the, the-- there's a lot of science that shows that gratitude can be r-a really powerful force in people's lives or individuals' lives. There's been tons of studies, University of Miami and lots of people have shown that if people make a daily practice of gratitude they are more likely to succeed, more likely to be happy, more likely to be healthy even have better relationships and all sorts of other sub-factors.

And a lot of these kind of scientific studies they're almost like just mirroring things that have been known in culture, especially Asian culture, for instance for thousands of years. And now we're all excited by them 'cause it's been validated by Western sort of science.

But the, the point is that gratitude becomes self-fulfilling. It, it actually does make you more likely to succeed. And I think [00:11:00] that applies to organizations too. This isn't something that's been documented quite as much, but it's something that I talk about a lot in the book. Because I think a lot of the time organizations are so focused on their problems, understandably, every organization's got a problem to talk about, that they are blind to all the luck that they have, the good things, and they just don't take a little beat or a moment to appreciate.

And so often and again, this kind of looks like almost stupidly obvious the stupidly obvious solution is sitting right under people's noses. And something that they don't realize and they don't appreciate because they're so familiar with it. So for instance the clue might be in their name.

They might have an amazing name, but none of us think about our names, do we? We just... The name is the thing that we were given when we were born. They might have an amazing provenance, but they might be allergic to talking about that provenance because a lot of the time companies don't wanna have define themselves as coming from a particular place 'cause maybe that will limit their [00:12:00] popularity.

But it's like your hometown. You don't appreciate your hometown. When someone else comes to you and go, "Oh my God, you live in a place like this. How wonderful." so sometimes it takes an outside perspective to say, "Wow, what a great place you come from. You need to tell people about that." It might be their advertising.

They might have an incredible advertising history. They might have an incredible mascots or slogans or brand assets historical sort of icons. Again, a lot of companies are terrified of tapping into their past because they think it'll make them sound old-fashioned. And the list goes on.

They might have data. They collect loads of data, but they don't appreciate how lucky they are. They might have people. We've all worked in places where the, the leadership doesn't appreciate the amazing people behind the sort of company. So I find a lot of the time our job as outsiders is almost like stepping into a company and saying, "You do realize you've got something absolutely amazing sitting right under your nose that you've not done anything with, or you've not done anything for 20 years."

And that can be the unlock that in [00:13:00] retrospect is obvious, but actually at the time is anything but

**Richard Shotton:** Could you give us an example of maybe a business applying that or a brand applying that in, in practice?

**Andy Nairn:** Oh, yeah. There's lots. Just recently we did something for The Guardian.

And The Guardian have got one of the most famous ads of all time. In some cases, some people would say and cer- certainly everyone in Britain will know this. It's an ad that was done by an agency called BMP 40 years ago by the amazing John Webster. A- and it shows a skinhead chasing what we...

Appears to be a skinhead ch- chasing an old man down a street and about to mug him. And actually viewed from a different perspective, which is the whole point of the ad, we see that he's saving him from a pile of bricks that's fallen from the from a, a building site. And the, the lesson is to see the whole picture.

And that, that ad is 40 years old, and it's [00:14:00] commonly voted the greatest ad in British history, and is probably familiar to a lot of your international audience as well. Anyway, the point is that is, that's-- It's in black and white. It's not run for 40 years. It's still incredibly potent. In fact, it's actually more potent today, arguably, in this current media culture than ever.

So we said to them that this is like an absolutely incredible asset that you've got. And what we also discovered, which the vast majority of people didn't know, is that in that ad, as the skinhead runs past, there's a, there's an extra in that ad who's a lady called Kathy Burke, who, again, all the Brits will know, is Sh- In, in that ad, she was a, a young lady. So- ... and then she-- You never were conscious of her being in, present in the ad. She's gone on to be a household name and a sort of a national treasure, one of our most beloved actresses, and has also been very outspoken on the, the issues of media billionaires and media corruption, [00:15:00] and has actually written for The Guardian.

So it's one of these odd things, a backstory that nobody knows about. And she's never done a single ad ever since. And so we thought, "Wouldn't it be amazing to just run the whole ad? We don't-- Let's not even edit it. Let's keep that ad entirely intact." but then tack on Kathy stepping out the doorway, now 40 years older, and talking about how potent and resonant that message still is.

So that, that ad has been sitting in their archives for 40 years. That could have really been done at any time. It's particularly resonant right now, but, The, the answer is not always re-in- total reinvention. In fact, very often I think our jobs is about archeology and finding what is this amazing thing that you've got sitting in your attic that you could use and repurpose and make more relevant than ever today.

So that, that might be an example.

**Richard Shotton:** Y- you mentioned there that the job maybe a, as a, as marketer is not [00:16:00] necessarily, I think you said novelty, it's more about archeology. Is this what you mean when you've criticized the industry's fetishization of originality? Is that-- what was-- is that what you mean or something different there?

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. I can't even remember. I have said that, but I-- it sounds like it's something I would say. So that, yeah, I'll take that. Yeah, and do you know what it is? Because of course, originality for-- in our world actually there's a big debate really, is there any such thing as originality in any creativity?

I don't think there is. We're all influenced by something. But specifically in the world of brand building, we shouldn't be purely original because that means we're not building on anything that has gone before. That, that way madness lies, and I think it's a massive problem because when you get-- I'll give you another example.

We-- A, a quicker one. We worked on a soft drink called Irn-Bru which is a very odd drink in Scotland. It is the number one soda, and it's only-- it's one of the only countries in the world where this brand, Irn-Bru, outsells Coca-Cola. [00:17:00] Anyway, the slogan for that brand was Made in s- made in Scotland from girders," and that slogan must be 30-odd years old and it was a phenomenally popular slogan all over the country, and they did very funny, quirky advertising on it.

And when we got the brand again we brought that line back from about 30-odd years ago. And most people thought it was a, I think, thought it was a very good sort of revival. But you got-- You get some people saying, "Oh, that's not very original. All you've done is take a line from 30 years ago.

Why couldn't you come up with something of your own?" and I'm like, "Wow, are you crazy?" That that, that is madness. If you've got a line that's as good as that great if we could beat it, and if we thought the right thing to do was beat it we would try and beat it.

But you-- Our job is not to always be original and not always to come up with the thing that can only be identified with our agency [00:18:00] or for the brand team. It's to use what you've got and then of course be original in the way that you bring things back to life.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** To me, Andy, that's such an important underscore and I was thinking about it as you were talking.

One thing is to be a great archeologist and unearth the things that will have value and resonance for the brand today. But in your example of The Guardian, you found a way to make it connect to today's audience, and I suspect what you were doing with Irn-Bru also found a way to make it relevant today.

Can you talk a little bit about that part of the process? So it's one thing to find the elements of the brand's history that may have potency. It's another thing to help make them connect in today's world. And sometimes that's about having the courage to not repeat to not change a tagline, and sometimes it's about bringing that asterisk back in.

So how do you think about that? How do you find a way to make it relevant in today, into in the market you're gonna [00:19:00] run it in today?

**Andy Nairn:** It's a great point. And I think the secret-- because you must do that, that is very true. The secret is not to write off the asset from day one. That's what happens Mostly people either don't think about it because they're so familiar with it and they think they don't-- it doesn't even come to mind that we could possibly use that because it's, it would just seem so stupid to use it.

It's a black and white ad why would we ever think of that? Or they actively are very anti doing it. I'll give you another example. Hovis best-selling or was at the time best-selling bre-bread brand in Britain, had again, one of the most famous ads of all time of a boy pushing a bike up a hill with a loaf of bread.

And it was shot in sepia by Ridley Scott, funnily enough and that must be now 50 years old. When we took on the Hovis brief, we were told explicitly, "Do anything you like, but do not go anywhere near history because that's what's got us in the tr-problems that we're in. Everyone thinks we're old-fashioned now because of that [00:20:00] ad.

It's a disaster for us. It's a..." so we were explicitly told not to go anywhere near that. And but we couldn't help explore it because every, every time we did a focus group, people would talk about it and would start singing the music and we thought, do-- to your point, isn't there a way, surely there must be a way that we can take some of the spirit of that, not directly lift it, but change it, bring it into the current day.

So what we did was we still thought that boy is so iconic, why would we start again? Let's have a boy in this ad. Let's have him back in Victorian kind of buying a loaf of bread, but then let's make him run literally through all the greatest scenes of British history, through two world wars, a World Cup, the miners' strikes, suffragettes all the way up through the millennium, fireworks going off.

And the boy's appearance and clothes are changing as he runs through time. He lands breathless on the table, puts the loaf of bread back on the table. His mom asks, "Is that you back, Bert?" And he says, [00:21:00] "Yeah, I'm back. I'm home." And then the line was, "As good today as it's always been," which was a lift of the line that from 50 years ago.

So everything lined up. You had, you had-- you-- to your point, you took the thing that was historically true to that brand and you l- you literally ran through into the current day and situated in the current day, and then said it was as good today as it's always been. And that, that was voted the favorite ad of the British public of that decade.

And my point is that all the advice prior to that and all the advertising, you look at it, was-- it was-- it's funny now to look back at it because it was all achingly trying to be modern. It was people in students in flat shares making toast doing things that were a bit more modern, like with the new type of bread crumpets and sort of thins and everything was screaming.

And it was like animated South Park cartoons and things like that basically saying, "We're y- we're young, we're modern. Forget about the old black and white ad. This is the new [00:22:00] Hovis." But people don't buy that. So I think what you have to do is- Be open-minded. Force yourself to think, is this possible?

Maybe it's not, maybe it is wrong. But more often than not I think there's a way to, if you possibly can... I love some work that I think maybe Wieden's did in the States where they took the KFC Colonel and revived him and made him very funny and modern in a way that you wouldn't have expected, 'cause he seems like the probably most old-fashioned brand character of all.

But if you force yourself at least give it a try. Don't write it off on day one.

**Richard Shotton:** Andy, with the book "Go Like Yourself," you've got 40 lovely short chapters, each with a, a different idea and a, a practical point of view. You then subdivide things into kind of themes, and one of my favorite themes was this argument that we need to look for opportunities everywhere.

Can you talk about what you mean by that? [00:23:00]

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah, the-- I was inspired by a great experiment by Richard Wiseman, who I'm sure you are familiar with. He's a psychologist and also a magician, funnily enough and all-round interesting guy. I didn't know that. Yeah, no he's a very experienced and proficient magician.

Anyway, he he did this experiment where he recruit... And he's very interested in luck. He in- he recruited people and then asked, "Are you mostly a lucky kind of person or mostly an unlucky kind of person?" and then he got them to flick through a newspaper and count how many photographs were in the newspaper.

And what he found was that the people who said that they were lucky could do it in literally a couple of seconds, and the people who said that, that were unlucky took quite a few minutes. So it was a massive difference. And the reason was that on page two, he'd done a-- he'd put a little notice saying, "There are 42 ads in this newspaper.

You can stop counting now [00:24:00] and claim your money, and you can go home." And his point was that when we say that we're unlucky, a lot of the time what we're really saying is that we are, have our heads down and we're focused on the task that we've been given, in this case, counting photographs. And so we don't notice all the other things going on in life.

When opportunity is waving to us at, from the opposite end of the street, we're blind to it. Whereas when we're lucky, that possibly means we're just less focused and we spot these things. And so what he does is he teaches individuals to look out for opportunities everywhere in their lives when they encounter them.

And so I think the same appli-applies very much for our organizations. Again, one of the things that so many organizations there's everyone's so busy right now, right? And so we're all focused on the specific brief that we've been given. We're specifically looking at our marketplace and our immediate competitors and our audience, and everything's very narrowly focused.

Whereas if we just put that aside for a moment and look to all the other things happening, [00:25:00] culture, nature, the news, politics or the classic go for a run go walk into the next room. All of these kind of things, defocusing is actually enormously helpful. So I think that's what I mean by looking out for...

Ideas come from all these incredible places in the world and parts of our lives, and we should look out for them and recognize them when they come to us.

**Richard Shotton:** And if you were running a team or a, a group of people, how would you encourage them to har- harness this advice?

**Andy Nairn:** I think part of it is just living a life where you make sure you are filling your life with interesting things.

So never insisting that you must be sat at your desk and working into the wee hours on this brief. Going for a walk, [00:26:00] going to the cinema, doing other things is a good-- That is gonna help your work, within reason, obviously. We can't all just do no work all day.

But you-- That, that's all gonna... People are always worried when I do these talks, and then you can see the bosses thinking, "Oh my God, he's gonna tell everyone to just give up and go home." But no. Of course, we've gotta focus on the immediate task to some degree, but then beyond a certain point...

This is why I don't like the-- And I used to use this phrase m- a lot myself. Maybe this should be my answer of something I believed back in the day and don't believe any longer. But the, that old phrase, "The harder I work, the luckier I get"- I I used to use that a lot, but I've gone off it now because it's only true up to a point.

After a certain point, working harder and harder, certainly in the same way and just slaving away, is literally the last thing that's gonna get you the breakthrough. That it's actually much more likely that you get the breakthrough from doing something else.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah. And maybe that quote suffers from its origins.

Obviously quotes get [00:27:00] misattributed- Yeah ... but I've heard that coming from Arnold Palmer. And if your- Yeah ... skill that you're trying to develop is a motor skill, maybe practicing ridiculous hours could be a good thing. But if it's about- Yeah ... idea generation or creative problem-solving- Yeah then you have these unintended consequences of be- being too narrow and too focused.

**Andy Nairn:** Agreed. So I think it's partly that and then I think it's so you ... That, that's almost like backdrop. And then, but then I think you can specifically force it a little bit, and that, that's why this is really what the book is trying to do.

There's, there is natural living that kind of life naturally is one thing, but then you can slightly artificially increase your chance of doing it by forcing a combination. And I find that one of the best ways to do that is to think of literally the opposite of your category. I read a great example.

There's a, there's an eye care brand in India called Averend who I think is maybe the biggest eye care provider in the world, and they have built this business by [00:28:00] taking inspiration from, drum roll, fast food. And it's an incredible ... They have atomized everything in the production line of fast food, which is obviously the opposite of healthcare to think of every single detail of their process that then allows them to mechanize eye care to the extremity of having, for instance, if you've got one, one surgeon, two, two beds in each operating theater, so that while he's or she is working on one patient, the other one is being prepped with the patient absolutely ready for him or her, and then they literally just turn around and attend to the next bed.

So there's a constant it is like these burgers being put along on a ... And it enables them to get through a hugely greater volume with higher standards of healthcare, by the way than Western hospitals. It's an incredibly high standard but [00:29:00] also just massively streamlined- Yeah

Process.

**Richard Shotton:** I love that idea of learning from almost the opposite- The opposite ... in Hacking Human Mind that M- yeah, MichaelAaron and I I wrote last year. We have a chapter on Liquid Death. They are in the- Oh yeah ... bottled water brand. Exactly. Yeah. But rather than learning from the category conventions of bottled waters and drawing on alpine scenes and yoga mums and greenery, they looked at what would be a polar opposite category.

They looked at craft beers and energy drinks and adopted the rules of that category. Humor and dark, bloody approaches. That would've been a run-of-the-mill campaign maybe for a craft beer. For a- Yeah ... water brand it was phenomenally distinctive. So I think that's a really nice recommendation.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. Yeah. I think, and we see it again and again, I think Ar- Arthur Koestler, if I pronounced that right, is the, [00:30:00] a Hungarian psychologist that kind of said that this was at the heart of all great ideas by association. And another example I saw recently which I really liked was in Rwanda, they are transporting blood to clinics.

And like all, all blood schemes it's always a, a struggle to get blood to the right people in the right places when accidents happen or in, in hospitals and so on. They've got an added problem with the infrastructure and also the weather. So they looked to-- They went from healthcare to warfare, and have got drones carrying the blood, which I thought was a great sort of like basically military drones being repurposed to save lives rather than take them.

So again if you just force yourself, I think we are I've done this with a, a beer brand that we turned into, or we took inspiration from public utilities, [00:31:00] and it seemed like the most ridiculous sort of thing to learn from, but then I think that's what makes it interesting. But your Liquid Death is a brilliant example.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Andy, it strikes me that so often in our talk so far, it's almost about identifying what the bigger opportunity is, not just the problem in the brief. So often where the, the brief is we need to increase market share, we need to increase sales. But so often what the stories that you're sharing solve a larger-- or maybe see a larger opportunity.

Do you think that's some of the power of not only looking in category, but looking at the opposite or looking for association, it c- helped you solve maybe an adjacent but bigger problem? H-how do you think about that?

**Andy Nairn:** I think that's a really good point. And obviously it's s-something that you've done brilliantly in your book and in your business, which is articulating the problem.

And does that l- I think it's one of these, again, one of these apocryphal [00:32:00] quotes. It's always attributed to Einstein. I don't think Einstein was him. Where he said, "If I had an hour I would spend 55 minutes of it defining the, the, what the problem was, and then five minutes solving it."

Whoever said it, I think that's really good advice because a-and it is mission-critical right now because a lot of the time, because organizations are wanting to do things more quickly, they s- they almost skip through that part of the problem. And if you think about it, and perhaps to talk about AI, the even the most sophisticated artificial intelligence requires a human, certainly most of the time now, to define what the problem is.

And if you just do that very quickly, depending obviously on what you define as the problem, that can have incredibly different results on, on, on what the outputs are gonna be. So increasingly, our ability to define the problems in an interesting way is gonna be a really important part of human creativity, I think.

Because that, that, if you get that right then [00:33:00] good things will come. And if you get it wrong, then you can go off in completely the wrong direction. So I think problem definition is is super important.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Yeah. It strikes me that we're all in the business of outcomes.

We wanna build healthier brands, we wanna drive more sales, but getting to outcomes is very often a question of what is the problem that you see? And then how do you solve that problem? So- Yeah ... being creative in the problems that you see or being w- wide open in the analysis of what are the right problems to solve to me that seems like part of the center of the conversation here because that gives you the bigger opportunity to then solve in different ways.

**Andy Nairn:** Sure. I was reading about the the Panama Canal and how that was built the other day. So that- the, the guy who built the Panama Canal was the same guy who built the Suez Canal. He's a French engineer. Or actually he certainly start- he did the, the French [00:34:00] the Suez Canal and he then got the brief because of his great success in building the Suez Canal.

And because he'd already done the Suez Canal, the assumption was I'll just do it the same way then. That worked brilliantly. And of course, that attracted huge investment. Everybody flocked to this this scheme and piled money into it. And what he hadn't really realized was that obviously the geography was different and the, some of the dynamics were different, and not least because they were digging and working through a jungle where everyone was dropping dead.

I think there was about something like 20,000 people were killed. And they made very little progress over the course of about 10, 10 years. And at that stop time all the money ran out. He got fired, his son got put in prison, and somebody else got brought in. And actually an American team, this is interesting, an American team got the gig next and they started

This just shows how or- organizational sort of habits are so hard to break. They applied exactly the same technique [00:35:00] and had similar results for about a year before deciding that they should probably change as well. And the breakthrough came when an American engineer, actually more of a railroad guy actually, came in and said, "Okay.

The, the problem is not the digging. Stop digging, actually. Put your spades down." First of all, we've got to make sure that we cannot sustain this project if all the men are dying. So- Yeah ... let's put care provisions in first. So they went through a huge sort of sanitation sort of program and draining swamps and getting in control of the, the illnesses and the diseases.

Then he figured out that actually this is f- this is not flat terrain as the desert was in Suez. Let's, so let's start creating a series of elevations so we can lift the the ships through the through locks through the mountainous terrain.

So he'd spent a long time defining the problem and resisting the urge to just get spades digging. And that's what made the [00:36:00] breakthrough. But a lot of organizations I feel like just jump straight to digging, don't we? We pick up our spades and and then we lose... Think how many projects we all work on that we lose months or years sometimes because we've leapt to a solution, and quite often the same solution that the previous guys had tried and failed with.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah. With your argument about AI and that this isn't a tool that can necessarily boost creativity unless people have the kind of right mental model of human behavior. Because AI or an LLM just gives you lots of different answers rather than an answer. So I've heard you make the point that it still requires the, the user to have a degree of discretion, and if that discretion is misguided, the I- AI just gets you to the, the wrong place quicker.

You know- Yeah ... one chapter in your book that I thought exemplified [00:37:00] that was Lucky Hitch, because in that chapter you talk about the power of flaws. Now, if someone didn't know that there can be real benefits to the power of flaw and an LLM suggested it for their brand, they'd just completely ignore it.

They'd say it's a ridiculous idea. It's only- Yeah ... with that human understanding that you can make the most out the technology. Could you talk about that, that that chapter? 'Cause I think that was probably one of the, the best in the whole book. It was amazing.

**Andy Nairn:** Oh, thanks. I think it is this, yes, the, this, the human brain can be framed problems can be framed as po- positives or negatives, can't they?

That's the point. In fact, there was a lovely experiment done with a with a guy called Tsutomu Yamaguchi who was a Japanese gentleman who is-- was the only person to survive both atom bombs. It's an incredible story, this. He was in Hiroshima on the day the first bomb dropped survived it and decided to escape to, I [00:38:00] think, what was his hometown, which unfortunately was Nagasaki, and arrived there to witness the second bomb and survived that too.

Now, you can tell that story as these researchers at I think an American university did, in two ways. They split the sample so that they could tell half of them the story of the headline was the luckiest man in the world because it's pretty lucky to avoid both of those sort of situations.

And they told the other half, "This is the story of the unluckiest man in the world." And just by f- the way that they framed the stories, they could convince different audiences of-- based on exactly the same facts, everyone came out from a com- with a, a completely different takeout of the story.

And I think that so often applies in marketing. Some of the great marketing case studies have been things that on face value seem like negatives, un- really unlucky, awful things that then can [00:39:00] be cleverly repurposed into into things that we love. And as I know you've, I know you've written about this many is the time about flaws and the Pratfall effect and how we appreciate human beings and organizations that have got some humanity and some flaws.

So if you're thinking of some of the greatest lines of all time VWs are small. Okay now we're gonna embrace that and say, "Think small." We're gonna turn that into an advantage at a time when the automobile market in America was all about big cars. No let's make small a good thing.

Or the fact that Avis was second and but okay, that's all right. We're gonna embrace that, and we're gonna say, "We try harder." they're two of the most famous slogans of all time that start from the negative. My f- one of my favorite slogans of all time is the Guinness, you know, "Good things come to those who wait."

And that takes the most annoying thing about getting a pint of Guinness, the fact that you've gotta wait for it, and turns it into something beautiful, which is anticipation. So I think very often, and again, we skip over this because

[00:40:00] often in a briefing, the first question we ask is, "Okay, what's great about this product?"

Don't we? We kinda gravitate towards, "Tell me all the lovely good things about your brand- Yeah ... and the great things, and I don't wanna hear about the bad stuff." I certainly don't wanna talk about it. We hide the bad stuff, don't we? Whereas actually sometimes embracing it is better.

**Richard Shotton:** I-interestingly, you mentioned on Hovis that the recommendation in their brief or the instruction in the brief from the client was, "Do not talk about history."

We interviewed Walter Campbell when we wrote "Hacking the Human Mind." and he talked about the-- And there is some kind of dispute about this, but he said that in the brief, there was a absolute mandate from Guinness that you couldn't talk about the weight. All their research showed that drinkers found it really annoying.

But had-- he had the I think the insight to push through and i-ignore that recommendation.

**Andy Nairn:** I think that's true. [00:41:00] One of the things I do as a practical tip I often will look at jokes about a brand. Es-especially if a brand is big enough, there'll be jokes about it, right? And jokes, as we all know, have truth for them to work.

And quite often there's a, a nasty truth 'cause we like a little bit of we like to put the knife in and make fun we're gonna make fun of a brand usually. So I go on places like nasty places like Reddit or pe-pe- places on social media where people are snarking.

Or I'll look up the brand name with cartoons and I'll just Google Images cartoons to do with this brand. And then there's usually a joke at that brand's expense. So how-- and it would be about how long does it take to pour a pint of Guinness or something like that. And that... I think jokes are the-- These are the jokes that people tell about your brand when you're not in the room are incredibly useful because that is what's everyone's saying [00:42:00] about you.

And if you-- Actually, if you listen to g- what great comedians do they will often understand what joke people make about them. There's a lady called Jo Brand who's quite a, a large lady, and she makes no-- her whole act is about being overweight basically. And she used to, when she went on stage, the first thing she did would, she would anticipate that.

Clearly, she knows what people are thinking and make lots of jokes about herself that were miles funnier than anything that the guys in the audience could come up with. And that completely demolished them, got 'em, got them on side, and spoke about the thing that was in the room. And I think a lot of the time brands don't do that.

If there's a thing that people are saying about you behind your back, maybe you're better to acknowledge it and then flip it and turn it into something good.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah. Your example of Guinness. The, the fact was there, it takes ... And they have a very specific number. I think it's 119 seconds they've determined is the amount of time you have to let it [00:43:00] settle. But that fact is there. Every single drinker of Guinness would've known that there's a delay.

So the amazing thing from their perspective of overtly admitting to that, is you get all the benefits of looking humble and human. You get all the benefits of emphasizing the strength of quality. Yes. And there is no downside, 'cause people knew it anyway. Yeah, I think you're right with Guinness being absolutely one of the the pinnacle of

In terms of the application of this.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** It strikes me that in the business of communication, people know they're being communicated at for a reason, and if it's an ad, it's for a commercial reason, it's for a financial reason. So- Yeah ... using this tactic of like beating people to the punchline, if that they're already thinking about something negative about the brand it just lowers folks' defenses.

Because if you're already talking about the thing that's in their mind when they [00:44:00] see the brand or when the comedian gets on the stage, you're now you're out ahead of whatever they're thinking, and then you get to insert what you wanna say next, which to me- Exactly ... is the real power. Y- you get to end the story.

You get to build the arc. And so by controlling the narrative, you get to decide what happens. It feels like in the Hovis example, Andy, that really was th- that, that was the brilliance. You got to start with the old narrative of the brand, and you got to determine where the story ends.

**Andy Nairn:** That's a really good point. That's exactly the way to look at it. It's what good salespeople do, isn't it? If you go into a sales somebody who really knows how to sell but knows that perhaps people have a problem with this brand, or they think it's too expensive, or they think there's a particular problem, it's that classic line, "I know what you're thinking.

I know you might have heard this. I know that people sometimes say that, but don't worry." and if you Cause if you don't acknowledge it, then they're gonna walk away with that thought in their mind and still have that worry. But if [00:45:00] you can control the narrative and turn it on its head or refute it or make it sound less of a big deal.

That, and then it's also honesty as well because you've, you- they will appreciate your- Yeah ... candor in- Yeah ... mentioning it. I

**Richard Shotton:** th- I think that point about honesty is a massive one. It's very easy to slip into the trap of thinking that because you've said something, the audience has believed it.

Yes. But of course, in any commercial situation, the audience is gonna be skeptical. It's not a new thing. People know that a brand has a vested interest to- spin its benefits. Of course, every brand is gonna say it's amazing, so people discount it very heavily. The amazing thing, and psychologists call it the stolen thunder effect, is if you admit openly to a flaw, you have tangibly proved your honesty, and then everything else becomes a bit more believable.

It's a technique- Yes ... that's regularly used by lawyers. Yes. But I think it's something that people in agencies could think about far more. If you're [00:46:00] pitching, try and identify what is it that is a flaw in your offering. No agency can be all things to all people. Proactively mention it, and then, as MichaelAaron says, steer the interpretation to a more positive one.

And also, it will boost that, that believability of every other strength that you then go on to talk about

**Andy Nairn:** It's so true. We used to do that a lot. So one of the things that people especially if you're pitching for big bits of business, sometimes people would harbor perhaps a, a sense that, ooh, this quest- we're not the biggest agent in the world.

There's maybe 120 of us in, in the UK and maybe 30, I'm gonna say, in New York. And so people would sometimes harbor this little nagging worry about are they big enough for my brand. So we would bring that up o- overtly and make a virtue of it, and we would talk about Amazon, who we worked with for over 10 years.

And first of all, we'd tell the Jeff Bezos principle of... And we would say, "I know you might be thinking, you might be wondering, are we [00:47:00] too small for this? But we adhere to the Jeff Bezos rule. We've worked with them. We've worked with the biggest company in the world on their biggest briefs from the Super Bowl to the global campaigns."

So we would say, "Don't worry. We know you're thinking this. We've worked on much bigger things frankly than you guys." and actually they have this principle which you've probably heard of, which is j- when Jeff Bezos was there was make sure your team is small enough to be fed on a couple of standard sized pizzas.

Which was a bit of a problem 'cause we had a very large guy, a guy who was six foot five on our team, and we used to always make, be able to make a joke about him saying that doesn't really apply to this guy. We need about five or six. But the principle is made. You don't need a big team to...

So we would always acknowledge that because if we didn't, we quite often in the early days got people saying, "Oh, we loved you you were gonna be too small for us."

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Andy it strikes me so much of our conversation has been around it's [00:48:00] an empowering message about how we as leaders can kinda, m- I don't wanna say make our own luck, but we can practice being lucky.

Can you talk more about how you think about that?

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah, I think we can all practice being lucky. It sounds like a misnomer, doesn't it? Because luck can happen to us. And obviously there's a passive form of luck and we just wait for it to happen. But I do think you can really increase your chances.

Rory Sutherland's got a nice phrase about this. He's got a nice phrase for everything, hasn't he? But he's got a nice phrase which is, "Increase your surface area for luck." by which I think he means, or certainly I would mean, make-- It's what I was saying before. Make sure you're doing all these things.

You're interested in many aspects of life. You've got more points, if you like, in your network your neural network that are humming and and they will all come back to [00:49:00] help you later on. So the more chances and the more conversations, the more interesting things you've got in your life, then that's gonna massively increase your sort of...

It's maths basically. It's gonna just make it more likely that you have those stumbles, those serendipitous sort of moments.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah.

**Andy Nairn:** So I

**Richard Shotton:** think- in-interesting that you started that with a quote from Rory, 'cause one of the things I really liked about the book was I think you've got a, a, a brilliant memory for amazing quotes.

The one that I loved was-- And then they're such wide ranging. There's ones from Quincy Jones all the way through to Greek philosophers. The one that I loved was the one from Ovid. So it's it says Chance is powerful. Let your hook always be cast in the stream where you least expect it.

Where you least expect it, there'll be fish." So that I I thought was a wonderful way of thinking about things.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. But let me tell you a funny story about that then. I included in the book because I wanted the book to be in itself to be lucky. And so I- Yes, and I've made the

**Richard Shotton:** same mistake.

Yes.

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. [00:50:00] I included a book... I included a little bit in the book that said Lucky mistake." mist- I wanted to prove the point that mistakes can be lucky even. And so I said, "I've inserted a deliberate mistake in this book." and I will give the winner, the first person to spot this, I'll give £250.

And then I got-- I, and this is, that was my mistake because I got so many- ... So many people bombarding me then with and so- some of them were just like completely wrong. Then there was a couple that made me think, "Oh God, maybe that is wrong." and so- ... and one of them was actually offered, and so this is a non-intentional mistake- Yeah

because I think I described him as... Now I'm gonna get this wrong again. Is he Greek or Roman? I got that wrong whichever way I- I think he's Roman. I think he's Roman ... did it. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's right. I think maybe you said he was Greek. And that was not the mistake, so I had to fess up to that.

And the real mistake was I deliberately mixed up my [00:51:00] Roosevelts. And s- and somebody did get that and I, I did manage to give them the fee, but I had to publicly call it quits to any more, no more pointing out- ... intended or otherwise.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** You

**Andy Nairn:** couldn't take any more. But yeah, no-

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** It was enough.

**Andy Nairn:** Exactly. I should just that was a mis- a meta mistake of, a, a mistake about mistakes. But yeah, but I do, I think that original quote is a good one. Make sure, yeah, make sure you're fishing in all these waters and good things will come to you.

**Richard Shotton:** The example about asking people to spot a mistake, I found that really interesting as well because often people will write a book about a particular theme.

You might read a book about distinctiveness and then the book is absolutely like every other book cover that's out there. But yours wasn't like that. You applied the principles of luck actually to the book's [00:52:00] promotion. So could you talk about a few of those clever ideas that you had?

**Andy Nairn:** Yeah. Thanks. No, actually, funnily, Richard Lu- Richard Wiseman, who we mentioned earlier he makes the point that most books about creativity are the most boring books ever written. So Yes. Yes. There's a sort of a great irony to that. But yeah, what I wa- I wanted to bring luck to... So the first thing I did was all the money and all the royalties, the licensing, international translation deals, every-everything, all the money goes to bring luck to working class kids trying to get a break into our industry.

So that's raised tens of thousands of pounds for people. So that was a book about luck that brought luck to other people. Then I did make the lucky mistake in the book. I hid £10 notes in copies of the book in various booksellers. Yeah. And this is a good example as know of that co- how much did that cost me?

I maybe did it three times with a £10 each time is £30. But it got so many people on social media [00:53:00] circulating it and s-sharing film and, "Oh my God, I just found a £10 note in this in this book about luck." other examples I put copies in places like that had lucky names like The Black Cat Cafe or The Horseshoe Bar.

The, the publishers in Hungary did a brilliant thing. They made a special edition copy, which they were sent out to 20 influencers, let's say which had a cover that was made out of a scratch card material so that you- Oh, lovely. And had a lucky coin on the front. And you you had to scratch the cover off, and that, that revealed the sort of cover.

So there were lots of lovely things. I did promotions on Friday the 13th. Cause I thought that might be quite funny. I'm trying to think what else. There's, there was a lot of luck is such a lovely rich vein, but it just meant that, yeah, [00:54:00] that it, it demonstrated the point that this wasn't hopefully gonna be a really boring, dusty marketing book.

It was a book that practiced what it preached and was creative in its own right. The book won creative awards, so that was also a lovely thing because of course the audience it was partly creative and marketing people. So if you're a marketing person and you're at an awards do and you see a... It was great publicity for me as well.

Again I could not have bought that publicity because you've got you've got thousands of marketing influencers awarding it prizes. So that, that was a lovely sort of thing as well.

**Richard Shotton:** Yeah. Brilliant. Brilliant.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Andy, as we come to a close today, if you wanted to leave our listeners with one message, either from our conversation or from your work, what would you want marketers to leave today's conversation thinking about?

**Andy Nairn:** I would ask them to take luck seriously in the sense that it, it [00:55:00] it's only once we appreciate it that we can do anything about it. If we deny that luck exists, then you're never, ever gonna change your luck. And actually only 2% of business books mention luck at all. So I think ... And that's just rubbish, isn't it?

That's bullshit. We know anyone who's worked on anything will know that luck exists and it plays some role in life. My message would be to think about luck, appreciate how lucky you are, look out for all these opportunities everywhere, see if you've got bad luck, can you turn it into good luck?

Try practicing luck. And if you take those active steps to manage your luck, then you are going to increase your chances of succeeding. It's not, it's actually all based on ... It's not silly superstition, it's based on maths, and probabilities, and risk. So there's a science to it, if that makes you feel better about it.

And yeah, I, so I'd tell everyone to go luck yourselves.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** For folks that wanna learn more [00:56:00] about you and your work, they can get the book called Go Luck Yourself, and and find you on social media. Is that the best place, Andy? Or where can they learn more?

**Andy Nairn:** Social media, yeah, all the usual sort of places.

LinkedIn all the usual places, and the book's on all the usual places too, including Amazon, where I forgot to say the, the single best marketing thing was the title of the book, Go Luck Yourself, because every time people search for it, Amazon they don't do this now, but for certainly the first year asked, "Do you mean go fuck yourself?"

Which then everybody screen grabbed, and that, that went- Brilliant ... viral as well the first year. So I, which I didn't actually anticipate, but it was a very nice side effect. So yeah, go there or any of the other usual retailers to get the book.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Thank you so much. And for those that are listening at home, if you found today's conversation engaging, please share it with others [00:57:00] that would find it helpful, and and comment on our channels.

It helps us reach more listeners just like you. And until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

**Richard Shotton:** And I'm Richard Shotton.

**MichaelAaron Flicker:** Andy, thanks so much for being with us today.

**Andy Nairn:** Thank you so much. I really enjoyed it.