Episode 68 - Interview: Adam Ferrier author of *The Advertising Effect* on why you should stop listening to your customer

MAF: [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science For Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and marketing. Every other week we sit down and go deep behind some of America's most successful brands. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

RS: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MAF: And today we're sitting with Adam Ferrier, author of two excellent books in the advertising arena.

Uh, also founder of Thinkerbell, be one of Australia's leading creative agencies. And the host of the podcast, black T-shirts. Let's get into it.

AF: Cheer.

MAF: Yeah. Adam, welcome to Behavioral Science for Brands. Uh, as you know, Richard and I have been on this little mission to bring behavioral science, uh, to the world, specifically in marketing advertising.

Um, we're so excited to have you on the show today.

AF: Yeah. Well thank you. It's great to be here. And ma, say congratulations on your new president.

MAF: Oh, thank you very much. Uh, it is a, uh, what I have [00:01:00] been telling everyone who will listen to me is it's a proud moment in America when we have a peaceful transition of power and we've done it again.

Uh, so we're, uh, you know, we're, we're excited about that. And the people have spoken, uh, you know, uh, for, you know, it's a, it's a serious one and may it not be a shit show. Yeah. How? It's beautifully said. It's beautifully said. So Adam, uh, if you'll indulge me, I am going to give our listeners, listeners a little background on you, and then we can get into a conversation.

AF: Cool.

MAF: I'm quoting your agency website. When I say Adam is one of Australia's most successful and best known consumer psychologists. Okay. He may be the only one. God, please. Which, uh, which in a, a, a sentence, Mr. Ferrier encapsulates, uh, the humor and the, uh, seriousness with which you bring, uh, to your [00:02:00] work.

Uh, you are a serious thought leader, uh, in the world of consumer psychology, brand strategy, and behavioral economics. Uh, your books. The advertising effect had to change behavior and stop listening to the customer. Try hearing your brand instead, have been on Richard and MA's bookshelves for a long time.

And so for our listeners who may have not been able to read your books yet, um, we thought bringing you onto the show today, getting the chance to have a conversation and, um, learning about all that you're doing at Thinker Bell and your podcast would be a great opportunity. So. We're excited to have you on the show.

Uh, thanks for being with us. We always start with an opening question. Our listeners love stories. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about how you got introduced to the world of advertising. What brought you to consumer psychology? How did you find yourself in this industry?

AF: Cool. Um, [00:03:00] I'm happy to do that before I do.

Artie, you have to go downstairs, buddy. I.

Out for a little bit, mate. Love ya. How much? Not long, but just Yes, you can. Well, a little parenting interlude. It's, everything's good. Everything's good. Um, that's, that's Artie. I have another one. Asterisk and a, a beautiful wife, Anna. Um, I, uh, the story of how I got into this is a little bit long, so just cut me off or say this is getting boring.

Not at all. When I was at school in, uh, I used to have a uncle who's a stockbroker, and so I used to, every lunchtime I would run to the only landline in the school and I would ring up my stockbroker and trade shares or lunchtime, and then as soon as the lunch bell would go back to class came, I would hang up and go back to his class.

And so I was always known as the [00:04:00] kind of the weird, rich kind of guy, played the. And as this is happening, my grades were plummeting as I was just kind of getting with, with shares and that kind of thing. And then I went to see a, I had to go see a tutor, um, to help me get through school basically. And the tutor said, what are your interests?

And I said, money and people. And that tutor when I was, uh, in year, just starting year 12, which is our final year in Australia, said I should become a consumer psychologist. And as soon as he said that, I thought, oh my God, that's perfect. I had no idea what it was. I don't even think he knew, in fact, the profession in Australia and that, uh, tutor has since gone to prison for various, uh, weird things.

But he got my advice right, and I knew it instantly, and that story never happened. So I went and studied, uh, commerce and psychology at uni. I got sidetracked when I graduated into forensic psychology. So I spent a few years in the prison system as a psychologist, [00:05:00] practice writing. Uh, court reports and that kind of thing.

I then read a book called Pause of the Court. Um, there's something of expert testimony and I thought, Ooh, I don't wanna be a whore of court. And so, uh, I, I wondered, I thought, well, I need to go back into that thing of consumer psychology that I was interested in. But how do I get back in there? I was studying my masters part-time, so I did my masters in.

Psychology on un identifying the underlying constructs of cool people, what made people cool. And I thought if I did that, that would be a very sellable thing that would be important in the world of consumer psychology. Did that, got a job with a marketing consultancy, published my thesis, became a cool hunter for a while, and then got into, basically became a psychologist.

In Australia, the term consumer psychologist isn't registered. So once you're a registered psychologist, you can call yourself a pet psychologist, a fish psychologist, or [00:06:00] whatever. So I'm calling myself a consumer psychologist in the US and the uk. The term consumer psychologist is a legitimate thing. Uh, so I'm a legitimate psychologist.

I'm an illegitimate consumer psychologist.

MAF: Uh. One that has taken your illegitimate, uh, status and really continued to build on that, an underlying thesis of coolness throughout your career. I mean, as I've listened to you speak in different venues, as I've read things you've

written. Uh, coolness may not always be at the forefront of what you're talking about, but why, what people's perception of what cool is or why people feel the way they feel and why, and why we should think about that, has been at the center of a lot of your, uh, a lot of your work, would you say?

AF: Yeah, I would, I reckon it's, I, I think, uh, that whole, um, thought of, you know, you, you are what you buy and, um, there's a, there's a saying and there's a, there's [00:07:00] a formula on consumer psychology, which is. Actual self plus brand equals ideal self. And I, and I like, I like that concept as evil as that may be.

But what it misses out on as well is a little bit of that collective cultural experience we have with brands together. I think coolness is a, is a bit, it's a bit corny, isn't, it's a bit cliched and the older and better. I get the weirder it is to talk about it, but it does have that sense of aspiration as and also kind of popular.

Um. About it and it's, it's just bloody interesting. As soon as you say, you know, stuff, everyone to. Not talk about that.

MAF: Is it fair to say that you've taken that base and when you talk about how you can apply creativity to brand building, you know, you, you have, so a few core steps of what you should be thinking about when you're applying creativity to brand building.

It's, it's in the same range. Is that fair?

AF: Nah, nah. I [00:08:00] wouldn't, I would say we use, I use it as a sales tool or as an interest tool, but when it gets down to unpacking coolness and trying to apply that to brands. The whole thing kind of falls apart, but it's a pretty fat word. It's like saying you wanna be popular or you want to be, you know, it, it doesn't help get that bar.

I think what's what's much more, been much more useful is being a psychologist. Um, the psychologist once said to me many years ago that psychology just, um, relabeled what people already know and makes it digestible and understandable just by playing it back to them in language they get. And I kinda liked that concept and when I got into marketing, behavioral economics hadn't kind of made the inroads.

It's had marketing sciences hadn't made the inroads as it had, so it was all completely made up and there was no common language. And so I've got a few

early runs on the board by calling myself a psychologist by unpacking what was already happening a bit in, in language that [00:09:00] psychologists use. And it was kind of like in the land of the blind, the one-eyed person's king.

Right. So I had a bit of language and that kind of gave me a running start. Yeah. Here we're,

RS: thanks for sharing that. So that's, um, fascinating background, Adam. Um, on the podcast, one things we're super interested in is bridging the gap between the academic side of psychology and.

Examples in marketing where you think a principle from psychology has been brilliantly applied by, by a brand? Is there any specific example

AF: that you wanna share? I mean, the, the hard thing about your question, Richard, is all the, all the principles of psychology have been, been applied for years and good.

Um, marketing often uses those, they just didn't have a, a name for it. So. Back in the day, people were creating [00:10:00] social norms by saying, nine out of 10 dentists prefer this. Um, and, and that, and, but now we're doing that with a little bit more, a bit being a bit more deliberate about it. I think what's been quite interesting is, is in Australia and Europe, more than America is the inroad, Zinberg Bass Institute has made into, um, into how we do marketing.

Taking away a lot of the fluff and putting some, some, I'm gonna use quotes here, although the Berg Bus Institute would kill me putting some science into it because we now know how people make decisions and what we need to do to help them, uh, buy one brand over the other. And we also know that power of advertising, we know that it's a weak force.

We know that it's not that strong, therefore we know what we need to do to make it work harder. I reckon that's been really interesting in how marketing is getting more [00:11:00] effective and changing and, and arguably creatively better, if I brought it down, was overly reductive. Um, and this is going to again, upset the people at the Berg Best Institute.

I'd say it all comes down to make the logo bigger, which used to be, um, you know, what the, what a bad client would say to their, their ad agency. You look at the work at the moment from, you know, two of the best agencies in the world is uncommon, which is, um, you know, you should get Neils Leonard on this as one of the founders of Uncommon.

He's amazing. Um, and the other agency I really admire is Rethink, and they're kind of stunt, they're a Canadian based agency. They're quite stunty, but both of those agencies, so much of their work is just. Getting the brand or the business front and center, making sure the whole thing's completely brand and then telling a, an, a bucket of story from there.

So, [00:12:00] um, you know, all the work that they, that, uh, rethink does with Pines, you have a look at it. They always just use the, use the bottle in some kind of interesting way. They make the label, you know, put the label on 32 degrees, which is the ideal way. Bottles being poured, the label's upright. So if the bottle's poured at 32 degrees, the label's upright, so that creates cognitive disfluency, uh, at shelf.

So it stands out more. So Adam Atlas or his work on cognitive disfluency is kind of on display there. I'm sure the people that rethink don't know who Adam is or don't give a shit about comms of ancy. But that's a, that's a principle they've applied. Mark, the people at the Berg Bass Institute will be stoked because the logo's front and center and the entire RADS branded.

And then the people at hees are stoked because they're getting a product message out, which is, this source is so thick, you have to put the bottle at 32 degrees [00:13:00] or whatever it is in order for it to work. And lots of our stuff is, is like that at um, uncommon again, he couldn't give a shit about. Maybe, I mean, they care about marketing sciences, but they're not u, I don't know how much they're using it in their language, but it's had the be the British Airways work they've done where there's, you know, they're talking about stories and so forth and the emotion of every seat in the plane and they're just doing massive closeups to the side of the BA with a little face in the window.

And that's the whole outdoor ad. So the whole thing has got emotion in it, but it's heavily, heavily branded. Um, highly evocative stands out.

RS: Yeah, I mean I'd love that example from Uncommon in the the British Airways work and the example that springs to mind when you talk about it. So Michael, you might have seen this in America, dunno how heavy they might run over in the States, but it's the side of the plane and rather than seeing British Airways on it, you see it.[00:14:00]

And I think that's a example of someone applying the the Generation effect. This idea. Um, CCA back at the University of Toronto that if you allow people to kind of fill in the blanks themselves to come up with the answer themselves, that processing they do embeds the message more deeply in their mind.

If you just tell somebody's British Airways, that's one thing. If they work out from the ad what it is, then it's much more likely to be, to be memorable. So I think there's a lovely example of a, a bias in there being used, but what's really interesting is, is the point you made about some people deliberately look at these insights, psychology, take that as an inspiration, and then generate creative ideas based bit.

But I think you are also right that there is many people who've never heard of these experiments, but they are [00:15:00] intuitively. Uh, great observers of of human nature, and that's fantastic if you've got that very small group of people like that. But why I love of psychology is it, is it kind of systemized? Is it for the rest of us now, we can't all be Neils Leonard or

AF: Bill Burner.

I, I totally agree. That's that's a beautiful way to put it. And it stops the crap. Like, I think lots of people go to agencies and get really bad experiences of creativity because they just get. Completely uninformed creative solutions, and which normally manifests itself as 27 seconds of something funny followed by the brand for three seconds.

Yeah. And then, and then sales don't increase. And then they go, well, why? And then they talk about, oh, it's a slow burn. Or you just have to wait and the sales never increase. And um, and they move on. So I do think marketing sciences, behavioral sciences, um, have, have [00:16:00] stopped the crap. Lifted the bar for everybody.

Um, and if you just followed the Ehrenberg bass, um, institute's laws to the letter, I think what it does at the very least is average marketing done well. So I dunno how much room there is within the Berg Bass frameworks to create something incredibly charming or create something that's culturally going to.

Uh, to sing, but you are gonna do line and link marketing Well,

RS: although I, I was gonna say Yeah, no, I was gonna say from, because knowing about the principles you mentioned right at the beginning, social proof, you know, this is an idea that marketers have known instinctively for a long time. This idea that if you make something appear popular, it becomes more appealing, uh, and people are more likely to.

Basic way, the pedestrian way of doing that would be to say, you know, we sold a million [00:17:00] cans of Heineken or nine out 10, uh, people recommend us.

So that, so if they think that is about lifting the, the floor as it were, I think you could also see people taking social proof, not as the endpoint, not just force fitting the idea onto their comms.

But just seeing it as an input into the creative process. Yeah, so there's a lovely example, really old one. It's, I think it's a 1986 ad from Ford. It's Ford Escort, uh, when that was the world's bestselling car. And the, the posters they run were these giant posters and on them they print it out. Tiny, tiny font, every single make or model of competitor, gar.

And then over the top they said Ford score. Um, you know, if your car's on minister list, we outsell it. Now that's still social truth, but I think that's an example of where they haven't just stopped a very basic application of idea. They've seen the role of behavioral [00:18:00] science. It's just a hypothesis of human nature.

They still had a job to do with it, to apply it with a bit of. And fla. So I, I, I feel so quite strongly that behavioral sites can lead to amazing advertising, but not if you think it's the, the the end point, as it were.

AF: Yeah. There there's a, there's a great concept, uh, called, which I really love. Uh, they're called embodied cognitions.

So basically, uh, cognitions, um, and our actions are interrelated stuff. You guys will, but if I, um.

If you show, there's actually quite a lot of studies done on this, but if you show people, I'll draw a little example here. If you show people a soup and that soup spoon, that soup has got a spoon. There you go. Coming out on the right, you'll reach for it with your hand in your head. Reference for that, for that soup versus the soup's bean coming out from the other way.

Goes up about [00:19:00] 20%. So you go, oh, I like that. You know, about 20% more increase because the soup spoon is related to how you would take it. Now, you're not gonna do a whole campaign around putting the soup spoon on the right side, but just by knowing that stops you, you know, that doesn't have to be the core of your idea, but put the soup bean coming out of the right.

If you know that preference increases 20% because people are reaching for it in their head. You can't get there. You can even get there by knowing about embodied cognition being a nerd, or you can get there by being incredibly

intuitive, um, as a creative person or, or whatever. But as you say, Richard, coming back to that point, it minimizes the chances of you.

I,

RS: yeah, and, and it is a small tweak to bit of photography in, in that example, but it's costless now. You've caught, if you are, if you are doing a product shop. And it's the cake or the soup a bit is being eaten, the [00:20:00] spoons gotta sit somewhere. You might as well place it in the way that it's going to work with human nature rather than against

AF: it.

Yeah. The only, the only, the only caveat to that is sometimes if everyone knows that, then everyone puts the soup spoon on the right. Then maybe the, you know, if you put the soup spoon in directly from the top and hand holding it like that, there may be creatively that's gonna stand out more. Um.

MAF: No, that's, it's, it's, well, it, it's well said that, uh, distinctiveness will go a long way if, if everybody in the category has the same convention.

Adam, I wanted to ask you to go back because you introduced this very interesting idea that if you followed the Berg Bass Institute letters of the law and you followed everything exactly, you would get effective advertising, but maybe not emotionally connective or memorable advertising. Maybe you could talk about.

How you've seen using these base principles get you to good and then what you've seen [00:21:00] help get brands to great or where, where you've seen that, you know, be able to build on top of these, these strong foundations.

AF: MichaelAaron. That is a, uh, such good question and one that I'm going to have to just, um, play with an idea, right?

Because I don't know what the answer is to that. If I knew what the answer is to that, I'd be, uh, logged very aggressively. Uh, the way I look at it is every, every interaction I have with the brand has a half life in my head, and that idea has a half life and a decay that, that, uh, I don't really know about.

If I just see a TV ad or a video piece of video content, no matter how good that harp, that that content is, the harp life will disappear after a while. So I need to keep on topping it up. So I need to keep on topping up because you never know

when I'm going to be in the category to buy something and the whole name of the game is [00:22:00] being in my head when the category trigger occurs.

So if I follow Aaron Bur bass letters to the law, I have to kind of keep on topping up my comms to be in the head when, when that happens. Where we don't have enough language or enough knowledge is if I have a really powerful experience and create an idea that sticks in my head for years and years and years, I might never need to advertise again because I'll be stuck in the head bit, like branding.

If you brand a cow with a, um, an iron, that cow's not gonna forget about the iron, uh, about that brand. But if you tell the cow, they'll forget about it. Hang on one sec. I. Go downstairs. I'll be down shortly. Okay, mate. Promise, but don't, don't come up again. Okay, Ross, I'll be, uh, be up. Uh, please don't come up again.

I'll be up, down shortly. All right. Okay. He loves being around you, dad. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that. Yeah. This is, [00:23:00] this is best parenting. This is my performance parenting mode. Yeah. Believe me, I see the restraint. That would be quite a different interaction if you weren't being recorded. Yeah.

Let me under no illusions here. I talk of a man. I appear Justin.

MAF: Yeah. That's a amazing, I said this man is very zen. Very zen. Alright, so if we, if we go back, we'll pick it up right again and no problem all,

AF: I don't mind all that. Um, that stuff being in there. I don't, whatever. Uh, so harp line. So brand stuff.

So then one of the things I learned as a psychologist, um, is that action changes attitude faster of an attitude changes action. Okay, well I get you to interact with me if I get you. Um, there's a whole [00:24:00] lot of, you know, you'll hear about the IKEA effect, the endowment Effect, the effort paradox, uh, the Benjamin Franklin effect.

All of these things basically say. If you take a step toward me and interact with me in some way, you are going to remember me more. So if I do something that actually gets you involved, um, gets you to co-create something, gets you to, um, build the brand you want or, or whatever, um, or even go to a concert and make something or just, just have a really cool interactive experience, for example.

That experience might stay in my head for years and years and years, and I might not need to top it up nearly as much. So my big default in marketing, that's getting back to your question. I know this is a long answer, but getting back to your question, my default is trying to get people involved with communications, not just pushing it on them and, [00:25:00] and advertising grew up in a broadcast landscape where you push stuff at people.

And most of the Erenberg Bass Institute has grown up with those kind of case studies that don't have as much language around interactivity and the power of that kind of stuff. Um, and, and lot and most of the work I do involves people having some form of collective experience.

MAF: So, Adam, when you are talking about these types of engagement with consumers, to me this is larger than advertising.

We're talking about brand experience or we're talking about customer experience. And just to drive it home for the listeners, the IKEA effect that you're talking about in my mind, and tell me if I've got this right. They make you walk a mile through the store and then you buy the product and you gotta build it at home.

You are experiencing the, the brand in a very tactile way because you're building the product that you get from them. [00:26:00] Is that what you mean by by? Is that what you mean by that?

AF: So the whole, the whole concept, the broader concepts. The epic paradox, the more effort you put into something, the more you value it.

Carry a baby around for nine months, pop it out. You're gonna love that thing no matter what it is. Took a lot of effort. Effort. After 18 years, you're gonna love it even more because of all sunk costs. The IKEA effect is basically Professor Michael Norton, Harvard Business School, got people to build a bookcase versus giving a bookcase.

Then ask them, he said, at end the experiment, I'm gonna buy them back up. You, the people who have built the bookcases charge about a 30% premium. To sell the bookcase back. So you value it more for having built it. May have got a few of the details slightly wrong there, but that's the, the effect, the walking through the maze of the IKEA thing, the driving out to ikea, that's all part of the paradox that Michael didn't study that bit.

He studied the co-creation bit of the actual building, the bookcase. But I, I like to talk about IKEA being [00:27:00] the least customer centric, um, brand in the world because. There's nothing about that that's customer centric. It's all about, um, Ikea making me the consumer put effort into that brand. I think one of ikea's official values is you do what your bit will do ours to help keep cost down.

So I think that's how they talk about it internally, which I like. I really admire ikea, but, and I admire, I, this is all documented in my second book. Stop listening to the customer by hearing your brand instead, which is kind of about this whole thing about have a, have a strong vision and, and then work out, you know, how to, how to, um, get people to buy into that vision and help build it with you.

RS: I, I think the effort paradox, like cure effect, procreation, these are fascinating areas and you say this, this whole body of evidence that if someone puts effort into of product, they're gonna value it more. But then you've got this body of experiments [00:28:00] from people. Daniel Cardiman or Todd Rogers where they say, look, if you do one thing from behavioral science, it's make it easy.

The often a little bits of friction will put, put people off engaging. So, so how do you kind of marry these two ideas together?

AF: Those two things are, yeah, those two things aren't counterintuitive, right? So, so put 'em together. What you've got is make it easy for people to get involved. So, and they will, so.

There's a, there's an Australian beer brand, uh, just about our biggest beer brand in Australia is called Forex, and it is sold internationally as well, the good big beer brand. But it's the pride of Queensland is written on the side of the art thing. So it's the biggest selling beer in Queensland by a long way.

One of the biggest selling beer in Australia. Uh, in Australia, we have a thing called state of Origin, Queensland versus New South Wales, uh, in what we, in Rugby league and, um. And as Queensland had been a sponsor of the, uh, Forex, been a sponsor of the, [00:29:00] uh, Queensland Maroons, um, for many years. They've got Fourex written on the logo.

One year we decided to change the logo Forex and make it the postcode of where that player was from. And so, and all the postcodes start with a four. So it was 4 1 2 3 or 4 8, 4 4 instead of four eight. And that got a lot of publicity and it

went nuts. Um, then the next year we thought, how do we get everyone involved in this?

So we just put numbers on all the Forex pans and we got people to show their support or their town or where they were from, at the same time as supporting the maroons when they went and played state of origin. So people would say, come on 4, 1, 2, 3 or come, you know, the proudly 4 1 4, 4. And they put the fours, they either used the cans to, to, to show their postcode or they wrote the letters in red on pay bales or, you know, [00:30:00] in on shop fronts or whatever it was.

So from taking the logo here on the player's uniform, changing that out, that was cool. But what really made it big and what makes it now a, a massive thing and, you know, it's, uh, the, the beer brands. Uh, the fastest growing in in Queensland. It's been a ma It's been very, very successful. Won effectiveness, its awards and so on is the collective ability to get everybody to do, to get involved.

And my, um, my camera is going nuts as my hands go. A bit nuts, isn't it? But that's all right. That'll just be kind of fun.

MAF: It's a, it's, it's all part of the experience. It's all good. That's

AF: right. It is, it is all part of the experience. Uh, one, just as an aside, one of the fun things we do at, uh, think about is we make everybody create their own brand positioning.

And we do it by getting, um, you have to have a positive feature about yourself and a negative feature about yourself, and you chuck 'em together, and [00:31:00] that's your brand positioning. Mine is enigmatic irritation, so kind of interesting, but kind of irritating. And I think this whole camera thing is a pretty good example of enigmatic irritation.

RS: Uh, I love that. I love that. Um, because in that's, you know, that idea of admitting a floor, I know that's something you've talked about before as being a, not just something you can use amongst staff, but being a really powerful way of boosting the, the appear of brands. Is that something you, you could talk about?

Sorry. Sorry, Richard. Can you repeat the question? Oh, I, I was saying I love the idea of getting the staff to talk about not just their positives, but also their flaws. Now, you've talked before about how brands have adopted that tactic. I

think it's an interesting one maybe to discuss, because in some of the earlier examples we were talking about using behavioral science to kind of sweat the small stuff.

Um, positioning the, [00:32:00] uh, the. Spoon in the, in the soup the right way, or, or using social proof to, to nudge people to, to buy. But you've talked about examples where admitting a flaw has led a huge impact for

AF: advertisers. So surely you guys have spoken about this on the, on this, on the previously, I'm sure, like this is the, um, your asking me to talk about the, the PR ball effect.

Correct? Yeah. Which is something I've spoken a lot about in the. Um, and basically it says if people perceive you as being, uh, competent in something and you show some form of availability, or you fuck up in some way, they'll perceive you as being even more, um, competent after you've done that. So maybe this example, the camera, if you, if people believe MichaelAaron's introduction about me as being, I knew what I.

This making you more likable and weirdly, this camera thing is actually making people think I'm even more competent. But if you [00:33:00] thought I was a dick when I was being introduced, then I'm doubling down. I really am. These are spiraled out control. Yeah, I really am a dick who doesn't know what he's talking about.

So it all depends on that introduction. Um, but, but, but it, so it's fascinating, right? So, so there's a, a, a behavioral economist called Baba Shiv, who's, who's studied this a lot and, and talked about blemishing and purposely putting blemishes into brands. So it allows the consumer in, um, again, I look at all of this holistically as the epic paradox, which is my, my favorite.

I now need, you've, you've let me in as a Flo I've, I've let you into my world that I can't get my camera right. And maybe, maybe that entheos me. That's a bit of a stretch. I know. But, um, and then if brands show a blemish, it allows them in. And the reason why I love it [00:34:00] so much in marketing is because it's a new thought.

The brand, uh, previously used to have be glossy and shiny and so forth, whereas every other industry knew. Flaws or availabilities are what engages. So the entertainment industry has known that, obviously for years. Editors know that if it bleeds, it leads. And so lots and lots of other industries know about being fallible and, and putting flaws into a tree.

Attractiveness. Marketers have, have historically thought we have to present a more polish image of the world.

RS: Entertainers know this. What do you mean by that? That that stories about stars having problems that make them more, uh, appealing? Is that the kind of angle?

AF: Yeah, but I think even just on the concept of somebody like Batman or somebody, uh, you know, having alaw protagonist store, um, you know, that, you know, there's no super, you know, Superman used [00:35:00] to be kind of perfect and wasn't as popular as.

Or maybe this wasn't, maybe that's a personal preference, but wasn't as interesting as Batman, who was a, a fundamentally flawed character. And I think it all comes back to, and then cross-culturally, we've known this for years. Um, so Wabi sabi that is, is that kind of Japanese thought of beauty and imperfection.

There's a Chinese kind of concept of yin and yang of two opposing forces coming together. Uh, there's union psychology, which is all about embracing your shadow. So all of these kind of thoughts are basically saying, you know, to have, have authenticity, you have to have your blemishes, you have to show your cracks.

And

RS: um, and you said advertisers have come to this quite late, but are there any examples that, that spring to mind of someone that you think has. Really. Now

AF: this is an idea, uh, the two, the two examples that spring to [00:36:00] mind, uh, or loads. But, um, the KFC, uh, FKC or whatever we're sorry, was kind of interesting.

So just using their own brand home as saying, fuck, we're sorry, but, um, using the, the, the letters. There's Montes apple cider, which I like, which it was a brand in the UK in New Zealand, and they twig packaging. They put twigs in the cartons of cider. And so people were complaining about the twigs they got in the cartons of cider, um, saying, what's this twig doing in here?

And then they allowed them to say, oh, sorry about that. You know, it was too close to the trees or whatever. And it just made it feel fresher by having these little bits of imperfection in there. Um,

MAF: the apple cider one is particularly meaningful because it doubles down on a brand point they wanna emphasize, which is the idea that it was made from real apples.

Why else would there be twigs in the [00:37:00] box? I mean, so a imperfection that you can highlight that reinforces something you want. PA positive brand perception feels a little bit like a double whammy if you can. Is that a fair thing to say?

AF: Yeah. We've just done something recently, uh, like in the last month or two for a brand called V, which is, uh, the biggest energy drink in Australia.

So, um, and they've, they've launched a brand called Be Refresh. And so V Refresh is, um, you know, it's a refreshing form of bee. We launched it by having an ice sculpture with bees stuck in the ice sculpture, and as the ice sculpture melted, you.

RS: I really hope you said these not bees otherwise, this was the cruelest stunt ever.

AF: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or I idiot. Um, but one guy went up to the ice sculpture and licked it and got his tongue on the ice [00:38:00] sculpture and uh, and he was stuck there for, uh, a couple of hours. And, um, we publicized that, um. Then we had a, a, a response, which was from, from v officially saying, look, in all of our years, we never thought we'd have to say this, but please don't, uh, lick ice sculptures in, in, in public.

It's dangerous. Uh, try, be, refresh. Instead. That quote got publicized everywhere, as did the imagery of a man with his tongue stuck to the ice sculpture. I'm not gonna say whether that was all completely fabricated. Um, it's up to you to, to work, but, uh, again, that, that kind of bit of mayhem or bit of confusion, Mike Faren, to your point, it allowed us to get the story of b refresh brain, a refreshing form of B out there through creating some kind of accident.

Uh, you know, that's just a pretty [00:39:00] topical example. Maybe not the best or cleanest example, but it's something we've done.

MAF: Yeah, no, I think it, it, it just gets to the point that, uh. Advertising is a weak force, as you said earlier, and any way you can make a more meaningful connection, either through surprise or in this instance, engaging, uh, you know, en engagement with a, uh, consumer that then had this outcome makes it more

memorable, makes it cut through, uh, in a more meaningful way to the people that are hearing about it.

AF: Yeah, I think people listen to people more when they listen to brands. So I think if you can get people to do the talking for you and think of the consumer. As the departure point to the story, not the end point of the story, then you're gonna get stuff that flows through. So the big example, the Forex example is, and a lot of our work is either getting journalists, writing about stuff, passing the message on, or getting people to get involved and peer to peer kind of stuff as well.

It

RS: makes a lot of sense. [00:40:00] You mentioned earlier with the effect the need to have a degree of status. Fully harness the idea. How does a brand know if it's got that status where the PR we're emitting a blemish or a floor is going work positively rather than backfire?

AF: Uh, I don't know. That's a good question.

I, I dunno. I think if it's, I think you'd definitely know when you've got it right? So if you've got the years and years, like the mon side of things, Mon side is a big, kind of a well established, strong brand. So you know when you've got it. But there might be. There might be emerging brands that haven't had their proposition fully established yet, that it could be very, very risky to do that.

Some of the work we do, we work, we do a lot of work with Vegemite as well, which is a very famous brand where we get people to kind of, um, you know, buy to be in the ads. If we ever do anything on ve MI, everyone just goes nuts about it. We look like we know what we're doing because everyone [00:41:00] gets involved.

That's just the strength of the preexisting. Brand proposition that everyone wants to get involved. So it's much, much easier when you've got a strong brand proposition. And it's kind of an interesting point to remember because if we just ended with the B thing as well, that would've been ridiculous. If that wasn't a very well known brand, people wouldn't have written about it or spoken about it.

So you do need to absolutely get your fundamentals right about what your brand stands for, and know how your brand is going to communicate and build itself in the world. Sometimes that gets forgotten. Another example I like, which

we've worked on recently, um, is, um, Tuy new, uh, or Tuy, just it, it's another, it's another very popular beer brand in Australia and they used to have a song which went, I feel like a toy.

I feel like a two ears. I feel like a two ears or two. That's the.[00:42:00]

You're good. It's all good. Looks like I've had a two years old group. Yeah. And, uh, and, uh, uh, but about 20 years ago, they, 15, 20 years ago, maybe they stopped doing, using that song. We reignited the song in advertising. We did it to such a degree. The, uh, the, the local, uh, football team has started singing the song, uh, at the end of football matches.

We've got people kind of, we're now doing a music tour where the band will sing the song with the crowd at the end of the tour. And we're just bringing back these latent memory structures for this song. Getting people again to sing along with it. If you're gonna sing, I feel like a two is, you're certainly gonna buy one.

And so, um, yeah. Anyway, that's another example.

MAF: Yeah, it's a lovely example. And, uh, returning to a point you made right before we talked about that example, um, in your second book you [00:43:00] talk about how. It's easy to get lost with all the insights about consumers that you forget about your brand. I think our listeners would be very interested just to hear your key insight about this.

Um, if you could talk a little bit about, yes, knowing what the consumer wants and needs is interesting, but it's really more interesting for the category and having a strong brand strategy is more important for differentiation and for your, and for, to improve your sales. I.

AF: Yeah. Uh, thank, thanks for that.

Setup it. You're exactly right. So listening to the customer is hard, so understanding what the customer wants is hard. Knowing what your brand stands for is probably easier, but it's a forgotten skillset. So people have, people are spending so much time, there's so much data available and what customers want.

We kind of go, oh, let's do that and let's understand all of that kind of stuff. Rather than understand what we stand for, unfortunately, most of the things we understand about the customer are at a category level. Because no category

needs your brand. They need [00:44:00] the category. So we don't need another soft string.

We don't need another car. We need the category. When the category need occurs, we, uh, we'll go, oh, okay, we'll buy that car over that car. So the more we understand the customer and the customer needs, really the more we're understanding the category, the more we're understanding the category. The more at risk of homogenization because we'll appeal to the category needs, we'll appeal to the category entry points and so forth.

So long established categories all tend to have this homogenizing effect where everything becomes the same. So all the banks become the same, just separated by colors. All the cars become the same. You know, you see all luxury good items kinda the same. And all they've got is distinctiveness how they look versus what they stand for as being different.

And there's no real differentiation because they homogenize. The alternative to that is being really, really clear what your brand stands for and focus on that. I'd say over the needs of what the customer says they want. And [00:45:00] so a good example of that is Ikea, utilitarian Swedish design that, um, we're going to make people put a bit of effort into, um, to, to enjoy.

No. Market research group in the world is gonna say, I wanna walk around your Maze Light store for years until I buy something. Very few of 'em are gonna say, I want to assemble it myself and carry it home, rather than have somebody do that for me. They are resisting so much customer insight to stay there.

The other one I love talking about is Apple equally as non-consumer centric, uh, with kind of weird payment systems, you. Extreme inbuilt obsolescence, cords and wires going everywhere. I'm just looking around my desk at the moment, which is a mess of, you know, apple cords connecting from one thing to the other.

None of that is customer centric, but it's all kind of Apple. Understanding their business and the business that they're in. Charming us with beautiful [00:46:00] looking product and then, and then working out how to monetize that really effectively. Um, and so. My insight for the book came from, I do a lot of public speaking and everyone says, oh, we're customer obsessed.

And I started thinking, Hey, if you're ready, we're customer obsessed. Would this business be here in the first place? Or would he just pack up and go home because the, maybe the customer doesn't need your brand or need your product.

And if you were just delivering purely underneath customer, I don't know if you'd have a business.

Kind feels like you need to prioritize what you stand for, what you are offering to the world. Get really, really clear about that, and then draw the customer in rather than prioritizing the other thing, which can lead to homogenization and lack of value.

MAF: I think it's a exciting thing for younger market for all marketers to hear, not just younger marketers.

I think all marketers want to stand for something and I think. Almost all marketers [00:47:00] want their brand and their product to meet a unique need, but under the pressure of meeting the consumer desires, it does lead to this homogenization that, uh, you're, you're talking about being very careful about and being very thoughtful about.

So I think finding that, that, that tension point and finding where your brand could stand out through strong brand strategy feels like a big opportunity.

AF: Yeah, I think so. And the way I look at it is all those insights might be helpful, but they might be a threat and they might be decreasing value if you listen to them.

So, and they might throw you a course, uh, they might, but they might be valuable. So just don't take them as, you know, down from the, um, mountain or whatever the biblical expression is.

MAF: Well, this is great, Adam. This has been a very interesting discussion and we've covered a lot of very, uh, exciting topics like we always do.

We're gonna take the key ideas from [00:48:00] today's episode and drop them into the show notes with links for our listeners to hear more. Uh, before we, we, we bring the conversation to a close. We always like to ask our guests. Something that you are reading, something that you're watching that has caught your attention, you know, uh, something that you, uh, it could be related to, uh, consumer psychology and brand building or not, uh, but what's Adam Ferrier, uh, obsessed with right now?

AF: Right now I'm obsessive Urban yell's latest book from the Heart, the stories from the here and now. It is amazing. If you don't know who Irvin Yell is, everyone should go read it. He is a psychiatrist. He wrote, uh, loves execution,

avatars of psychotherapy, existential psychotherapy, dynamics of group psychotherapy.

He's amazing. But he and lying on the couch was a novel. His he latest and la he's 93 and he's got dementia and he's dying. And he says, I can no longer form [00:49:00] long-term relationships with my clients, so I'm only gonna see them for an hour. And then I'm gonna write, I'm gonna help that client as much as I can in an hour, and then I'm never gonna see them again.

And so he is writing stories about every person he sees and how he tries to help them in an hour. How he tries to help them in an hour is bring the conversation into the here and now. So right now you're seeing me, the dickhead with his fucking camera. You're seeing Richard being very erudite and jumping in with um, you know, really interesting.

Well, things you see, MichaelAaron kind of, you know, being, being the hustler and the, you know, and so on. And like this our dynamic. This is how you, this is how the three of us get by all the time. This is us. And so the more we can dissect what's going on in this moment, uh, and be honest about then the, you know, anyway, that, that's what he is about.

And it's really, really good. [00:50:00] Have read the book.

MAF: Uh, that is, uh, one, thank you for the analysis. Uh, and two, uh, you know, really, uh, it's, it, it's great. We're gonna drop the book into the, into the show notes and, uh, as we have people read it and we hear about it, Adam, we'll share back what we, what we've heard people say up.

Thank you for joining us today. Uh, for all of our listeners at home, you can find, uh, the full show notes and a transcript of today's conversation at the consumer behavior lab.com. Until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

RS: And I'm Richard Shotten.

MAF: Thanks for being with us, Adam.

AF: God bless. Good on you guys.

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