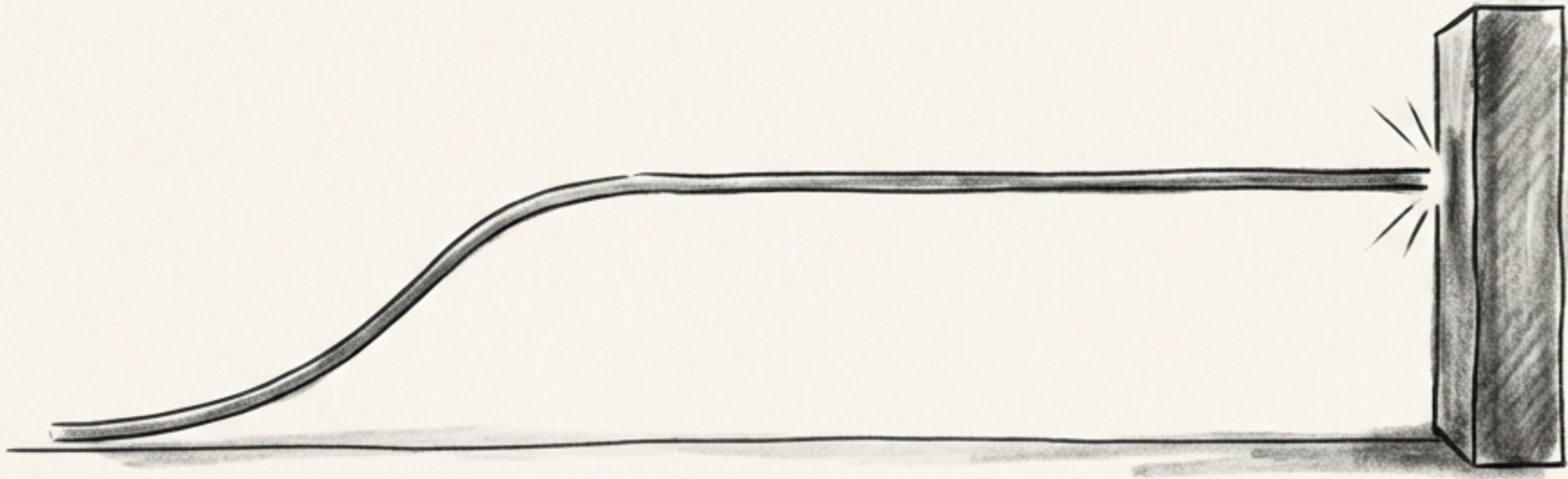


# A Modern Strategist's Toolkit for an Uncertain World

Key discoveries from Heather LeFevre's journey with the world's top marketing minds.



# *The Strategist's Plateau*



After 14 years and earning my “10,000 hours,” I still didn’t feel like an expert. The old playbooks felt outdated. I realized mastery isn’t about time served; it requires deliberate practice, pushing beyond your comfort zone, and learning from devoted teachers. But in an industry that has largely abandoned training, where do you find them?

“The development of genuine expertise requires struggle, sacrifice, and honest, often painful self-assessment. There are no shortcuts.” — Anders Ericsson

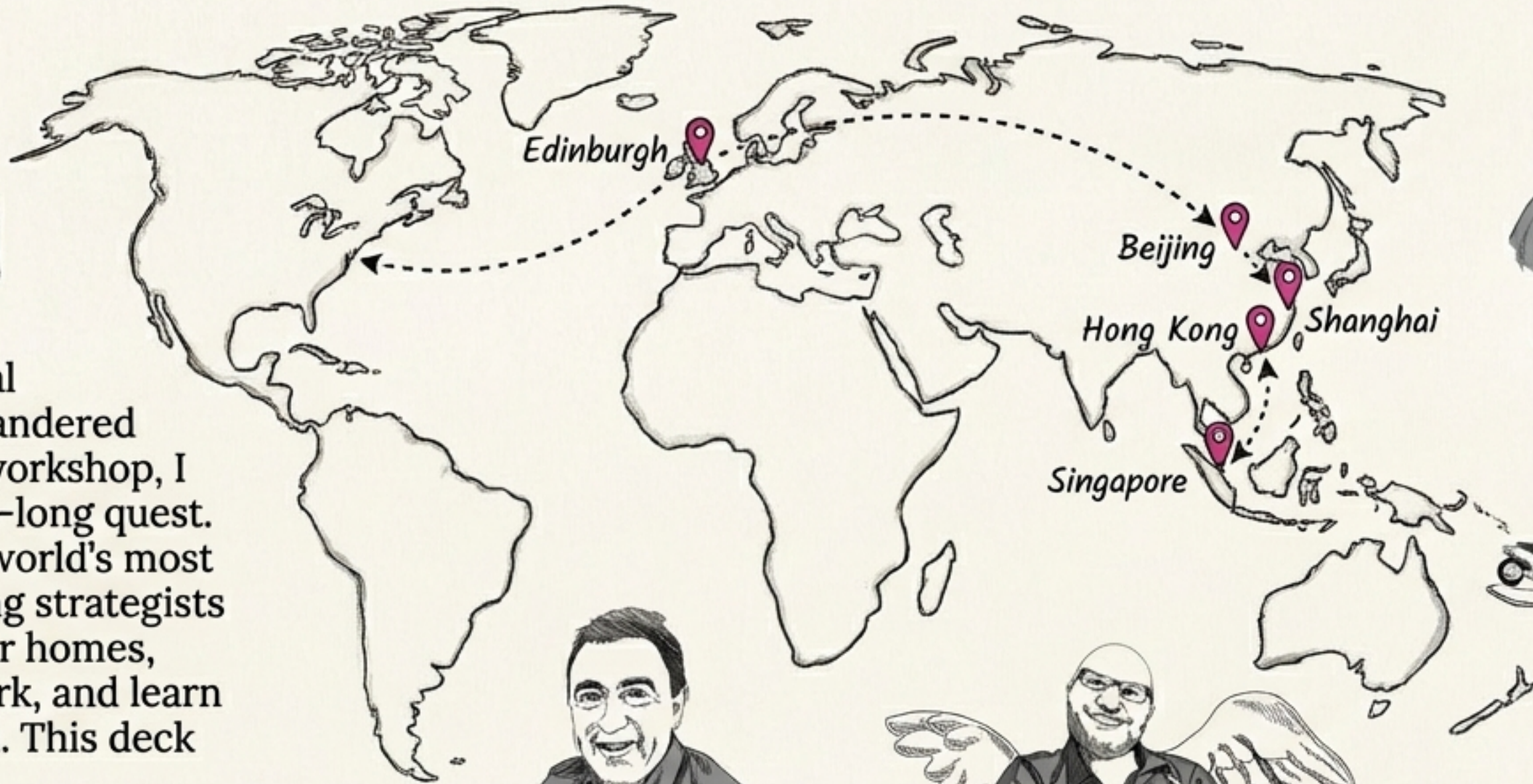


# *If the masters won't come to you, you must go to them.*



Inspired by medieval journeymen who wandered from workshop to workshop, I embarked on a year-long quest. I asked nine of the world's most innovative marketing strategists if I could live in their homes, shadow them at work, and learn their craft firsthand. This deck contains the uloliet.

This deck contains the toolkit I built from that journey.



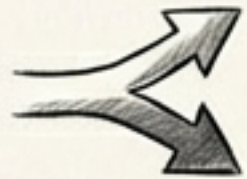


# *The Modern Strategist's Toolkit*

The journey revealed five essential mindsets and methods for thriving in advertising today.



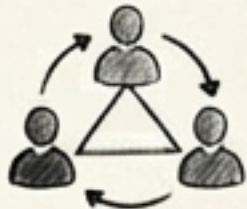
**1. The New Insight Engine:** Finding truth in unconventional places.



**2. The Modern Growth Formula:** Overturning the myth of loyalty.



**3. The Experimental Method:** Using speed and weirdness to your advantage.



**4. The Community Blueprint:** Building brands that people actually want to talk about.



**5. The Devious & Zen Mindset:** A radical approach to problem-solving.



# TOOL 1: The New Insight Engine

Move beyond the “inane questions and limp exercises” of traditional focus groups. True insight comes from cultivating unconventional sources and practicing empathy at scale.

**Mentor Wisdom:** Rob Campbell,  
Wieden+Kennedy Shanghai

**Method:** Cultivate “informants”—people with undeniable credibility and a unique perspective (priests, prostitutes, professors, car thieves). Seek out people who know things they don't know they know.

“I'm a bald-headed English bloke in China. How the fuck do I know anything? But when I ask people questions, they give me answers.”

**Case in Point:** The Shanghai Marriage Market. To understand modern Chinese culture, the author created an ad for herself seeking a husband. The reactions revealed deep truths about cultural expectations, status, and family dynamics that a survey never could.





# TOOL 2: The Modern Growth Formula is about Wooing the Disloyal.

## The Law

**Mentor Wisdom:** Jason Oke, Y&R Hong Kong

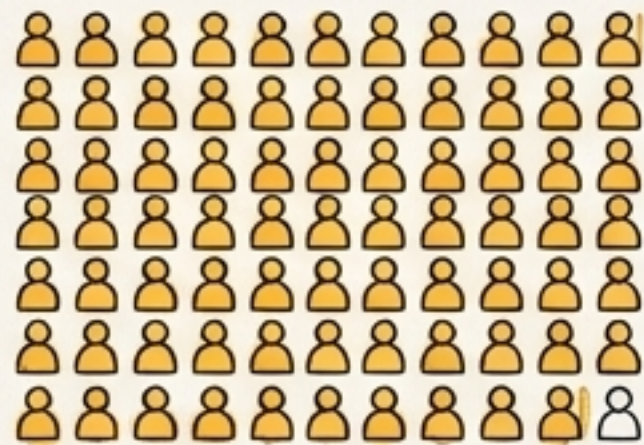
“Market growth comes from increasing **penetration**, **not loyalty**. The vast majority of sales come from light buyers who purchase a brand only once or twice a year.”

(from Byron Sharp's *How Brands Grow*)

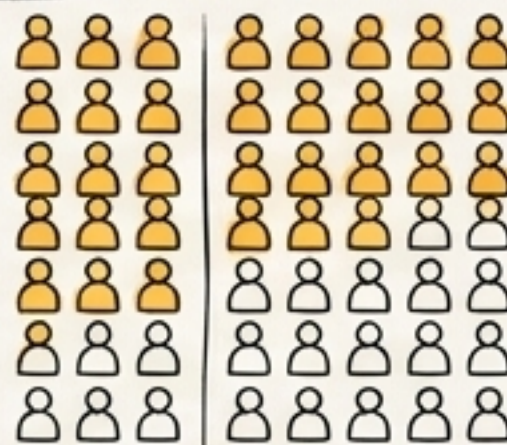
## Data as Proof

The 80/20 rule is a myth. For most brands, it's closer to 50/20.

### Case Study: Colgate in China



99% of people in the sample have bought Colgate at least once.



Only 33% can recall any specific detail about the brand (color, advertising, benefits).



Less than 1% say “this is the only brand I use.”

**Stop chasing the tiny percentage of super fans. To grow, you must make your brand easier to buy for more people in more situations.**

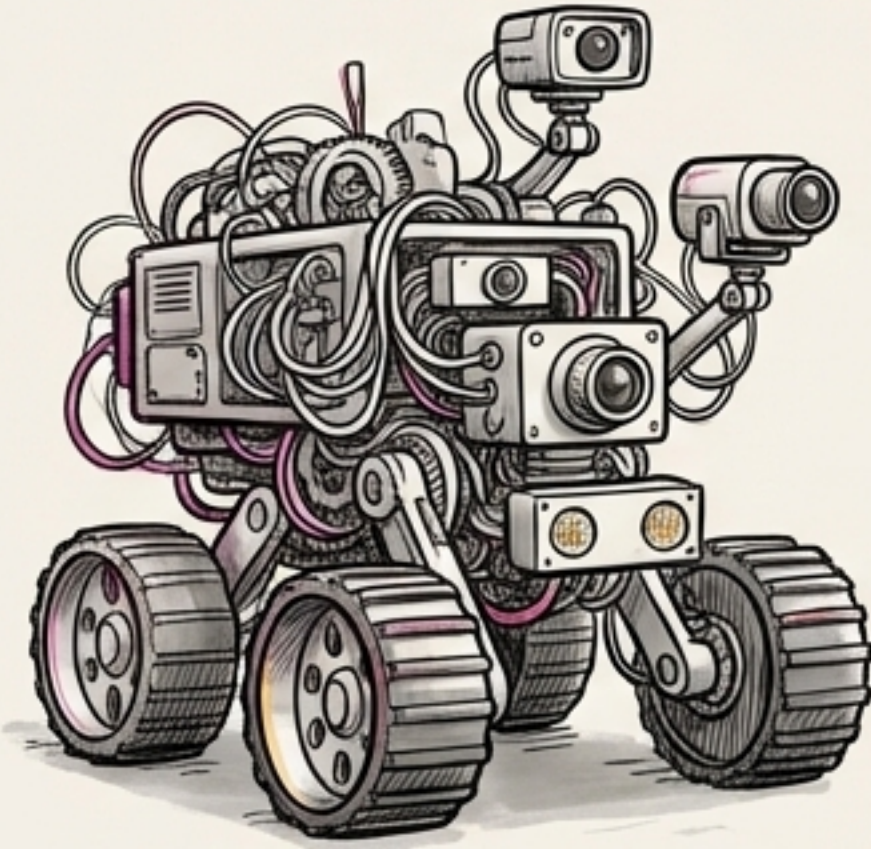


# TOOL 3: The Experimental Method is about being Fast and Weird.

**Mentor Wisdom:** Phil Adams, Blonde Digital & Jason Oke, Y&R Hong Kong

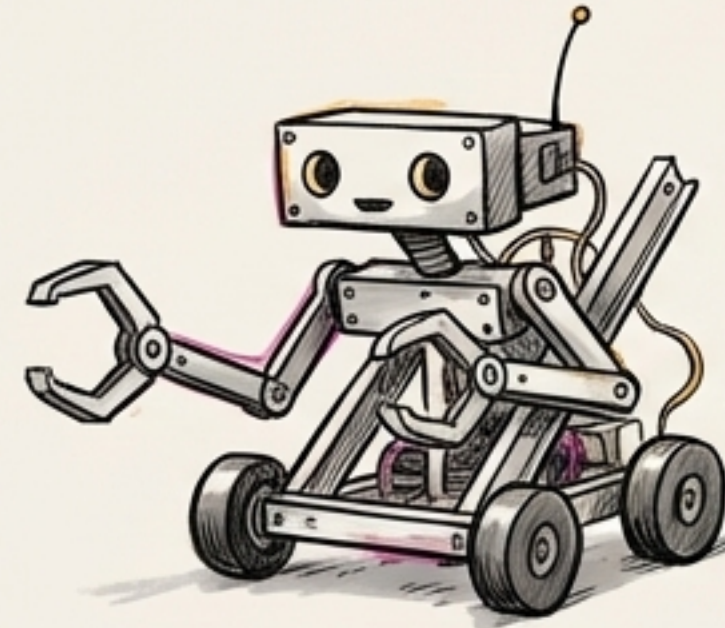
**The Military Framework::** Disrupt your competitor's decision-making by acting faster and more unpredictably than they expect (Colonel John Boyd's "OODA Loop": Observe, Orient, Decide, Act).

## Parable: A Tale of Two Robots (NASA)



### ROBBY

The \$2 billion, over-engineered rover. It was heinously slow because it tried to achieve 100% perfect knowledge before moving twelve inches.



### TOOTH

The \$500 intern-built prototype. It had no computers and was simply responsive to its environment, trying to grab anything it could. Tooth blew all the tests away.

**Most companies operate like Robby. Be more like Tooth. Get out there, be responsive, and light lots of small fires instead of betting on one giant, slow-moving plan.**



# Case Study: The IRN-BRU "Fanny" Experiment.

An ingenious distribution plan designed to be measured.

## Step 1: The Experiment



### Step 1: The Experiment

Instead of a traditional TV launch, Blonde Digital gave one fan (@larachie, 153 followers) the exclusive right to share the new ad on Twitter first.



### Step 2: The Lede (The Story They Planned to Tell)

An ad released by a single fan could reach one million views by orchestrating influence and harnessing the power of broadcast.



## Step 3: The Results & Learnings

### Phase 1

Driven by a few dozen key influencers. The "tipping point" effect.

### Phase 1

Day 1  
(#EC3E7A)  
100k views

### Phase 2

Next 21 Days  
(to #EC3E7A)  
650k views

Driven by organic word-of-mouth among small groups of friends. Proof that emotional closeness drives sharing.

### Phase 3

Final 48 Hours  
(to #EC3E7A)  
1M+ views

A few targeted TV spots pushed it over the top, proving an "AND" approach (social + broadcast) is most effective.



# TOOL 4: The Community Blueprint is built on Social Engineering.

Mentor Wisdom: Simon Kemp, We Are Social Singapore

**Avoid “One-Night-Stand Marketing”:** Don’t focus on transactional relationships and pickup lines (“key messages”). Create value through utility or entertainment.

## *The Three Pillars of Social Engineering (via Marcus Collins)*

### Tell a Story



Make them the protagonist, not your brand. (e.g., Red Bull Stratos is about Felix Baumgartner’s quest, not the drink).

### Strengthen Relationships



Create experiences that bring customers closer to their existing networks (e.g., Ticketmaster showing which friends are also attending an event).

### Connect with New People



Help like-minded people find each other (e.g., Airbnb’s social graph overlay).

---

**Case in Point:** The Standard Chartered Marathon page was transformed from a complaint forum into a community for runners by focusing on their interests (carbo-loading, finding partners).



# TOOL 5: The Devious & Zen Mindset

Mentor Wisdom: Rob Campbell & rOobin Golestan

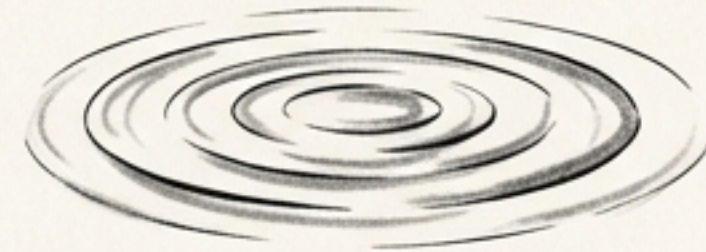
## Part 1: Be Devious (Not Evil, Clever)



Give your audience something they want, but in a way that also fulfills your own different agenda. A win-win.

Example: Daniel Radcliffe wore the same outfit every day to make paparazzi photos worthless, giving them what they wanted (a photo) but achieving his goal (being left alone).

## Part 2: Practice Zen (Gelassenheit)



Maintain a “mind like water.” The best way to deal with constant change is to be proactive with your effort, even if you can’t control the outcome.

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.” – John Lennon



# The Human Layer: Care Hard.

Mentor Wisdom: Rob Campbell,  
Wieden+Kennedy Shanghai

- **Charisma is a Learnable Skill:** It's a combination of Presence, Power, and Warmth. Rob's parents taught him to "care about what others care about," and this genuine interest has commercial value.
- **Trust is a Strategy:** Being trusting is not the same as being gullible. It allows you to meet wonderful people and build the network of informants that fuels fresh thinking.

"People don't buy skill in a vacuum. They buy skill plus care." – Jonathan Fields





# *Your Turn to Surf.*

The strategist's plateau is not a final destination.

It's an invitation to a new journey.

This toolkit isn't a set of rules, but a compass for navigating the complex, thrilling, and ever-changing world of brands and people.

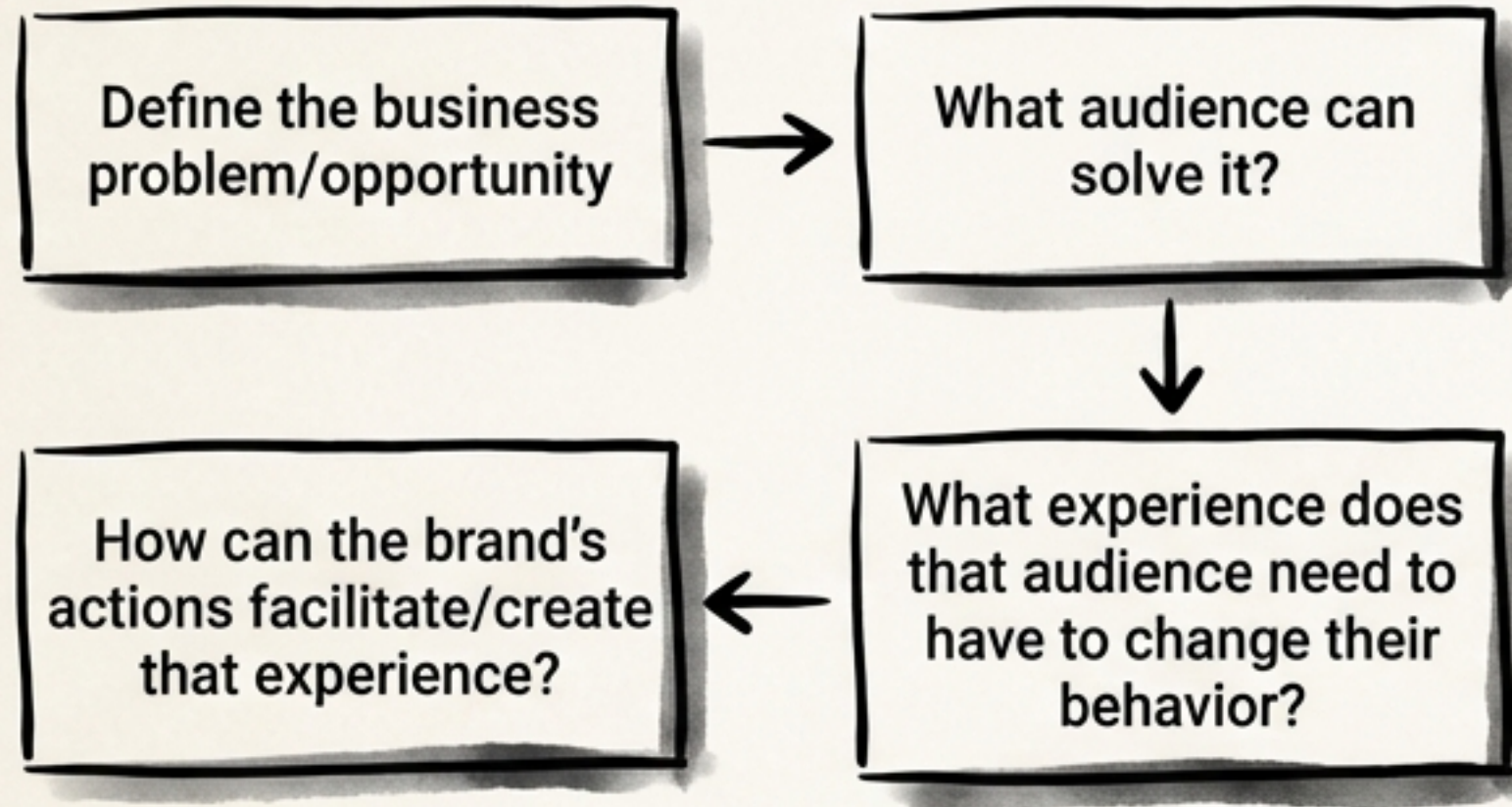
The journey to mastery is about having the courage to begin.





# APPENDIX: Fifty Ways to Get Started

By Jason Oke



**10.** Go to a store. Use the actual product and the competition's.

**14.** Disruption: What are the category conventions? What are the sacred cows?

**14.** Disruption: What are the category conventions? What are the sacred cows?

**19.** How would another brand solve this problem? What would Nike/Apple/Virgin do?

**29.** Embrace your weakest point—What's the worst part of the brand? Can we turn that on its head?

**41.** What would Jon Steel do?

**48.** Have a strong point of view. Piss people off.

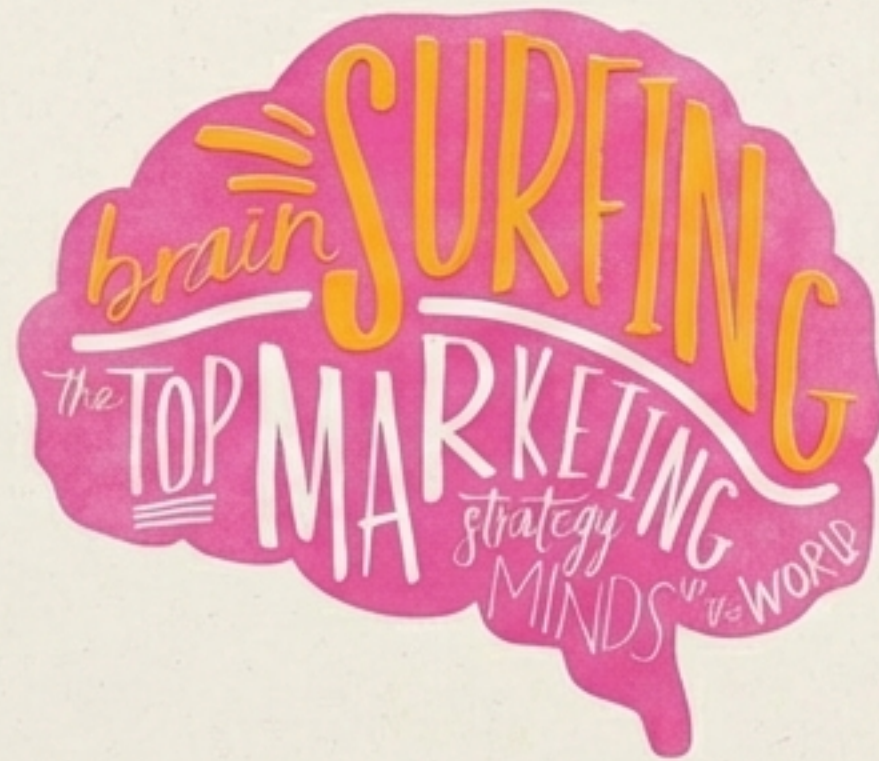
**50.** You belong here. Don't sweat it.



# Go Deeper.

## **Brain Surfing: The Top Marketing Strategy Minds in the World**

Heather LeFevre



A travel journal meets business text, this book is the full story of a year-long journey to learn from nine master strategists. It's packed with the tools, stories, and provocations that can help you rethink, rejuvenate, and revitalize your own approach to the craft.

*“Brain Surfing is Eat, Pray, Love for planners, strategists, and people who study brands.”*  
– Larry Vincent, Chief Branding Officer, UTA Brand Studio