

A DECIDEDLY USEFUL GUIDE TO HOW BRANDS & BUSINESSES GROW

What the world's leading thinkers (largely) agree on.

WHY THIS EXISTS

Marketing is full of noise.
Opinion travels faster than evidence.
Frameworks multiply faster than understanding.

Yet, across decades of research, practice, and effectiveness data, a small number of thinkers consistently arrive at the same fundamental truths about how brands and businesses grow.

This document is a synthesis of those truths.

- It is not a collection of trends.
- It is not a set of tactics.
- It is not a point of view.

It is a practical distillation of what has been shown, repeatedly, to work.

My intent is simple:

To help leaders, marketers, and teams make better decisions, faster, by grounding strategy and execution in evidence, not assumption.

HOW TO USE THIS

This guide is designed to be a shared language and decision framework, not a textbook.

Use it to:

- **Align leadership** on how growth actually happens
- **Pressure-test strategy** before it becomes execution
- **Challenge assumptions** that are based on habit, not evidence
- **Design marketing that builds long-term commercial value, not just short-term activity.**

It starts with what the evidence largely agrees on.

Then, each section summarises a thinker's core contribution, the implications for practice, and the traps teams commonly fall into when their ideas are misapplied.

You don't need to "agree with everything."

You do need to understand what the evidence says, and what it doesn't.

The real value of this guide is not in knowing the models.

It is in making **better choices** because of them.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE LARGELY AGREES ON

This guide draws from different schools of thought; effectiveness, behavioural science, brand memory, strategy, creativity, but the overlap is striking.

Across contexts and categories, the evidence most consistently points to the following.

1. GROWTH MOSTLY COMES FROM INCREASING PENETRATION

Most brands grow by getting **more buyers**, not by getting the same buyers to buy dramatically more.

So the job is to reach more category buyers, more often, across more buying occasions.

2. AVAILABILITY BEATS PERSUASION MORE OFTEN THAN WE LIKE TO ADMIT

In real life, buying decisions are frequently:

- Low attention
- Fast
- Habitual
- Context-driven

Which means brands win when they're:

- **Easy to think of** (mental availability)
 - **Easy to buy** (physical availability)
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3. MEMORY IS THE REAL “HOME” OF BRAND ADVANTAGE

Brands are chosen because they are **recognised and recalled** in relevant buying situations.

So brand building is largely the work of:

- Linking the brand to buying situations (Category Entry Points)
- Building distinctive cues that make recall and recognition effortless
- Repeating and refreshing those links over time

4. DISTINCTIVE ASSETS ARE COMMERCIAL TOOLS, NOT DECORATION

Logos, colours, characters, sonic cues, icons, and consistent creative devices aren't "brand wallpaper."

They are **retrieval shortcuts**; making the brand easier to notice, remember, and choose.

5. LONG-TERM BRAND BUILDING AND SHORT- TERM ACTIVATION ARE DIFFERENT JOBS

They work differently, on different time horizons, with different requirements.

- Brand building creates future demand (broad reach, emotional impact, memory)
- Activation converts existing demand (targeted, timely, offer/product cues).

Overweight either and effectiveness suffers.

6. CREATIVITY IS A MULTIPLIER, NOT AN “EXECUTION DETAIL”

Creative quality is one of the biggest drivers of marketing effectiveness because it:

- Earns attention
- Creates emotion and memorability
- Builds fame and talkability
- Makes media work harder.

And it works best when it is **clearly branded** and **consistently applied**.

7. ATTENTION IS THE FUEL, AND IT'S NOT EVENLY DISTRIBUTED

An impression is not the same as attention.

Media plans that optimise only for cost and quantity often buy lots of exposure with very little processing.

Effective investment accounts for **quality of contact**, not just CPM or reach.

8. HUMANS AREN'T RATIONAL, BUT THEY ARE PREDICTABLE

Decision-making is shaped by biases, heuristics, context, and social influence.

Marketing works best when it reduces effort, uses cues people naturally rely on, and respects how choices really happen.

9. STRATEGY IS CHOICE AND TRADE-OFFS

Real strategy is an integrated set of choices:

- Where to play
- How to win
- What you will do (and won't).

Coherence beats activity. Best practice isn't advantage if everyone can copy it.

10. OPTIMISING THE MEASURABLE CAN QUIETLY DESTROY THE VALUABLE

Some of the most important effects (fame, trust, meaning, memory, brand strength) are:

- Long-term
- Diffuse
- Not perfectly attributable.

So measurement should **inform judgement**, not replace it.

ACT ONE: HOW MARKETS AND BUYERS ACTUALLY BEHAVE

This is the world as it is, not as we wish it were.

**THINKER ONE:
ANDREW EHRENBERG**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Marketing knowledge should be built on empirical observation of how markets actually behave, not how we wish they behaved.

Ehrenberg laid the statistical and methodological foundations for much of what later thinkers (Sharp, Romaniuk, Binet & Field) built on.

THE MODEL: HOW MARKETING KNOWLEDGE SHOULD WORK

1. Look for patterns, not exceptions

Markets exhibit strong regularities:

- Buying is light and infrequent
- Loyalty is mostly a function of brand size
- Growth follows predictable statistical laws.

2. Description before explanation

Ehrenberg argued that marketing research should first **accurately describe reality**, before attempting to explain or change it.

THE MODEL: HOW MARKETING KNOWLEDGE SHOULD WORK

3. Replication over novelty

Truth in marketing comes from findings that:

- Repeat across categories
- Hold over time
- Survive scrutiny and re-testing.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Be sceptical of “insight” without evidence

Stories feel compelling. Patterns endure.

B. Prefer longitudinal and behavioural data

What people do matters more than what they say.

C. Use research to reduce uncertainty, not confirm beliefs

The role of research is to inform judgement, not decorate decisions.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Ehrenberg rejected creativity and strategy.”

He rejected unsupported claims.

“Research must predict perfectly.”

Marketing is probabilistic, not deterministic.

“This makes marketing mechanical.”

It makes it grounded.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Marketing laws exist; ignore them at your peril.
2. Observation beats speculation.
3. Behaviour is more reliable than attitude.
4. Replication creates confidence.
5. Evidence improves judgement; it doesn't replace it.

Primary Sources:

- *A Primer in Data Reduction* – Andrew Ehrenberg
 - *The Dirichlet: A Comprehensive Model of Buying Behaviour* – G.J. Goodhardt, A. Ehrenberg, and Chatfield
 - *Repeat-Buying: Facts, Theory, and Applications* – Andrew Ehrenberg.
 - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute foundations and methods.
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**THINKER TWO:
BYRON SHARP
(EHRENBERG-BASS INSTITUTE)**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Most categories are “near-lookalike” markets: brands are more similar than marketers like to admit, and growth comes less from persuasion and more from being **easy to notice, easy to think of, and easy to buy.**

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

1. Growth comes primarily from penetration (more buyers), not “loyalty work”

Sharp’s work (and the empirical patterns he points to) argues that share growth mostly happens when a brand increases the number of category buyers who purchase it, rather than trying to heavily “convert” existing buyers into buying much more often.

2. Build two market-based assets: mental availability and physical availability

- **Mental availability:** being easily thought of / recognised in buying situations
- **Physical availability:** being easy to find and buy where/when people choose.

These two are positioned as the practical levers behind penetration growth.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

3. Expect (and plan for) “Double Jeopardy”

Smaller brands tend to have **fewer buyers and slightly lower repeat buying**, while bigger brands have more buyers and slightly higher repeat; a pattern Sharp popularised for marketers as “Double Jeopardy”.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Chase broad reach and broad buying occasions

If penetration is the main game, then marketing has to be built for **broad category buyer reach**, not narrow “perfect prospect” logic.

B. Treat distribution and ease-of-buy as strategy, not operations

Physical availability is a strategic growth lever (coverage, visibility, convenience), not just a sales problem.

C. Use distinctive brand assets to make recognition effortless

Sharp’s ecosystem heavily emphasises distinctive assets as a mechanism to build mental availability (easy recognition, quick retrieval).

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Differentiation doesn’t matter.”

The more accurate read is: in many categories, differentiation is often **smaller and less behaviour-driving than marketers assume**, so “easy to buy and easy to recall” typically beats “brilliant differentiation” as a growth engine.

“Targeting is pointless.”

Sharp’s argument is not “no targeting,” but that **overly narrow targeting** fights how brands grow (penetration + broad buying).

“Just be distinctive, not meaningful.”

In practice, most teams need *both* (distinctive assets + a coherent promise), but Sharp’s contribution is to **correct the overweighting** of persuasive messaging relative to availability.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Penetration is the primary lever for growth.**
2. **Build mental availability:** make the brand easy to notice, recognise, and retrieve in buying situations.
3. **Build physical availability:** remove friction; be easy to find and buy across channels and occasions.
4. **Assume buyers are light buyers** and that loyalty is mostly a function of size (Double Jeopardy).
5. **Distinctive assets are not decoration;** they're memory shortcuts at the moment of choice.

Primary Sources:

- *How Brands Grow* - Byron Sharp
 - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute articles and explainers (mental/physical availability, distinctive assets)
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**THINKER THREE:
JENNI ROMANIUK
(EHRENBERG-BASS INSTITUTE)**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Brands grow by building and refreshing memory structures that link the brand to buying situations.

Advertising works primarily by improving **brand recall and recognition at the moment of choice**, not by changing deep attitudes.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

1. Category Entry Points (CEPs)

People do not think in terms of “brand attributes” most of the time; they think in terms of **situations, needs, and contexts** (e.g. “quick dinner,” “gift for a client,” “something indulgent after a hard day”).

Growth comes from linking the brand to **more of these situations in memory.**

2. Distinctive Brand Assets as Memory Cues

Logos, colours, characters, sounds, shapes, and consistent creative devices act as **retrieval shortcuts**, helping the brain recognise and recall the brand faster under low-attention conditions.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

3. Mental Availability is Built, Not Declared

It is created through:

- Repeated, consistent exposure
 - Broad reach
 - Clear brand identification
 - Linking the brand to relevant buying situations over time.
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WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Plan communications around situations, not segments

Think less about “who” and more about “**when and why**” the category is bought.

B. Design for recognition, not explanation

If the brand is not recognised quickly, the message rarely lands.

C. Be consistent before being clever

Consistency in assets and associations compounds effectiveness.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“CEPs are just usage occasions.”

They include emotional, social, and contextual triggers, not only functional moments.

“Distinctiveness replaces meaning.”

Distinctive assets work because they cue meaning, not instead of it.

“One campaign builds memory.”

Memory structures require cumulative investment.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Growth comes from being thought of in more buying situations.
2. Memory beats persuasion at the moment of choice.
3. Distinctive assets are cognitive shortcuts, not creative decoration.
4. Consistency compounds.
5. Plan for recognition first, persuasion second.

Primary Sources:

- *Building Distinctive Brand Assets* – Jenni Romaniuk
 - *How Brands Grow, Part 2* – Sharp & Romaniuk
 - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute publications on CEPs and asset distinctiveness.
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**THINKER FOUR:
DANIEL KAHNEMAN**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT BEHAVIOUR (AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR GROWTH)

Humans do not think in a single, rational way.

We rely heavily on fast, intuitive, error-prone mental shortcuts; especially under time pressure, low attention, and uncertainty.

Marketing works largely in **System 1**, not System 2.

THE MODEL: HOW PEOPLE ACTUALLY MAKE DECISIONS

1. Two systems of thinking

System 1

- Fast, automatic, emotional
- Effortless, associative
- Dominates everyday decision-making (including buying)

System 2

- Slow, deliberate, analytical
- Effortful and lazy
- Rarely engaged unless forced

Most marketing is processed, or ignored by System 1.

THE MODEL: HOW PEOPLE ACTUALLY MAKE DECISIONS

2. Heuristics and biases shape choice

People rely on predictable shortcuts, including:

- Availability (what comes to mind easily)
- Familiarity
- Loss aversion
- Framing effects
- Anchoring

These biases are not flaws; they are features of how humans cope with complexity.

THE MODEL: HOW PEOPLE ACTUALLY MAKE DECISIONS

3. Attention is scarce, not effort

System 2 tires easily.

System 1 is always on.

This has profound implications for:

- Creative simplicity
- Repetition
- Recognition over explanation.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Stop assuming attention, motivation, or rational evaluation

Most decisions are made quickly, with minimal cognitive effort.

B. Design for intuitive processing

Clarity, familiarity, and emotional cues matter more than argument density.

C. Reduce cognitive load

Complexity suppresses response, even when people “agree” with the message.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“People are stupid.”

Nope, they are efficient cognitive economisers.

“System 2 persuasion wins.”

It can matter for high-involvement decisions; but it is rare and fragile.

“Biases can be fixed with information.”

Awareness does not remove bias.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Most decisions are made intuitively, not analytically.
2. Familiarity breeds preference, not contempt.
3. Ease of processing increases trust and choice.
4. Complexity kills effectiveness.
5. Marketing succeeds by working with human psychology, not against it.

Primary Sources:

- *Thinking, Fast and Slow* – Daniel Kahneman
 - Nobel Prize-winning work with Amos Tversky
 - Behavioural economics research underpinning modern marketing science.
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ACT TWO: HOW STRATEGY AND VALUE ARE CREATED

Given reality, how do we choose to compete?

**THINKER FIVE:
PETER DRUCKER**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

The purpose of a business is to create and keep a customer.

Everything else: products, operations, finance, and marketing;
exists in service of that.

For Drucker, growth is not driven by selling more, but by
creating superior customer value.

THE MODEL: HOW ORGANISATIONS ACTUALLY GROW

1. Marketing is not a function; it is the business

Drucker argued that marketing and innovation are the only two functions that produce results; everything else is a cost.

This positions marketing as a strategic, value-creation discipline, not a communications department.

2. Value is defined by the customer, not the company

Customers buy outcomes, not features.

The job of the organisation is to understand what the customer considers “value”, and to organise the business to deliver it profitably.

THE MODEL: HOW ORGANISATIONS ACTUALLY GROW

3. Strategy starts with the customer

Drucker consistently framed strategy around:

- Who the customer is
- What the customer values
- What the business is uniquely capable of delivering.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Put customer understanding before activity

Insight precedes execution.

B. Treat marketing as a growth engine, not a cost centre

Marketing's role is to shape demand, not merely to communicate supply.

C. Build the business from the outside in

Internal efficiency without customer relevance destroys value.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Drucker is old-school.”

His principles underpin most modern strategy and marketing thinking.

“Customer focus means customer-led.”

Drucker never argued for blindly following customers, but for understanding them deeply.

“Marketing equals promotion.”

For Drucker, this is a category error (marketing is more than just the Promotional ‘P’).

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **The purpose of a business is to create and keep a customer.**
2. **Marketing is central to strategy, not downstream of it.**
3. **Value is defined by the customer.**
4. **Insight precedes execution.**
5. **Growth comes from relevance, not just efficiency.**

Primary Sources:

- *The Practice of Management* – Peter Drucker
 - *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* – Peter Drucker
 - *The Effective Executive* – Peter Drucker
 - Various publications in association with the Harvard Business Review.
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**THINKER SIX:
MICHAEL PORTER**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Competitive advantage comes from creating superior value through deliberate choices about how a business competes.

Growth is not about doing more things well; it's about doing **different things, or the same things differently**, in a way that creates sustainable value.

THE MODEL: HOW VALUE IS CREATED

1. Value \neq price \neq cost

Value is created when customers are willing to pay more than the cost of delivering the offering, because the offer is meaningfully different or more relevant.

2. Strategy is positioning within a competitive system

Porter frames strategy around:

- Industry structure
- Competitive forces
- Trade-offs
- Fit across activities

This reinforces the idea that advantage comes from **coherent systems**, not isolated strengths.

3. Operational effectiveness is not strategy

Doing the same things better is necessary, but not sufficient, for long-term growth.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Anchor brand and marketing in real value creation

Brand is not separate from value; it is one of the mechanisms through which value is perceived, justified, and sustained.

B. Understand the competitive frame

Value only exists relative to alternatives.

C. Design for fit across the value chain

Brand, experience, pricing, channels, and communications must reinforce the same strategic position.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Porter is anti-customer.”

He is anti-strategy that ignores competition.

“Differentiation means adding features.”

Often it means subtraction, focus, and trade-offs.

“Best practice creates advantages.”

If everyone can copy it, it isn't advantage.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Value is created through choice and trade-offs.
2. Strategy is relational, not absolute.
3. Brand expresses value; it doesn't replace it.
4. Fit across activities sustains advantage.
5. Efficiency without strategy erodes returns.

Primary Sources:

- *How Competitive Forces Shape Strategy* – Micheal Porter
- *Competitive Strategy* – Micheal Porter
- *Competitive Strategy* – Micheal Porter.

**THINKER SEVEN:
ROGER MARTIN**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Strategy is not planning. Strategy is making integrated choices that create a unique way to win.

For Martin, growth comes from **clarity of choice and coherence of system**, not from ambition statements or activity lists.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY WIN

1. The Playing to Win Framework

Five cascading questions:

- **What is our winning aspiration?**
- **Where will we play?**
- **How will we win?**
- **What capabilities must be in place?**
- **What management systems are required?**

Strategy exists only where these choices are explicit and aligned.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY WIN

2. Strategy is about trade-offs

Trying to serve everyone, everywhere, equally well is the fastest path to mediocrity.

Competitive advantage comes from **doing some things exceptionally well, and accepting what you will not do.**

3. Advantage is designed, not discovered

Martin argues that leaders must actively design systems of activity that reinforce each other, rather than hoping differentiation “emerges.”

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Anchor marketing to the business strategy, not the campaign plan

Marketing is one of the primary mechanisms through which “how we will win” is made real.

B. Stop confusing goals with strategy

Revenue targets are outcomes, not strategic choices.

C. Design coherence across experience, brand, and operations

Isolated excellence does not create advantage; systems do.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Strategy is a document.”

It is a set of living, guiding choices.

“Vision equals strategy.”

Vision without choices is aspiration, not strategy.

“Best practice equals advantage.”

If everyone can copy it, it isn't strategy.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Strategy is choice.
2. Advantage comes from coherence, not activity.
3. Trade-offs are a feature, not a flaw.
4. Marketing must express the way-to-win, not decorate it.
5. If you can't explain how you win, you probably won't.

Primary Sources:

- *Playing to Win* – Roger Martin & A.G. Lafley
 - *The Design of Business* – Roger Martin
 - *A New Way to Think* – Roger Martin.
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**THINKER EIGHT:
MARK RITSON**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

There is no such thing as “tactical marketing” without strategy.

Brands grow when clear strategy, sound segmentation, and disciplined execution are aligned; not when teams chase channels, trends, or tools.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

1. STP is the core of marketing effectiveness

- **Segmentation:** Understand the real structure of demand.
- **Targeting:** Make deliberate choices about where to compete.
- **Positioning:** Define a clear, competitive, and defensible value proposition.

Without this, activity becomes noise.

2. Brand is a commercial asset, not a communications layer

Brand strategy should sit above campaigns and channels, guiding investment, pricing, experience, and innovation.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

3. Evidence over opinion

Ritson consistently argues that:

- Marketing is a discipline, not a creative art alone.
- Decisions should be grounded in data, research, and effectiveness evidence, not internal preference.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Do the hard strategic work first

Avoid jumping to execution before choice.

B. Balance brand and performance properly (hello, Bothism)

He strongly supports the Binet & Field long/short framework in practice.

C. Invest in fundamentals, not fads

Tools change. Principles don't.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Ritson is anti-Digital.”

He is anti-undisciplined digital (and he’s not a fan of the term ‘digital’)

“Brand is soft.”

For Ritson, brand is one of the hardest commercial assets to build, and one of the most valuable.

“STP is old.”

It remains the foundation of effective marketing strategy.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Strategy precedes tactics. Always.**
2. **Choice is the heart of marketing.**
3. **Brand is a business asset, not a campaign output.**
4. **Evidence beats opinion.**
5. **Discipline beats novelty.**

Primary Sources:

- *Marketing Week* columns and Mini MBA lectures – Mark Ritson
 - Various talks on YouTube by Mark Ritson
 - Multiple articles referencing STP, brand strategy, and effectiveness.
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**THINKER NINE:
CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Organisations fail not because they stop working hard, but because they keep optimising what once made them successful.

Growth is driven by understanding **the real job the customer is trying to get done**, and by recognising when new solutions redefine the basis of competition.

THE MODEL: HOW MARKETS EVOLVE

1. Jobs to Be Done (JTBD)

Customers don't buy products.

They "hire" them to make progress in a specific situation.

This reframes demand around:

- Context
- Motivation
- Desired outcome

Rather than demographics or features.

THE MODEL: HOW MARKETS EVOLVE

2. Disruptive Innovation

New entrants often win not by being better on traditional performance metrics, but by being:

- Simpler
- More convenient
- More affordable
- Good enough for a different set of needs.

Over time, they redefine what “good” looks like.

3. The Innovator’s Dilemma

Established firms struggle to invest in disruptive models because they conflict with existing customers, margins, and operating systems.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Look for progress, not preference

Understand what customers are trying to achieve, not just what they say they like.

B. Compete on the right dimensions

Not all improvements create value; some overshoot real needs.

C. Separate exploitation from exploration

Protect the core, but design space for new growth models.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Disruption equals technology.”

It is about business models and customer value, not just tech.

“JTBD replaces segmentation.”

It complements it by adding situational insight.

“All innovation must be disruptive.”

Sustaining innovation still matters.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Customers hire products to make progress.**
2. **New growth often comes from different value trade-offs.**
3. **Overserving creates vulnerability.**
4. **Disruption is strategic, not accidental.**
5. **Innovation must be aligned to real customer jobs, not internal assumptions.**

Primary Sources:

- *The Innovator's Dilemma* – Clayton Christensen
 - *Competing Against Luck* – Clayton Christensen
 - Harvard Business Review articles on Disruptive Innovation and JTBD.
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**THINKER TEN:
JOHN KAY**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Sustainable success in complex markets is rarely achieved by direct, linear optimisation.

It is achieved by building distinctive capabilities, strong relationships, and a clear sense of purpose, and allowing performance to emerge obliquely.

THE MODEL: HOW ADVANTAGE REALLY EMERGES

1. Obliquity

Complex goals (like growth, trust, brand strength) are best achieved indirectly, not by mechanical optimisation.

2. Distinctive Capabilities

Competitive advantage comes from unique, hard-to-copy capabilities, not from generic “best practice.”

3. Markets are not perfectly rational

Strategy must account for uncertainty, institutions, and human behaviour — not just economics.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Stop treating growth as a purely mechanical problem

Not everything that matters can be engineered through dashboards, targets, and short-term optimisation.

B. Build distinctive capabilities, not just campaigns

Brand, creativity, customer understanding, and strategic coherence are organisational assets, not tactical outputs.

C. Protect long-term value over short-term efficiency

Excessive optimisation erodes trust, brand strength, and resilience.

D. Design for coherence, not just performance metrics

Great marketing systems work because the parts reinforce each other, not because each part is locally “optimal.”

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Obliquity means being vague.”

It means being clear on purpose, but patient on outcomes.

“Targets don’t matter.”

They matter, but they are not the strategy.

“Best practice guarantees success.”

If it’s easy to copy, it cannot sustain advantage.

“Efficiency equals effectiveness.”

Often, it undermines it.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Complex goals are rarely achieved by simple optimisation.**
2. **Advantage comes from distinctive capabilities, not generic excellence.**
3. **Purpose and coherence drive performance.**
4. **Short-term efficiency can destroy long-term success.**
5. **Marketing is a system, not a set of tactics.**

Primary Sources:

- *Obliquity* – John Kay
 - *Foundations of Corporate Success* – John Kay
 - *The Corporation in the Twenty-First Century* – John Kay
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ACT THREE: HOW BRANDS INFLUENCE CHOICE

Given reality, how do we choose to compete?

**THINKERS ELEVEN:
AL RIES & JACK TROUT**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Marketing is not a battle of products. It is a battle of perceptions in the mind of the customer.

Growth comes from owning a **distinct, simple, and defensible position** relative to competitors.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY COMPETE

1. Positioning

A brand must stand for *one clear idea* in the customer's mind, relative to alternatives.

This is not what you say about yourself; it is what you come to be known for.

2. Category framing matters

The leader often defines the category, and therefore the rules of competition.

Being first in a category, or redefining the category, creates powerful advantage.

3. Simplicity beats completeness

Clarity in positioning outperforms comprehensiveness.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Focus the message

Trying to communicate everything weakens everything.

B. Compete in the mind before you compete in the market

Perception precedes choice.

C. Defend the position

Consistency is strategic, not conservative.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Positioning is just a tagline.”

It is a strategic frame, not a line (but it can be, think of the gold standard “Have a break, have a KitKat”).

“More benefits = stronger brand.”

It's usually the opposite – the more you say the less that's remembered.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Own a word, an idea, a space.
2. Clarity beats creativity when it comes to positioning.
3. The mind is the first marketplace.
4. Focus builds power.
5. Consistency sustains advantage.

Primary Sources:

- *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* – Ries & Trout
 - *Marketing Warfare* – Ries & Trout.
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**THINKER TWELVE:
RORY SUTHERLAND**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

People do not behave like rational optimisers. They behave like humans.

Therefore, the greatest growth opportunities often come not from changing the product, but from **changing the perceived value of the product.**

THE MODEL: HOW GROWTH REALLY HAPPENS

1. Behaviour > Logic

Sutherland, drawing heavily on behavioural economics, argues that most business problems are wrongly framed as engineering problems, when they are actually **psychological problems**.

2. Perception is part of the product

Two offerings with identical functional performance can have radically different value, price tolerance, and demand; purely because of how they are framed, branded, and experienced.

3. Small changes, big effects

Non-linear responses are common. Minor interventions in context, framing, or experience can unlock disproportionate impact.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Design for human irrationality, not economic rationality

Optimising only for efficiency often destroys value.

B. Look for psychological leverage before operational leverage

Not every problem needs a structural fix. Some need a perceptual one.

C. Protect the emotional and symbolic value of brands

These are not “soft”, they are economic multipliers.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Rory is anti-data.”

He is anti-narrow data that ignores human behaviour.

“Behavioural ideas replace strategy.”

They complement it; they don't substitute for it.

“Irrational means random.”

Human behaviour is predictably irrational.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Value is perceived, not only delivered.**
2. **Psychology is a growth lever.**
3. **Efficiency is not the same as effectiveness.**
4. **Small perceptual changes can outperform big functional ones.**
5. **Brands are economic assets because they change behaviour.**

Primary Sources:

- *Alchemy* – Rory Sutherland.
 - Talks and essays on behavioural economics in marketing and business (you'll find many on YouTube and TikTok).
 - He is influenced by the work of Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and behavioural science.
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**THINKER THIRTEEN:
RICHARD SHOTTON**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Marketing influences behaviour by working with human biases,
not by relying on rational persuasion.

THE MODEL: HOW BEHAVIOUR IS SHAPED

Shotton translates behavioural science into applied marketing, focusing on predictable effects such as:

- Social proof
- Loss aversion
- Anchoring
- Framing
- Choice architecture
- Defaults and effort reduction

These biases influence attention, evaluation, and action, often unconsciously.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Design for behavioural reality, not stated preference

People say one thing and do another. Behavioural biases explain why.

B. Reduce friction and cognitive effort

Ease increases uptake.

C. Use social and contextual cues deliberately

What others do, and how options are framed, strongly shape choice.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Behavioural science replaces strategy.”

It optimises execution, not strategic choice.

“Nudges are manipulative tricks.”

They are design decisions, whether intentional or not.

“Biases are errors to be corrected.”

They are normal decision mechanisms.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Context shapes choice.**
2. **Ease drives behaviour.**
3. **People follow people.**
4. **Framing matters.**
5. **Small change can create large effects.**

Primary Sources:

- *The Choice Factory* – Richard Shotton
- *The Illusion of Choice* – Richard Shotton

ACT FOUR: HOW ADVERTISING AND CREATIVITY ACTUALLY WORK

Turning strategy into impact.

**THINKER FOURTEEN:
PAUL FELDWICK**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Advertising works by increasing the probability of being chosen,
not by guaranteeing persuasion.

THE MODEL: HOW ADVERTISING INFLUENCES MARKETS

Feldwick emphasises:

- Fame
- Salience
- Cultural presence
- Probabilistic effects
- Long-term accumulation.

Advertising shapes the mental environment in which choices are made.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Build fame, not just awareness

Being well-known matters commercially.

B. Accept that effects are long-term and diffuse

Not all value is immediately attributable.

C. Avoid false precision in measurement

Some of the most important effects are not easily isolated.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“If it can’t be measured, it doesn’t matter.”

Measurement has limits.

“Persuasion is the primary job.”

Availability is often more important.

“Short-term metrics tell the full story.”

They don’t.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Fame is a business asset.**
2. **Advertising increases likelihood, not certainty.**
3. **Long-term effects matter most.**
4. **Over-precision can mislead.**
5. **Salience drives choice.**

Primary Sources:

- *The Anatomy of Humbug* – Paul Feldwick.

**THINKER FIFTEEN:
ORLANDO WOOD**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

The industry has over-indexed on rational, left-brain advertising at the expense of emotionally engaging, right-brain communication, and effectiveness has suffered.

THE MODEL: HOW ADVERTISING WORKS

Wood differentiates:

- **Right-brain advertising**
(Emotion, narrative, character, humour, broad attention)
- **Left-brain advertising**
(Information, justification, selling, narrow focus)

Long-term growth is driven more strongly by right-brain execution.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Rebuild emotional storytelling

Story, character, and humanity drive memory.

B. Design for broad attention, not narrow persuasion

Emotion scales. Information fragments.

C. Protect entertainment and engagement

Boredom is a tax on effectiveness.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Information doesn’t matter.”

It matter, but it doesn’t build brands.

“Emotion is soft.”

It is empirically linked to commercial impact.

“Digital demands left-brain advertising.”

It does not.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Emotion builds memory and growth.
2. Story beats argument.
3. Entertainment is economic.
4. Humanity drives effectiveness.
5. Right-brain thinking is a competitive advantage.

Primary Sources:

- *Lemon* – Orlando Wood
- *Look Out* – Orlando Wood.

**THINKER SIXTEEN:
SIR JOHN HEGARTY**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Creative excellence is a commercial discipline that drives disproportionate business results.

THE MODEL: HOW CREATIVITY CREATES VALUE

Hegarty argues that:

- Original ideas cut through clutter.
- Simplicity improves memorability.
- Distinctiveness creates competitive advantage.
- Long-term creative platforms outperform one-off campaigns.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Invest in ideas, not just execution

Great creative is strategic, not decorative.

B. Build long-term platforms

Repetition with variation compounds effect.

C. Protect distinctiveness and originality

Sameness destroys value.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Creativity is subjective.”

Effectiveness evidence contradicts this.

“Consistency means boredom.”

It means cumulative power.

“Efficiency beats brilliance.”

Often, the opposite is true.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Creativity multiplies effectiveness.**
2. **Simple ideas travel furthest.**
3. **Distinctiveness is commercial, not cosmetic.**
4. **Platforms beat campaigns.**
5. **Brilliance pays back.**

Primary Sources:

- *Hegarty on Advertising* – Sir John Hegarty
- *Hegarty of Creativity* – Sir John Hegarty.

**THINKER SEVENTEEN:
TOM ROACH**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Creativity is the single biggest multiplier of media investment effectiveness.

Growth is not driven by spend alone, but by how creatively and distinctively that spend is used.

THE MODEL: HOW CREATIVITY DRIVES EFFECTIVENESS

1. Creative quality multiplies ROI

Highly creative campaigns outperform average ones significantly on both short- and long-term effects.

2. Distinctiveness + Emotion = Effectiveness

Creative work must:

- Be clearly branded
- Be emotionally engaging
- Be memorable

3. Creativity builds fame, not just recall

Fame reduces price sensitivity, increases talkability, and amplifies media efficiency.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Invest in creative as a growth asset

Not as a cost line.

B. Design for broad, emotional impact

Not narrow, rational optimisation.

C. Protect consistency over time

Campaigns work better as platforms, not one-offs.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Creativity is subjective.”

Effectiveness evidence shows otherwise.

“Digital precision replaces creative power.”

It does not.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

- 1. Creativity quality multiples media effectiveness.**
- 2. Fame beats frequency.**
- 3. Emotion drives memory and growth.**
- 4. Distinctiveness enables impact.**
- 5. Consistency compounds.**

Primary Sources:

- www.thetomroach.com – effective modern marketing
 - WARC / IPA / System1 effectiveness studies
 - IPA Effectiveness Databank analyses.
-

ACT FIVE: HOW IT ALL WORKS TOGETHER

Why good strategy still fails, or succeeds.

**THINKER EIGHTEEN:
KAREN NELSON-FIELD**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

If advertising is not seen, it cannot work.

Attention is not a given. It is a scarce, measurable, and highly variable input to effectiveness, and most media delivers far less of it than we assume.

THE MODEL: HOW ADVERTISING ACTUALLY WORKS IN-MARKET

1. Attention ≠ Exposure

An impression is not the same as attention.

Many ads are technically “served” but barely processed.

Nelson-Field’s work shows that **active attention strongly correlates with brand and sales effects.**

2. Not all channels or placements are equal

Different media environments generate very different levels of:

- Visual attention
- Auditory attention
- Cognitive processing

This materially changes effectiveness, even at the same reach or CPM.

THE MODEL: HOW ADVERTISING ACTUALLY WORKS IN-MARKET

3. Creative and context interact

Attention is influenced by:

- Creative quality
- Distinctiveness
- Format
- Environment
- Clutter and competition

Media is not neutral.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Optimise for attention, not just reach and cost

Cheap reach with no attention is false economy.

B. Evaluate media by quality of contact, not quantity of impressions

Effectiveness depends on *how* people experience the ad, not just whether it was delivered.

C. Design creative to earn attention

Branding, simplicity, and engagement matter from the first seconds.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Attention replaces reach.”

No, both matter. Attention makes reach valuable.

“Digital is always more attentive.”

Empirically, this is not true.

“Viewability equals attention.”

It does not.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Attention is the fuel of effectiveness.**
2. **An unseen ad is wasted spend.**
3. **Media quality matters as much as media quantity.**
4. **Creative and context jointly determine impact.**
5. **Optimising only for cost erodes effectiveness.**

Primary Sources:

- *The Attention Economy* – Karen Nelson-Field
 - Amplified Intelligence research and publications
 - Multiple peer-reviewed and industry studies on attention and advertising effectiveness.
-

**THINKERS NINETEEN:
LES BINET & PETER FIELD**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Sustained business growth comes from balancing long-term brand building with short-term sales activation.

Over-investing in either side weakens effectiveness over time.

Their central contribution is that marketing effectiveness is not about “more activity,” but about **the right mix, over the right time horizon.**

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

1. Two distinct jobs of marketing

Brand Building

- Broad reach
- Emotional, fame-building communication
- Drives memory structures and future demand

Sales Activation

- Narrower targeting
- Rational, product and offer-led messaging
- Drives immediate response and conversion

These two work differently, on different time scales, and require different creative and media approaches.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

2. The 60 / 40 Investment Rule (long vs short term)

Across large datasets of IPA effectiveness cases, Binet & Field observed that the most effective campaigns, on average, allocate approximately:

- **~60% to Brand Building**
- **~40% to Sales Activation**

for brands seeking long-term growth.

The correct split for your business will vary depending on your category, your position in it, your budget, and your objectives.

The goal though, is to find a better balance between priming future buyers (where all the big profits are) and closing the sale in the short-term.

THE MODEL: HOW BRANDS ACTUALLY GROW

3. Long and Short Effects Are Not Symmetric

Activation decays quickly.

Brand effects accumulate and compound.

Over time, excessive activation erodes price sensitivity, increases promotional dependence, and weakens profitability.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Stop optimising only for short-term ROI

Short-term metrics systematically undervalue brand effects and bias investment toward activation.

B. Build emotional memory, not just rational persuasion

Emotional campaigns outperform rational ones for long-term effectiveness because they build broader and more durable memory structures.

C. Plan over years, not quarters

Effectiveness must be judged over the full commercial life of a brand, not campaign-by-campaign.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Performance marketing is bad.”

No, it is essential. But insufficient on its own.

“60/40 is a formula”

It is a rule of thumb, not a law. Category, brand maturity, and market context matter.

“Brand is about awareness”

Brand building is about **future buying propensity**, not just recognition. Potential buyers could be aware of 25 brands, but they'll only buy one.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. **Marketing has two jobs: build future demand and convert current demand.**
2. **Long-term growth requires sustained brand investment.**
3. **Short-term efficiency can destroy long-term effectiveness.**
4. **Emotional, broad-reach communications drive the strongest long-term returns.**
5. **Balance beats optimisation.**

Primary Sources:

- *The Long and the Short of It* – Binet & Field
 - *Effectiveness un Context* – Binet & Field
 - IPA Effectiveness Databank (multiple papers and analysis).
-

**THINKER TWENTY:
W. EDWARDS DEMING**

CORE BELIEF ABOUT GROWTH

Most performance problems are caused by the system, not by the people.

Sustainable improvement comes from designing better systems, not from exhorting individuals to “try harder.”

THE. MODEL: HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN ACTUALLY IMPROVE

1. Systems thinking

Outcomes are the product of interconnected processes. Optimising parts in isolation often damages the whole.

2. Variation and learning

Not all change is improvement.

Understanding variation, feedback, and experimentation is essential for progress.

3. Long-term orientation

Short-term targets and incentives frequently undermine long-term quality and performance.

WHAT MARKETERS MUST DO (PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS)

A. Build marketing as a system, not a set of activities

Strategy, creative, media, brand, sales, and experience must reinforce each other.

B. Stop blaming execution when the system is flawed

If campaigns underperform, the issue is often upstream (briefing, strategy, structure, incentives).

C. Design for learning, not just delivery

Testing, feedback, and continuous improvement matter more than perfection.

DON'T GET THIS WRONG (COMMON MISINTERPRETATIONS)

“Deming is about manufacturing, not marketing.”

His principles apply to any complex performance system.

“More KPIs improved performance.”

Often they distort it.

“Targets create excellence.”

They often create gaming.

TRAINING-READY PRINCIPLES

1. Performance is systemic.
2. Optimising parts can damage the whole.
3. Quality is designed, not inspected in.
4. Learning beats blaming.
5. Long-term thinking sustains advantage.

Primary Sources:

- *Out of The Crisis* – W. Edwards Deming
 - *The New Economics* – W. Edwards Deming
 - *Leadership Principles from the Father of Quality* – W. Edwards Deming.
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SOMETHING DIFFERENT

I hope you found this useful.

I certainly refer to each of the thinkers work regularly in doing my own work.

I would highly recommend reading the books referenced. I'm sure you won't regret the time taken to read any of them.

Best,
Gareth.