

CHAPTER 1

Business as Usual Is Over . . . or Is It?

If you always do what you always did, you will
always get what you always got.

—Einstein

When B.L. Ogilvie & Sons opened for business in 1919, it faced little competition selling coal and household goods to the well-heeled residents of Weston, Massachusetts.

If you visit Ogilvie's today, you will find a crowded but neatly laid out arrangement of everything one might need in the way of hardware and home goods. The store is brightly lit, immaculately clean, and smells faintly of turpentine, kerosene, and pine. It is a good, old-fashioned smell. Clear, sometimes hand-lettered, signs indicate which aisle holds screws, and where to find the charcoal briquettes. Several uniformed employees constantly fuss about, tidying and arranging merchandise on the well-stocked shelves, eager to answer questions, explain how to DIY, or talk about issues in the local community.

At the rear of the store on a raised platform several steps up above the crowd, behind the wooden sales counter, Kevin Whittemore surveys the establishment while seated at the same wooden desk that served his father, and several grandfathers before him. An old cowbell clangs, and his well-trained eye shoots to the front door. Mrs. Appleyard enters, and stops to let her eyes adjust from the sunlight outside. A spry and passionate gardener, Mrs. Appleyard, by Kevin's count, must be 89 or 90 years old. She takes a step or two farther into the store and stops to admire the bird feeder display Kevin's team has just set up in aisle one. He is pleased to see Ray Glover, his hardware

manager, step forward to greet her by name and offer assistance. Kevin cannot hear the conversation but senses, as she pulls a small darkened lightbulb from her purse, that Mrs. Appleyard is having trouble with her refrigerator again.

Kevin watches as Ray walks her to the proper shelf, selects the appropriate replacement, and slips it into a small brown paper sack. He nods as Mrs. Appleyard smiles, slips the bag in her purse, and offers a small wave to Kevin up on his dais. No money is exchanged. No credit card swiped. No signature needed. Ray will note the purchase on her account, and Mrs. Appleyard will receive a bill at the end of the month, with a handwritten note from Ray, "Nice to see you. Hope you can find the cat food for Mr. Whiskers' dinner in the back of the fridge more easily now!"

How can such a place still exist? Is it an anachronism, a throw-back, a pleasant stroll down memory lane for the ultrarich?

Hardly.

Ninety-three years after opening for its first day of business, Ogilvie's is a thriving mecca for "in-the-know" locals seeking a new screwdriver, suet for the bird feeder, lumber to repair the deck, framing to build a house, or advice on ridding the garden of those pesky gophers. Located on a back road, near an old abandoned railroad track, with no sign to speak of pointing the way, Ogilvie's parking lot is brimming with Land Rovers, BMWs, Mercedes-Benz station wagons, and rusted out Ford pickup trucks from 7 a.m. 'til 5 p.m. on weekdays, and 8 a.m. 'til 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

Kevin Whittemore and his staff have all the business they need, want, and can handle, despite the opening of a Home Depot Superstore, a Lowe's Home Center, and a Walmart on the highway outside of town. In short, Ogilvie's is thriving.

How can a place like this survive in the age of Amazon? Isn't it doomed to fail, a dusty bookstore in the era of e-books? A tube TV repair shop in the time of hundred-dollar flat-screen LCDs?

As he surveys his fiefdom of old-fashioned service, his knowledgeable staff trained to remember names and personal details of his customers, and as he looks back at his bearded, mutton-chopped, and mustachioed ancestors glaring down from their portraits on the wall above his desk, Kevin Whittemore's face shows no concern.

What does he know that we don't?

The cowbell jangles again as a young mom wearing jeans and a sweatshirt enters in a rush, her toddler in tow. The child instantly reaches for a shiny object on the nearest shelf, but she swoops him up on her hip before he causes any damage. With her free hand, she brushes back a lock of hair that's fallen across her eyes in the process.

"Hello, Marjory!" calls Whittemore, rising from the desk and stepping down to the sales floor. "What can we do for you this fine morning?"

"Hey, Kevin." She sounds tired and it's only 10:30. "We need a gate, or something, to keep Teddy out of the kitchen. He's figured out how to open the cabinets and thinks it's great fun to dump my pots all over the floor."

"Ha! Maybe we have a budding new drummer for the Warrior's marching band?"

"Please . . . that's all I need. Seriously, what can we do? I tried those handle-tie bars, you know, the ugly white U-shaped thingies? I hate how they look all over the new kitchen, and Dave got so frustrated trying to open them that he cut them off and threw them all out."

"Sounds like Dave . . . Right this way . . . I think I have just what you need." He leads her to a display at the end of a nearby island. "Here you go. It's the latest baby-proofing set. These clips install just inside the door, so they're invisible, no ugly white U-shaped thingies. You slip your finger in here, push sideways, and voilà, the cabinet opens up. No problem."

She tries the latch. "That is easy to open, and they don't show." Brushing off a small hand tugging at the end of her nose, she asks, "Don't suppose you sell aspirin, do you?"

Kevin smiles, "Of course, right at the register. These may be easy for you to pop open, but little Teddy won't be able to work the latch with those tiny fingers—for a couple more years, at least. By the time he can get his hand in there, hopefully his interest in banging your pots will have subsided."

"Looks good, Kevin, but you know Dave . . . he's a fine teacher, but he's not exactly what you'd call . . . handy."

"They're super-easy; it's just two screws."

"I dunno. He can be a real klutz, and those are expensive cabinets you sold us."

“I’m more worried about what else little Teddy might find in those cabinets than I am about Dave messing them up,” Kevin says, his expression showing a faint concern. “You did take all the bleach and stuff like that out from under the sink, right? I remember coming into our kitchen once—Brian must have been three or four—and finding him sitting on the floor in front of the sink with a bottle of ammonia in his lap. Thank goodness I reached him before he got the top off. They didn’t have safety caps back then.”

“Oh my! He could have. . . .” She squeezes her kid, and kisses him on top of the head before flicking off a Cheerio she notices glued to his cheek.

“Here, listen, take one of these cool new electric screwdriver flashlights. Just came in. Dave’ll have so much fun playing with it, he won’t realize you have him doing chores.”

She smiles as she takes the new tool.

“You know him pretty well . . . you’re right, he’ll love that thing.”

Well, come to think of it, Kevin thinks, I guess knowing Dave—and all the other folks in town—well, that’s my real job. Isn’t it?

“He can do it, I’m sure,” Kevin nods his head at her. “But if he has any trouble, any trouble at all, you call me and I’ll stop over and help him out. Meantime, get that stuff out from under the sink, and look around in the other cabinets, too. You can’t be too careful.”

Customers at Ogilvie’s do not roam the aisles, smartphones in hand, Googling the online price of every pint of Velux paint, demanding Whittemore and his staff match their competitors’ prices on paving stones and bricks. Ogilvie’s charges a premium for virtually everything they sell, and they get their price without complaint.

So what is going on here? How has Ogilvie’s been able to survive for so long? Why do people prefer to go to Ogilvie’s rather than lower-priced super-mega stores like Home Depot and Lowe’s?

Because Kevin Whittemore, and the entire staff at Ogilvie’s, understand that relationships matter more than money, more than time, more than almost anything else in our human existence. Relationships tie us together and form the social bond that keeps us all alive. The adage “People do business with people” is as true today (even on the Internet) as when it was first uttered. Of course, digital complicates that by allowing organizations to build relationships at a scope

and scale that Kevin Whittemore's ancestors never dreamed possible. It allows us to connect with thousands and even millions of individuals as "digital friends." It allows us to receive online birthday greetings every year from high school classmates we have not laid eyes on since graduation day, and to share pictures of babies with the entire universe seconds after their births.

Make no mistake, digital is a powerful thing. It's an amazing, awesome, wonderful, terrible thing. However, digital on its own does not, for one second, change a thing about our need for relationships and their importance in our lives, or their impact on our decision-making, and their influence on understanding ourselves.

Keep in mind always that digital relationships are human relationships. As Maya Angelou once said, "People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel."

In studying how organizations leverage digital technologies to build and enhance relationships with their audiences, we have identified nine key relationship-building elements, and we have come to believe that these nine elements form the basis for establishing and maintaining long lasting relationships, regardless of the mechanism used to connect—digital, face-to-face, telephonic, written word, and so on.

We believe these elements are the key to successful audience relationships for any organization, whether the organizational goal is selling something, influencing audiences to think or act differently, educating an audience, or any combination of the above.

NEED

A desire or problem instigates the attention cycle in the first place. However, the need that leads to relationships is more than surface need. It's more than the need for a new lightbulb that draws Mrs. Appleyard to the store. In Chapter 3, we explore in detail the kinds of relationships people want/need to have with the organization and its story. It's critical to understand the needs of your intended audience(s). You need to align your story—which includes the entire experience your audience receives from its first interaction with you to its last—to the needs of that audience at a personal level. One of the best things about digital is

that it enables organizations to monitor continuously changing needs at an individual level. Rather than focus groups and surveys—where we know buyers are liars—organizations now have a 24/7/365 digital connection to the true, unadulterated voice of the customer.

HISTORY

The history of the organization as it relates to the target audience is a crucial piece of the experience and story you are attempting to convey. This backstory can sometimes be very evident—portraits of Kevin’s ancestors and historical pictures of Ogilvie’s past lining the walls—or it may be unspoken like all that Kevin knows about Mrs. Appleyard. However, it exists nonetheless, and it must be examined and understood. At the first moment of interaction with the audience, what do we know about them? What does the target audience know about us? What have they heard? Who told them? Have we interacted previously? If so, what did they look at, ask for, investigate, comment on, or buy? This history, this backstory and collective interactions with the audience, is multifaceted and comes from many sources, some of which you can, and others you cannot, control.

CURATION

Today we love to curate. We retweet, Reddit, StumbleUpon, favorite, and friend with abandon. We frequent stores and sites we love because the proprietors curate on our behalf. These shopkeepers search for and sell items they believe fit our needs and interests better than others. We pay for this service, in retail profit, in attention and repeat business, and in word-of-mouth. Kevin Whittemore’s customers come to Ogilvie’s willing to spend more money because they understand they will get only the best and most appropriate products. People pay well for curation because it offers them value. Curation saves time and offers the promise of quality, selection, knowledge, experience, brand image, class distinction, snob appeal, and tribal alignment. But curation goes beyond items we put in a store. Audiences value the experience, the conversation, the interaction as long as it involves their issues, and their interests. Harvard Business School’s John Deighton may have said it best when he stated, “As a museum curator does, a firm must capture what’s insightful from beyond the corporation’s view of itself, and store and present it in an accessible form. This means finding ways to distribute,

not simply the organization's message or positioning, but the content of the conversation, the two-way flow of meaning and creation."¹

FACES

Face-to-face interaction creates a powerful reaction in the brain. Susan Weinschenk, PhD (also known as “The Brain Lady”), writes that humans are born with “a special part of the brain whose sole purpose is to recognize faces. The fusiform face area (FFA) allows faces to bypass the brain's usual interpretive channels and helps us identify them more quickly than objects. The FFA is also near the brain's emotional center.”² According to Dr. Weinschenk, the fusiform face area of the brain virtually forces us to pay attention to faces. It is why a newborn baby quickly focuses on its mother's face. This actual brain function makes us hard-wired to use a human face as a centralized point for information and believability. In-person interactions obviously rely on faces to convey stories and build relationships, but how so in the digital world? Video. The burgeoning use of digital video—everywhere from YouTube to websites and now even in email—grows from the power the human face brings to storytelling and relationship building.

STORIES

The human brain is also hard-wired to respond to storytelling. Presented with a story that follows the traditional story arc (more on this in Chapter 11), audiences involuntarily immerse themselves in the characters, conflict, emotion, and ultimate resolution of the storyline. We used this trick on you at the beginning of the chapter. Admit it, in your mind's eye you pictured yourself inside Ogilvie's. If you were ever a young mom, you may have empathized with Marjory's plight or flinched at Brian's brush with poison. If you run a business, you may have seen yourself in Kevin's shoes, fighting the chain stores with pluck, imagination, and pride. Stories are the crux of all great relationships and transformations.

AUTHENTICITY

What feels worse than when you buy something thinking it's one thing and realize it's another? How would you feel if the Rolex you purchased from the local jewelry store turned out to be a fake? Authenticity is a

lot of things rolled up into one, but deep down, it's a feeling that the person or business with whom we are dealing is real, that they "are what they say they are." Ogilvie & Sons does not pretend to be anything they aren't. They offer advice because they think that's right. They'll recommend another store if they think it will benefit the customer. They have created an experience with their business that is embodied by everything—from the way their associates interact with customers to how they answer the phone to the products they stock on the shelf. Authenticity is what forms the basis for trust and for feeling like we know what we are getting. And online that hasn't changed much. As soon as organizations hide behind their digital storefronts, preventing people from contacting them, making return policies unclear, and ultimately undermining the expectations that people have of any organization, authenticity crumbles.

CONSISTENCY

Building relationships means building trust. Trust is built by establishing expectations and consistently meeting or exceeding them in a positive manner. Kevin and his staff endeavor to provide each customer with a great, personalized experience every time they walk into the store. Building relationships, especially when the only means of communication are digital, requires that we consistently deliver to our audiences expectations at every touch point, every time. If Kevin decided one week to replace his entire stock with only one brand when his customers expect choice, he would break continuity and fracture the trust his story has developed (especially as a curator). The concept of touchpoints now extends to every online interaction, and because so many of our online interactions with our audiences are through mobile devices, the concept is also becoming quite literal. Our online audience is physically *touching* our digital touchpoints at all hours of the day and night. That is not to say that an organization cannot ever broaden our scope. If Kevin were to enter the furniture business, for example, he could carefully build on the familiarity with the Ogilvie environment and old-fashioned service model, but add a new dynamic in his audience engagement, offering similar experiences to his customers who need furniture. To be successful, he would have to offer the new content—furniture—and the new story with the same levels of trust, comfort, and tribal association that he has developed with his hardware audience.

CREDIBILITY

What makes a consumer choose one organization over another? Is it just price? Availability? Selection? Or is it something else, some intangible factor that communicates to people, “This is the place to shop”? That intangible factor is credibility. Credibility is composed of two fundamental elements—trust and expertise. Together, these elements tell consumers that the business not only understands what they are selling (and the challenges that their product helps solves), but also that their dealings will be above board. In other words, they won’t lie about what they know or don’t know. They will be forthright and honest. Coupled with expertise, it makes for a business that consumers want to deal with. And in the digital world, it isn’t any different. Imagine going to a website where the product information was just a sentence, providing nothing of real substance to help you understand what the product does or how it helps you. That business would have little to no credibility.

HELPFULNESS

Developing long-lasting relationships requires that organizations focus on adding value, being helpful, and improving the lives of their target audience. Zig Ziglar said it best: “Stop selling. Start helping.”³ This means being willing to delay gratification—and not always focus on selling, or influencing, or getting the result, or reaching the organizational goal with every transaction. We have to realize that sometimes people are just curious and want to learn about something new. Or maybe they just want a friendly smile to brighten a lonely day. In the digital world, this is all about content. When people visit an organization’s website, part of that crazy buyer’s journey we detail in Chapter 4, their relationship need has specific requirements for helpfulness that people like Kevin are innately talented at discerning.

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

In this book, we will talk a lot about engagement. But industry experts like Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer at MarketingProfs, believe that engagement (as marketers use it) is just a buzzword.

“The whole notion of engagement for marketers is really an amorphous term,” she says. “There is no shared definition of what it means to have an engaged customer . . . or an engaged person.”

This is why we want to make this point before we send you on a journey through the rest of the book—looking at engagement as a “thing” to measure, to turn on and turn off, to control, is a fallacy. In fact, it’s the marketer’s biggest Achilles’ heel. Why? Because focusing on characteristics (i.e., aspects of a person, certain consumer behaviors, etc.) and not the whole picture, the whole relationship, is why digital is so problematic for marketers today. They keep looking for the justification. “Look,” they say, “page views are up. I must be doing something right.”

You can get lots of people to look at your store by lighting it on fire. But that doesn’t mean they want to buy anything from you.

“I see a lot of marketers of all kinds, whether they are marketing a band, a church, a for-profit business, still being very corporate-centric with the way they approach their communications,” says Ann. “If marketers want to be successful, they need to be customer-centric, user-centric, people-centric. Engagement comes out of this.”⁴

When it comes down to it, business has not really changed, whether we are operating in the digital world, the real world, or somewhere in between—people want to do business with people. We all want to be treated as individuals. We crave social interaction. We focus on faces. We want to trust.

What needs to change is the way organizations (and marketers) look at audiences. They need to see those audiences as people that want and need relationships.

Engagement is just the means by which we connect to form those relationships.

You cannot find it, you cannot create it, and you cannot manufacture it.

And, you sure cannot demand it anymore.

You have to discover it.

You have to uncover it.

You have to earn it.

The rest of the book is about helping you make the most of the power of building relationships in the digital world and hopefully teaching you the things you need to do to earn them.