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THE ENTERTAINER

I like our employee base, so my guess would be that I would like their friends. Our parties where I'm the DJ become a way for people who love their jobs to be able to share with their friends. And some of those people say, "I want to come and work here."

—Jeff Taylor,
founder and CEO,
Monster.com

Great entertainers build a bond with their audience through humor, talent, and charisma. Just as Patrick Stewart, Barbra Streisand, Yo-Yo Ma, and Bruce Springsteen are their own brands, so the successful Provocateur becomes the face of the company.

Visitors to the Maynard, Massachusetts, offices of Monster.com are met by a giant model of one of the company's trademark monsters and a video showing the CEO and founder Jeff Taylor water-skiing behind a blimp—in fact, setting a new world's record for water-skiing behind a blimp. The stunt the video records is entertainment for a purpose, to publicize the company's name among potential clients and job seekers.

To promote itself, Monster.com leases two blimps from a

Virgin Atlantic subsidiary, the conglomerate Sir Richard Branson leads. At the meeting to sign the lease for the second blimp, Taylor and the subsidiary's president chatted about Monster.com's plans for the blimp. The president told Taylor, "You realize that over water we can bring the blimp right down to 50 feet above the surface, whereas over land we have to stay between 500 and 1,000 feet."

Making conversation, he added, "Richard Branson actually water-skied behind the blimp on a *Bay Watch* episode, and he holds the current record for water-skiing behind a blimp." And then he asked casually, "What would you think about seeing if you could break his record?"

Taylor asked, "How far did he ski?"

As Taylor recalls, the answer was something like, "Basically, if you can get up on the skis, you can beat his record." That sounded feasible, so, although he had only been on water skis four times in his life, Taylor agreed.

Four months later, his assistant, Kaycee Langford, called him on his cell phone, "You realize you're going waterskiing next week. Flying out Tuesday night and doing it Wednesday morning."

At that point, Taylor thought to ask, "Exactly how long *is* Branson's record?"

"I knew you were going to ask. One point five miles."

At the time, Taylor was in a New York City taxi and told the driver to mark 1.5 miles. Thirty blocks later, Taylor began to wonder if he was making a mistake.

The following week he was in Panama City, Florida, sitting in the Gulf of Mexico with three small boats. "The lead boat is going to cut my wake, and the boat on the left has three video camera crews and about four photographers. The boat on the right has a guy in full scuba gear, and I want to know who he is. He says, 'If I have to come to you in the

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water, let me put this thing in your mouth.’ So I’m in the water, and I’m cold, and the blimp has made its third or fourth pass. A 200-foot rope comes off the blimp, with a ball at the 50-foot mark so I know when the handle is coming, but the blimp keeps going by and I can’t catch the handle. And then I see this fin and think, ‘Okay, somebody has a fin hooked on his back and is screwing with me.’ But it turns out to be two dolphins, and everyone says that’s good luck, although my heart is pounding.”

On the blimp’s next pass, Taylor caught the handle, rose to his feet, skied for 40 seconds, and wiped out. On the next attempt, he again caught the handle, and skied 11 minutes and 43 seconds or 3.3 miles to shatter Branson’s record. “I came out of the water totally exhilarated,” says Taylor, “and I’ll put myself in a situation as often as someone will let me.”

While this is entertaining, these are not stunts simply for the fun of it (albeit, Taylor was having fun). There is a method behind the madness.

People remember a journalistic presentation of brand much longer than a commercial representation of brand. A news story about Taylor breaking Branson’s waterskiing record (with a picture of the Monster.com blimp) has greater recall than an advertising commercial.

Also, the “CEO as brand” can be a very strong marketing hook. Taylor learned well from watching Richard Branson who was one of the early CEOs as brand. Branson did not separate himself from the Virgin brand; he was always there. I have often joked that every time Virgin needed a shot in the arm, Sir Richard would take up his hot air balloon and crash it. Then he would be on the cover of every newspaper in the world, shaking off the dirt.

To be a bit of an adventurer is also to be a leader, and I think Taylor is trying to communicate to his staff and cus-

tomers that he really wants to try new things and be different and to separate Monster.com from the pack of online employment sites. Monster.com needs companies to list jobs on its site (and pay it for running them), and it needs workers to search for the jobs. Without sufficient numbers of both, the company fails. But there is no simple target market. Companies seeking workers cover every industry, virtually every country, from small businesses to giant corporations. Workers seeking jobs are equally diffused. Taylor's stunts give Monster.com a personality, and having a corporate personality helps people think of you.

CONNECT TO PEOPLE THROUGH
ENTERTAINMENT

Great entertainers create an environment in which people feel connected to them. The Provocateur entertains in such a way that people do not feel they are being passively amused—the difference between listening to a recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and attending a performance.

The entertainer, however, does not need to be on stage, since a choreographer and a theater director are also entertainers. They create an environment in which people feel connected to the dancers, the musicians, the actors, and the players to feel part of the creative process. The greatest Provocateur/entertainers will be ones who convey a deeper feeling than superficial amusement.

Great entertainers get you to connect with them in a very personal way. The end result is both your personal satisfaction and an appropriate self-involvement that makes you want to come back for more.

Great entertainers do something that initially looks selfish. At first blush, they seem to be saying "I want to be on

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stage,” but through some alchemy they turn that around so it’s the audience that wants them on stage. Indeed, the audience wants these entertainers to be on stage for a long time because they enjoy the performance so much. (And great entertainers know they should leave an audience unsated, wanting more.)

The entertainer can touch the emotions as well as hold your attention, both of which business must do since keeping your attention is the key to a successful customer relationship. An entertainer knows when to bring in appropriate props—think of Ronald Reagan and his charts. Reagan was a master of the simple chart that transformed him from the Leader of the Free World Talking to America into The President Entertaining Americans. People watching became involved. With the charts, they could see what the deficit was doing to the economy. That his tax cuts actually increased the deficit makes his performance even more impressive.

TOUCH EMOTIONS AND INTELLECT

Great leaders—of nations, corporations, and organizations—touch people emotionally and intellectually. Peter Drucker has written that the first requirement of effective leadership “is to earn trust. Otherwise there won’t be any followers.” Touching people emotionally and intellectually is the first step in earning that trust.

Jeff Taylor is a Provocateur who understands how to reach out and touch his employees and prospects. Before he became a CEO, he was a disc jockey at parties and weddings, and he continues to work as a DJ at Monster.com’s quarterly recruiting parties. “We invite people to bring their friends—no resumes—and come in and meet the managers and other employees. We always theme it. At one, everybody had to come packed to go to Las Vegas to be qualified for the draw-

ing. We had 550 suitcases all piled up, and at 10:30 P.M. we did a two-minute drill to find your suitcase. You should have seen these guys flying through the suitcases trying to find their own. We drew two names of people who went straight out into limos and on to Las Vegas, right from the party.”

Taylor is the DJ, the entertainer, but the party's focus is around employees bringing their friends. “I like our employee base, so my guess would be that I would like their friends. We typically get 600 to 700 people at a party—300 employees and 300 to 400 friends. We have the facility to have these parties. We do drink tickets, and we hire professional bartenders. We have drivers waiting, so if someone doesn't feel comfortable driving home, he can take one of the cars and we will pick him up in the morning and bring him back to his car. People say it sounds very old-fashioned, but it is not the beer blast of the past. It is themed and becomes a way for people who love their jobs to be able to share with their friends. And people say, ‘I want to come and work here.’”

If Provocateur/entertainers create entertainment, they create an environment people want to visit. People will want to be part of the act. Taylor is “selling” his company to prospective employees and clients through entertainment.

HOLD ATTENTION WITH FUN

Fun will be more important in a world where it is increasingly difficult to hold people's attention. A business has to get its points across quickly the way good entertainers get their points across quickly and effectively.

If the leader enjoys entertaining, the employees and the other stakeholders will have a good time being part of the community. If the business's goal is to encourage prospects and customers to choose its community over others, it needs an element of entertainment to make people feel this is the

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place they should be. This is a place where they can, among other things, have fun.

I think many people today feel we only live once so let's make every experience count. If the company believes in making every customer's experience a good one, it will thrive. If the leader believes that every employee should have a chance to grow, be heard, and make a contribution, the firm will attract and keep good people. Entertainment makes the experience that much more attractive.

Staples is a great example of a corporation having fun about the most boring products—paper, folders, pads, envelopes. CEO Tom Stemberg has been able to create an entertaining environment with great ads. The advertising almost makes it *fun* to go back to school. In one ad, the kid looks totally bummed out because he has to go back to school, but his mother dances down the Staples' aisles, singing, "It's the most wonderful time of the year . . ." She tosses products into the shopping cart, gets up on one foot, and floats down the aisle as she sings. The ad says without bludgeoning viewers that Staples has all the supplies you will ever need, and it's a fun place to shop.

The idea of fun in marketing has been around as long as the idea of marketing, of course. A company's ads are often a doorway to an environment, and they will become more so as they become interactive. The trap (one that advertising agencies have been known to help their clients fall into) is that the advertising *only* entertains; it does not sell the company's products or services. The Provocateur/entertainer never allows the ad agency to forget the point of the entertainment—to build sales.

Provocateur/entertainers become almost evangelical. They know how to use the way they dress, the way they speak, the way they present, the props they use to draw in

the audience, whether it be employees or customers or congressmen in a hearing room. Provocateur/entertainers are able to convey the feeling that what their business offers is fun, and that it is worth doing, worth buying, and worth coming back to more than once.

BRING CUSTOMERS INTO THE ACT

Provocateurs have to think about ways to stir customer senses as they create the company environment. The whole idea of creating a business environment is to make it a positive experience, a place customers and prospects enjoy visiting. Novell had a 24-hour radio station—WNOVL—and while someone waited on hold he heard music and then a disc jockey advertise about great Novell software. The station ran interviews on the future of software. Ray Norda, who was running Novell at the time, understood he had to surround the customer's senses.

I am, of course, talking about entertainment in the broadest sense as any kind of positive visual or aural stimulation. What's entertaining varies by individual. Some find a rock concert entertainment, others find it torture. Some find shopping a form of entertainment, others feel it is a necessary nuisance. Dining out can be entertainment or uninspired—although McDonald's and Burger King have encouraged franchisees to install children's playgrounds. I find the Rain Forest café to be entertainment. The shopping mall has become an entertainment center with amusement park rides, theaters, and public performances.

If a woman is happy shopping for sheets and towels on the JCPenney Web site, I argue she is being entertained as well as furnishing her home. She can, after all, buy sheets and towels from many places. She may, for example, be more entertained by Martha Stewart at Kmart. Martha shows her how sheet and

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towel colors and patterns can work together so the woman buys more and returns more often to the store. If a man enjoys checking his portfolio's performance twice a day at the Charles Schwab site, that's entertainment. Provocateur/entertainers need not crack jokes or croon songs to be entertaining. They say, "Come to my world; come to my channel; come to my tent; come to my stage, and you will see extraordinary things. And while you're here, maybe you'll consider my sheets, my towels, my funds."

Entertainment is not limited to consumer marketing. It is possible to entertain business customers—not with a jacket to the plant or a golf game but with an email from the CEO: "On Tuesday, I am going to take you on a virtual visit to our new customer in France to show how they are using these products. Would you want to come along?" Some customers and prospects may want to see how French companies use the products. Done well, it will be entertainment with a purpose.

Not long ago I talked to a company about ways to maintain its leadership position as the Web took over its industry. "You are going to have to create an information circus where people will want to come and learn about everything from new stereo technologies to new Java applications, some of it free, some of it they pay for." The managers were not convinced. They said the approach did not sound serious enough. They seemed to feel that if they were entertaining or fun, prospects and customers would not take the company and what it offered seriously. As a consequence, people did not take them at all and they lost sales and market position.

The opposite of entertainment is not seriousness but tedium, monotony, and boredom. You can be serious about the entertainment, and serious about what is real, important, and genuine about your product or service, but still have fun

and be entertaining (unless your product is something like caskets, life preservers, or fire extinguishers—something about which you probably should be fairly grim).

But if the company creates an environment of entertaining, learning can be fun. It is much like the Montessori method of teaching: I want to go to the bubble table, I want to go to the share-the-dream table, and so on. I want to go to Staples.com for school supplies. I want to go to Amazon.com for books. I want to go to eBay just to see what's being offered. People talk about auction action, and eBay is truly an entertainment commerce site. Then there's Starbucks.

SELL A COMMODITY PRODUCT WITH ENTERTAINMENT

Howard Schultz, now the chief global strategist for Starbucks but formerly the CEO who built the corporation, went into the low-margin commodity coffee business when American coffee consumption was in decline. Nevertheless, he noticed that a four-store Seattle chain was buying far more than its share of the Swedish drip coffeemakers that Schultz's then employer imported. Schultz visited Starbucks Coffee, Tea and Spice in 1981, and was so impressed by what the firm was doing that he signed on as director of retail operations and marketing a year later. In 1985, he started his own chain of Seattle coffee bars, and in 1987 raised enough venture capital to buy out Starbucks' two partners and merge the firm with his own, renaming the company Starbucks Corp. It now has over 3,800 stores in Asia, Canada, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States and annual sales of more than \$2.2 billion.

“The decline in coffee drinking was due to the fact that most of the coffee that people bought was stale and they

weren't enjoying it," says Schultz. "Once they tasted ours and experienced what we call 'the third place'—a gathering place between home and work where they were treated with respect—they found we were filling a need they didn't know they had. Customers today are more open than ever to new ideas. It's an incredible time to start a new business or introduce a new product because people are eager to try new things."

Simon Williams of the Sterling Group, a New York consulting firm whose category experience includes work on Kraft coffee brands, says that Starbucks "is a brand built on passion, and innately passionate relationships are much more rewarding to the human psyche than innately functional relationships." In other words, entertainment counts.

What is it about Starbucks that resonates with consumers? Schultz says that the company's own research shows that customers interact with the Starbucks brand differently from almost every other. "And I'm confident in saying that was by design. We purposefully stayed away from traditional brand building. We ran away from the Procter & Gamble model of taking a product with great packaging, broad-based distribution, and scaling up advertising with a brand manager focused on that tested formula. We turned that formula upside down by saying we'll have quite limited distribution, no advertising, and we'll build it through the retail environment and through all the things experiential branding can accomplish. As I say that, it sounds like a lot of modern marketing buzzwords, but really it's old-fashioned retail marketing—one customer at a time—and that almost sounds too trite."

Schultz decided early on that Starbucks was going to lead with the coffee bar experience first—that is, the entertainment—and the product second. "We certainly don't ignore product, but it is something we always knew we had and a

lot of others didn't. There's still a lot of bad coffee out there being consumed. But we built the business through the experience, not through the product. We are definitely a product-driven company and not a marketing-driven company, but through the years we've become an experience-driven company. I think we recognized pretty early on that the key to growing the business was based on building trust and confidence with our consumers; we were already pretty confident in the product.

"Underneath all that is the underlying fact that the equity of the Starbucks brand was built internally; that's a different construct than the one practiced by most companies, or most brand managers, or most marketers. We've all read the advice of some of the great brand gurus about exceeding customer expectations. Our thought here was to originate within the company by exceeding expectations and establishing a relationship of trust with our own people." Schultz points out that retailers and restaurants live or die on customer service, but retail and restaurant pay is among the lowest in the country. Starbucks starts by calling its people "partners" not employees.

"It didn't take us long to realize that while we were selling a commodity product, our customers almost right away focused in on our process as something unique," says Schultz. "They wanted to know what we do and how we do it with almost as much interest as we have internally. When you have that level of interest in any brand, it shouldn't take any marketer too long to realize that what's really being sold is a value-added experience. In our case, it was one not solely based on the product, but on the features and benefits of the experience itself." In this case, it includes a place to read the paper, meet a friend, play a game of chess.

By offering a pleasurable, entertaining experience, Star-

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bucks has been able to grow with relatively little traditional advertising. Schultz attributes their growth to the brand's strength and the experience it represents. "We are not only a location, but we are something that you can consume, which is unique. And the stores have become gathering places, which became an important social aspect of the brand. All that means trust, and in building a brand today, that's imperative; the rules have changed radically from 5 or 10 years ago.

"The amount of marketing noise out there is just astounding. Consumers today are in a giant wind tunnel going the wrong way. They are bombarded with advertising and marketing, yet so much of it is just noise. That's because consumers are telling corporate America, all those marketers, that they don't believe much, if any, of what they are being told. Over the years, most national products have not delivered on their promise. I think that gives us a unique advantage in the direct connection we have every day with the customer. We don't have to do traditional advertising because we are communicating every day with our heaviest users in an environment we control way beyond what we could do with any advertising. That's the basis of our bond with our consumers."

Howard Schultz believes the experience of drinking coffee should be entertainment. Folgers—aside from the quality of its product—had an audience that was not being entertained and was ready to try something else. Customers want to become part of the act, so Starbucks offered an act. People order latte, sit in the warm greens and browns, and let the soft jazz wash over them. It's a community.

The stores must serve good coffee: That's a given. But look at the way Starbucks has been able to expand geographically and extend its product line into the supermarket—coffee ice

cream, ready-to-drink bottled coffee, and whole-bean packaged coffee. Once Starbucks created an entertaining, communal environment, it was able to extend the business because it had become an environment, one in which you want to buy, you feel good about, and feel you are entertaining yourself.

How does a company encourage customers to be part of its act? For starters, provide a means and stay open to customer reaction. "We're very fortunate to have customers who are passionate enough about what we do that they let us know quickly when they're dissatisfied," says Schultz. "We have customer comment cards in the store, we get thousands of phone calls in the customer relations department each year, and we train our partners to give feedback about what they hear." Schultz knows that its stores must not only perform well every day, they must also listen for hints that they could do better.

Many companies find ways to engage customers. Gerber encourages customers on its Web site by having parents talk to each other about concerns with babies. Amazon does it by having readers critique books. E*Trade does it by turning its site into a "digital financial media" center, one that supplies the stock quotes, news, and financial information that matches the customer's interests and income.

There are intermediate stages for visual presentation and interactive dialogue in the way a great entertainer connects with his audience. Think of the give-and-take of a great comedian or of a great singer. The tools available on the Web make this give-and-take available to every business with every constituency in an interactive way. A shareholder may not personally hear the CEO at the annual meeting, but once the meeting is available on a video database on the Web, the shareholder can then participate. And if shareholders are

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excited about how the CEO is presenting the company's goals and visions, and how they are going to go about accomplishing those goals through their partnerships, through their product initiatives, and their cycle of research and innovation, then they will want to be entertained by the company.

The great entertainer gets the audience so involved that they laugh, they grow misty-eyed, they gasp when Placido Domingo hits a high note. The lyrics by Andrew Lloyd Weber moves someone to the point that she wants to hear it again and again and again. Likewise, the great company gets customers so involved they buy more and tell their friends.

Provocateur/entertainers understand the environment's importance to entertainment. They know that if they induce you to visit their site, they must be effective in entertaining you and selling you or you will never return. The great entertainer, though, will know your interests and not sing opera if you want show tunes. How does a company learn the commonalities?

Go back to our original premise: The customer relationship is at the company's core. Provocateur/entertainers know how to bring individuals into the entertainment. Tom Stemberg knows people like comedy, so Staples uses comedy. AOL from the beginning has been organized by interest: sports, computers, travel, health, and now hundreds more. AOL built the company almost as infotainment. The Hard Rock Café, Dave & Busters, and The Rain Forest Café have been successful theme retailers/restaurants.

This is a whole new world. The question leaders should be asking is how do we create that stage, that environment, that place of fun, of learning, of motivating that connects our brand to the customer's heart and soul? Monster.com is good at making it easy to identify potential jobs. Starbucks is good

at making a comfortable environment in which to drink a great cup of coffee. IBM is good at making their site the place to know about e-business and to work on how to obtain results.

ENTERTAIN WITH A POINT

The Web is like a big flea market. Companies are still trying to sell goods and services, but how do they induce people to come learn about their products? eBay should evolve into (and what Christie's and Sotheby's should have done) a place where someone can learn about, say, early twentieth-century American art before she enters the auction. The customer becomes smart enough to buy with some confidence.

On its digital camera site, Sony should show grandma and grandpa in Florida watching their grandson's one-year-old birthday party in Ohio. Here's the camera in actual use. Here's how you connect the camera to your PC. Here's how you edit the tape to add music and titles. Do not even mention buying the product. Sony has now created an entertaining environment.

After the person has been brought into the community, the company moves to the next level, answering questions: "Is it really that easy to use the digital camera . . . bread maker . . . personal digital assistant . . . cake mix?" Yes it is. Here's how you do it. The information becomes personalized. The customer ultimately buys, but initially came to the product from an interest in sharing an immediate video with the grandparents. That interest, sharing a family experience, is the entry point, not the camera. Nobody wants a video camera the way nobody wants an electric drill—what they really want are pictures and holes.

We are going to see more and more Internet-related per-

formances like the famous Victoria's Secret introduction of new lingerie. As an example of how this can work, The Weber Group helped General Motors introduce e-GM with a Webcast press conference in August 1999.

e-GM, headed by Mark T. Hogan, is a cross-functional business group designed to put a wide range of products and services closer to customers. e-GM oversees GMBuyPower and OnStar and works closely with GM dealers to change the way consumers shop for and purchase vehicles. GMBuyPower allows consumers to configure the vehicle of their choice online, search vehicle inventories, and then make a purchase through the dealer of their choice. In select markets outside the United States, GMBuyPower will allow consumers to buy cars directly online. OnStar has pioneered an in-car telematics service that allows wireless Web surfing, stock trading, and hands-free cellular calling. OnStar has millions of subscribers on the road today, creating a new multi-billion-dollar market segment.

"The Internet fundamentally changes the way business is conducted," said GM president Rick Wagoner at the press conference. "With this move, we are applying the power of our technology innovations and the strength of our human and financial resources to the Internet to enhance the way we develop customer relationships. e-GM will serve as a catalyst to enhance the customer experience, improve efficiency, and cut costs." GM already had more than 100 consumer Web sites around the world with 3.8 million unique visits in the month before it announced e-GM. GMBuyPower had more than 650,000 visitors shopping for a new vehicle.

Because e-GM reflects the corporation's commitment to Internet commerce, it was natural to Webcast the press conference. GM held the event in a new facility in the Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit. Participants saw a

stage with three GM executives in casual attire sitting on stools. Behind the executives were two plasma screens with GM logos moving across them and behind that was a blue curtain. We set up chairs theater style and had video cameras at the back that panned to each individual as he spoke. On one side of the room we had set up multiple machines that could demonstrate all the GM online technology that was being included in the new offering. We also had video monitors so that everyone in the audience could see the video that was being streamed to the Webcast.

Reporters around the world—more than 120—were able to watch the press conference live and call in their own questions, so that an automotive writer in, say, Brazil or Germany or Japan had virtually the same access to Wagoner and Hogan in Detroit as a reporter in the room. Ordinary people, of course, could also watch the press conference (although they could not ask questions), and more than 4,200 did so, dramatically more than the 90 that was the average for previous Webcasts. Television stations could receive a video feed from the event, which we sent out via satellite, or if time was not an issue, we'd send a tape in the mail.

How did the event go over? e-GM generated more than 70 million media impressions in August. Some 43 U.S. TV stations aired e-GM launch news, including outlets in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Miami, and San Francisco. "Satellite Media Tour" interviews with e-GM President Mark Hogan appeared on CNBC, PBS's "Nightly Business Report," FOX News, and Bloomberg TV. More than 30 newspapers, Web sites, and trade magazines covered the announcement, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *CNNfn*, *C/Net*, *Red Herring*, *Computerworld*, and *InfoWorld*.

A September 1999 corporate online image and reputation study by Hass Associates found that GM "enjoyed the auto

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industry's most positive presence on the Internet, largely because of its well-publicized launch of an Internet-oriented business unit." GM received the highest level of positive attention during August on more than 80 Web sites and newsgroups that are frequented by investors and others interested in news and information about the auto industry. In other words, the Webcast did well.

As of the writing of this book, my company Weber Shandwick Worldwide is averaging two or three Webcasts a week as the cost has come down and we can produce them quickly. We are seeing a rapid move toward an entertainment platform that is visual, interactive, and multifaceted. This is where Provocateur/entertainers can rise to great heights, because they can start bringing in other employees, satisfied customers, music from the ad campaign, colors from the logo subtly in the background to entertain with a point more effectively than ever.

ENTERTAIN 24 HOURS A DAY

The media has combined news and entertainment. We are living in a world in which information must be presented in an entertaining way to be heard at all. In a culture where news has become entertainment, business as entertainment cannot be far off. It is going to be a fact of life that business leaders need to be prepared to present their companies and their visions in an entertaining way.

Ultimately, the company will have to offer 24 hours of entertainment by constituency—prospects who want information about products and services; customers who want to buy; reporters who want information; stock analysts who want financial data and the business outlook.

In time (and sooner rather than later), I believe a com-

pany will offer 24 hours of entertainment by constituency. Customers are clamoring to hear what IBM's Lou Gerstner has to say about the new storage device to see if IBM is really going to beat up EMC, its major competitor in storage devices. Customers will be entertained by the product or service. Employees will be entertained by the mission, vision, and compensation. Shareholders will be entertained by the financial returns. A great leader will have to know how to keep a 24-hour entertainment running, one that has highest levels of sincerity.

We will ultimately have 24/7/365 business channels that companies will refresh continuously to keep people coming back. The same will be true for business-to-business as for business-to-consumer sites. As the Web becomes filled with what, for lack of a better description, we will call 24/7 interactive visual destinations, they are going to become environments. My Yahoo! is a good example of a destination site that keeps growing with its visitors, and it keeps surprising them. Business leaders should understand that they have an amazing theater or, if you want a sports metaphor, an immense stadium available to them on the Web.

Leaders have to start thinking like entertainers. That is the big point. They have to ask, Once I get prospects into my theater, what do I do with them? Sell them things, yes, but what else? How do I keep them coming back for more? Some ideas: Make detailed instruction sheets (or manuals) available for every model of every product the company has ever produced. Announce new products, features, benefits, and prices. Establish bulletin boards where customers can talk to each other about their experiences with your product or service. Provide recipes if you're a food company, drug interactions and contraindications if you're a pharmaceutical company, simple maintenance instructions if you're a car company.

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Coming up with entertaining ideas to keep people returning is something leaders have to get their employees to think about. It will be constituency-based entertainment. On the business-to-business side, some prospects will want new ideas on the use of this software or buying paper in bulk. It might sound boring, but some customers will want to know more about it, how other people do it. It takes the chat room idea to a new domain.

The goal is to tap into their ideas, and it will be huge. The Provocateur/entertainer will say, “How do I keep this thing alive? How do I have my *Seinfeld*? How do I have my 24-hour news program?” Employing audio, video, and colorful graphics, the entertainment will be so engaging that people—prospects, customers, employees, suppliers, reporters, everyone—will routinely return to see what’s new.

In that way, continuing this whole community of entertainment, of education, and of moving is so cool because companies can do so many different things; they can appeal to myriad diverse interests. Amazon.com can have chat rooms with popular authors. L.L. Bean can have chat rooms with hikers and fishermen. Nike can have chat rooms with basketball players. Schwab can have chat rooms with financial advisers. IBM could have Internet gurus on e-commerce that someone could replay as many times as necessary. The company can offer the kind of entertainment online connected with the company’s business. (Back to the principle that an educated consumer is your best customer.)

ADD TO YOUR REPERTOIRE

Just as great entertainers continue to add things to their repertoire, so do Provocateur/entertainers. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com, started with books, added CDs, then DVD

and videos, then just about everything else: art and collectibles, auctions, kitchen tools and equipment, lawn and patio furniture, tools and hardware, electronics, software, toys and video games, health and beauty aids, and furniture, lighting, and rugs. Plus, Amazon.com's zShops "offer hundreds of thousands of new, used, and hard-to-find products from specialty retailers, small businesses, and individuals—things like buffalo steaks, office furniture, used books, maternity clothes, golf clubs, second-hand CDs and videos, car parts, and time-share accommodations at resorts."

All this creates an entertaining environment in which people want to browse, shop, and buy, returning to my point that entertainment is an environment that keeps you attentive. For example, I went to Amazon because I was frustrated at not being able to find a real store or Web site that sold software for kids. The kids wanted new software for Christmas. At Amazon, I found the programs I wanted, but the company had made the presentation so enticing—by age group, by subject area—that I started to feel entertained. I went to Clifford the Big Red Dog, and it was connected to something I thought my son would like. I looked deeper into what that kind of software teaches and—click!—put it into my electronic shopping cart.

Bezos adapted the "Attention Kmart shoppers! Come to aisle five before all the snow shovels are gone. They are only \$9.95." When everybody runs to buy the snow shovels, that's entertainment.

Oprah Winfrey, who is the ultimate Provocateur/entertainer, has recently established a magazine, *O*, that adds to her environment of the television show, production company, book club, and more. Now she will sell products through the magazine. A great leader will be like Oprah, who has been able to extend her interests into many related areas

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and create that environment of entertainment, buying, learning, and guiding.

The Provocateur/entertainer's challenge will be to orchestrate an authentic and entertaining presentation of what the company is doing to keep viewers returning to that channel. Lou Gerstner wants his constituencies returning to IBM.com time and time again. Jeff Bezos wants his constituencies returning to Amazon.com. Scott McNealy wants his constituencies returning to Sun.com. Provocateur/entertainers almost need the freshness of a nonstop Hollywood mentality.

One reason that *Seinfeld* obtained massive audiences was its innovation; the content needed to be fresh for every episode to get people to sit and be part of the show. Creating the show was exhausting but exhilarating, and was worth the record-setting money NBC gave to Jerry Seinfeld and his colleagues. The greatest CEOs of the next 5 to 10 to 20 years will be the ones who can sustain that kind of creative process.

Provocateur/entertainers are able to induce customers, shareholders, and reporters to come back for another act and another act and another. The tools exist to create entertaining environments to affect that loyalty. Which is why Pepsi-Cola is spending around \$1.2 million (3 percent) of its advertising budget on the Internet. "This medium is here to stay, and we buy that," says John Vail, director of digital media and marketing for Pepsi-Cola.

What, one might ask, is a soft drink company doing on the Internet? Selling Pepsi? Well . . . yes.

The Web is the medium of choice for Pepsi's prime demographic audience—people under 25. While it is almost impossible to measure online advertising performance—to connect a banner to a sale, for example—Pepsi has made deals that do show tangible results. Example: In the summer of 2000, Pepsi made a barter arrangement with Web portal

Yahoo!. Pepsi printed the Yahoo! logo on 1.5 billion cans. In return, Yahoo! took over Pepsi's established loyalty program, PepsiStuff.

PepsiStuff.com let customers collect points from bottle caps: open an account at the site, enter the unique 10-digit number from a bottle cap, and receive points. Customers could redeem the points for merchandise on the Web site; prizes included CDs, concert tickets, electronic goods, and more. To make the site even more entertaining, it included an auction so that customers could bid their points on prizes.

Something like 3 million customers logged on and registered at the PepsiStuff site during the promotion (it ended December 31, 2000), giving Pepsi detailed consumer data that normally it must pay for in market research or glean from focus groups. Information that once took months to collect could now be had in days. What's more, Vail was able to tweak the program while it was in progress, maintaining the right inventory of the most popular prizes. "Instead of lag-time data, we had real-time, and we could react to it," says Vail. Sales of Pepsi and sister brand Mountain Dew rose 5 percent during the six-month online promotion, and it cost about one-fifth what it had been as a mail-in project.

PERFORM BEHIND THE SCENES

It is important to note that the leader does not have to appear personally on stage, and good Provocateur/entertainers also know they are not the entire show. Everyone can stand up and perform his or her own solo like a clarinet player in a good jazz band. In a great sports team, everybody has his or her part and the audience knows that this player is a great passer and that one is a great slam-dunker.

Meg Whitman does not have to personally entertain the

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people who come to the eBay site. eBay could add a tour by a world expert on seventeenth-century American furniture before an auction; the tour may be both entertaining and informative, but Whitman does not have to give it.

The media and the public relations industry incessantly cite the need for today's CEOs to be business "rock stars." Public relations agencies even have practices dedicated to creating "CEO brands." I believe the CEO as brand is not interchangeable or synonymous with the company. John Chambers is not Cisco. Jack Welch is not GE. And even Michael Dell is not—or should not be—Dell. Cisco has its own developed brand and personality and environment, and John Chambers is the conductor or the Provocateur. He develops his own John Chambers brand, which is the smart salesman, driver, and visionary of the Internet world.

General Electric has its own corporate brands and sub-brands. Jack Welch is a brand himself. (Think not? How many people would buy a book with his name on it? We'll see when his book is published.) Welch complements the corporation—to make a serious understatement—but he has done a very good job of not being GE. The corporation would continue to thrive if Welch were hit by a bus. Indeed, part of a Provocateur's success is in creating an organization that continues to prosper after he or she is gone. Seiji Ozawa can leave the Boston Symphony, and it will continue to be a great orchestra. The Boston Symphony can have any number of guest conductors who will make great music with it. At some point, Provocateurs should think of themselves as brands. Being an entertainer is just one piece of becoming a deep, moving brand that can motivate customers, employees, and others.

Provocateur/entertainers have a special attitude toward

the world. They understand that life is grim, life is serious, life is real, but they also say let's have some fun while we're living it.

Too many executives seem to have the idea that if top management is seen as having fun, the world will perceive the company as not serious. That's obviously false. Quality entertainers have fun but know they are good. They know the fundamentals of what they do. They have practiced hard to act, to play the piano, to sing, to dance. The same is true for great Provocateur/entertainers.

George Conrades is the CEO of Akamai, a company that provides a global Internet delivery service for data, including streaming media, and applications that improve Web-site reliability while reducing complexity and cost of IT infrastructure. It has a network of more than 12,000 servers in 62 countries, continuously analyzing Internet traffic and delivering data and applications over the most efficient route from servers located as close as possible to the requesting user.

I asked Conrades, who had been a senior executive at IBM, what's been the biggest surprise of leading the start-up. He tells me, "How much total fun it is to be surrounded by people who are such high caliber. Because the intelligence and energy level are so high and because they interact well, I've never seen such incredible progress. I've never seen individuals contribute so much on their own initiative and have everybody else celebrate their achievements. I drive home at night and I don't worry. There are at least 15 very bright, very motivated people working on any given problem."

ENTERTAIN DURING THE BAD TIMES

It is easier to feel like entertaining when the company is growing. There are opportunities, bonuses, and good feel-

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ings. But the economy does not always expand, and industries do not always grow. How do you have fun when customers don't buy, the stock tanks, and employees start taking extra-long lunch hours?

One can always promote innovation, even within a business that is not growing. We have been using the metaphor of the community, but I would like to shift to a metaphor of the garden. A vegetable garden still provides enjoyment when it is the same size every year. You watch things grow in a limited space; similarly you can still do that in a limited marketplace company. The challenge is to continue being innovative in thinking about additional services, about creative things the company can do around the product.

Maybe this year we'll plant pumpkins. Let's inject a little innovation into this process to see if something does take off. In that way the company can start the growth or change or innovative cycles that are so important to keeping an environment fun, interesting, and motivating to employees and customers. When the economy does turn around, the company is well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities that appear.

I know that some mature industries will find it hard to figure out a way to grow. It is one thing when your technology is evolving every week, another thing entirely when the last major advance was in 1950. Nevertheless, I believe a business in the most moribund industry can grow through innovation, creativity, and Provocative leadership.

And to lead the company into new, more profitable paths is the task of a Sherpa guide.

