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BEYOND DISRUPTION

CHANGING THE RULES IN THE MARKETPLACE

An Adweek Book

JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.
To:
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Adweek Books is designed to present interesting, insightful books for the general business reader and for professionals in the worlds of media, marketing, and advertising.

These are innovative, creative books that address the challenges and opportunities of these industries, written by leaders in the business. Some of our writers head their own companies, others have worked their way up to the top of their field in large multinationals. But they share a knowledge of their craft and a desire to enlighten others.

We hope readers will find these books as helpful and inspiring as Adweek, Brandweek, and Mediaweek magazines.

Published
Disruption: Overturning Conventions and Shaking Up the Marketplace, Jean-Marie Dru
Under the Radar: Talking to Today’s Cynical Consumer, Jonathan Bond and Richard Kirshenbaum
Truth, Lies and Advertising: The Art of Account Planning, Jon Steel
Warp-Speed Branding: The Impact of Technology on Marketing, Agnieszka Winkler
Creative Company: How St. Luke’s Became “the Ad Agency to End All Ad Agencies,” Andy Law
Another One Bites the Grass: Making Sense of International Advertising, Simon Anholt
Attention! How to Interrupt, Yell, Whisper and Touch Consumers, Ken Sacharin
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Getting the Bugs Out: The Rise, Fall, and Comeback of Volkswagen in America, David Kiley
The Do-It-Yourself Lobotomy: Open Your Mind to Greater Creative Thinking, Tom Monahan

Forthcoming:
And Now a Few Laughs From Our Sponsor, Larry Oakner
“When the rate of change inside an institution becomes slower than the rate of change outside, the end is in sight. The only question is when.”

JACK WELCH
Changing the Rules in the Marketplace
DISRUPTION

A collaborative work by Jean-Marie Dru and business partners.
DISRUPTION

It’s more than a noun.
It’s more than a book.
It’s more than a process.
It’s a way of thinking.

It’s a way to look at our clients’ business and find opportunity.

It’s a way of defining how brands should act.

It’s a lens through which the world should view our network.

It’s how each of our agencies should do business every day.

Think boldly.
Sell brave ideas.
Create dramatic business results for our clients.

Disruption means dismantling of the status quo
and replacing it with something bold and new.

It can be the most powerful thing we sell.
It can be what the world expects us to do.
It can define who we are.

Clow
Think different.
Disruption began in the early 1990s. The method was initially developed by our advertising agency. It was designed to help produce more intrusive advertising strategies, and to give brands more substance and weight, by making a clean break with the status quo, by creating a “disruption.” Disruption soon proved to be much bigger than we had initially imagined, bigger than advertising. It turned out to be relevant for business in general — not just for brands, but also for companies. It gradually evolved into a way of thinking that encouraged companies to create and manage change at all levels of their organization.

Our original source of inspiration came from the success stories of businesses that had achieved exponential brand growth in an established, yet stagnant, climate. We discovered that all these cases shared certain characteristics. They all overturned convention in some way by means of product innovation, marketing stance, and/or advertising. And they all had a clear idea of the direction they were taking.

Disruption was thus designed as a means of questioning the established order, of challenging tried-and-true approaches. Our first book, *Disruption: Overturning Conventions and Shaking Up the Marketplace* (Wiley, 1996), explained the principles of the methodology. This sequel is about Disruption at work, Disruption in action. The years that separate the two books have proven the efficacy of the method. By seeing how the idea has evolved in practice, you can begin to apply Disruption in your own business, no matter what business you are in.

From the outset, Disruption was built on a three-step process: 

1. **Convention.**
2. **Disruption.**
3. **Vision.**

You start by identifying the Conventions that restrict the thought process, and then you challenge them through a Disruption, a radically new and unexpected idea. This is all done with a very definite sense of Vision — of where you are going, of the ground you want to cover from today to tomorrow.

This is the way the format of the methodology was designed some years ago. You will see throughout this book how Disruption has developed a life and a culture of its own. Some of the best-known international examples of Disruption at work are companies such as Absolut, Apple, Nissan in the United States, Sony PlayStation in Europe and the United States, McDonald’s, TAG Heuer, and Danone in Europe. Details of these case histories appear in the section entitled “Seven Disruption Stories.” Here, however, are a few words about each of these brands. **Absolut** vodka has embodied Disruption from the start by positioning itself as a fashion brand, rather than a spirits brand. It resisted the conventional approach of relying on the product’s provenance and heritage. Twenty years on, hundreds of ads later, and as many public relations events, such as sponsorship of the arts, Absolut has become one of the top-selling brands in the world. Its average price is 20 percent higher than its competitors’ prices.

**Apple** is a company that makes “tools for creative minds.” This strategy was embodied in the “Think different” campaign featuring Picasso, Einstein, John Lennon, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Muhammad Ali, Richard Branson — great creators of the twentieth century. These people, as the voice-over says, “...are not fond of rules and they have no respect for the status quo.” They are the ones who changed the world.
The Apple ads defy convention and, at the same time, they champion the challenging of convention; they are different themselves and, at the same time, they encourage us all to be different. They aim high and, at the same time, urge us to raise our sights. “Think different” would have been a great motto for the concept of Disruption.

Nissan, again poised to be the most brilliant car brand coming from Japan, has pioneered an exclusive campaign format in the United States, which has subsequently been exported to Japan and Europe. The launch campaign for each new model is preceded by a phase in which one of the head designers — Jerry Hirshberg in the U.S., Shiro Nakamura in Japan, or Steven Schwartz in Europe — talks personally on TV about the car. These designers have gradually helped this recently faceless company to achieve a voice of its own. In two years, Nissan’s image has been reinvigorated. Its new models have become a “cure for the common car.” This is a case history in the making.

PlayStation was third into its market, after Sega and Nintendo. By overturning the convention that computer games are for kids and geeks, Sony declared that PlayStation was not just a game, but a totally new experience, a way of life for teens and young adults. Sony captures the intensity of the whole gaming experience, with no age limits. PlayStation is now market leader with 82 million units sold worldwide. As the advertisements say: Do not underestimate the power of PlayStation!

In France, McDonald’s has decided not to communicate exclusively on a commercial level. It now also communicates at a corporate level. Since 1999, McDonald’s advertising has focused on the nutritional value of its food for children (after the mad cow disease and the foot-and-mouth disease crises), and, more recently, it has addressed criticism of the “exploitation” and “victimization” of young employees in a so-called overly competitive system. This approach marks a rupture with McDonald’s customary reserve, founded on the principle that nowadays, it is impossible to create a deep relationship with customers by isolating company issues from the brand. For McDonald’s in France, this idea marked a turning point.

Initially a trendy sports watch, TAG Heuer has become a luxury brand. TAG has shifted from applauding physical effort to advocating mental strength, embodying the power of the mind. The brand image has been upgraded to such a degree that the price for an average model has more than doubled, impacting profits considerably, as you can well imagine.

Danone in France is the same company as Dannon in America. No one conducts more research into the relationship between food and health than Danone. At the agency’s recommendation, they created the Danone Institute, as a means of providing tangible evidence of the company’s commitment to health. Danone has since become the most popular brand in France, all product categories considered. It has provided its parent company with a name. In the same way that the Minnesota Valley Canning Company became Green Giant, BSN, the former name of the company, has become Danone, a brand now synonymous with health all over Europe.

In each of these cases there has been a distinct rupture with convention. Creating new market spaces creates greater wealth. A study by the Financial Times revealed that, out of 100 new business launches, 86 percent were “me-too” launches, or incremental improvements. However, these generated only 62 percent of launch revenues and 39 percent of profits. By contrast, the remaining 14 percent of launches
— those that created new markets or recreated existing ones — generated 38 percent of revenues and a whopping 61 percent of profits.

It was with this in mind that we designed the Disruption methodology. Its goal is to reframe, restage, and reshape, by rejecting the obvious.

Our aim is to identify the conventions that surround clients’ businesses. We look at the established practices and specific characteristics of the sector or industry in question. We examine the conventional approach to marketing its products and services. We explore the consumer’s anticipated attitudes and behavior. We inspect how similar the approaches of various agencies are. We try to expose deep-seated cultural prejudices.

We often use one particular metaphor to illustrate what we mean by challenging convention. This is the “Fosbury Flop,” the back-to-front high-jumping style introduced by Dick Fosbury at the Mexico City Olympic Games in 1968. Fosbury disrupted the conventional approach to jumping, which held that the only way to go over the bar was on your front. It also made all other techniques obsolete. Within a few years, virtually all competitors were forced to adopt this style, and those who could not had to retire. Fosbury had challenged sporting convention with total success.

Once the imagination is fully prepared, we move on to the next stage. By challenging the way things are done, by developing new hypotheses and unexpected scenarios, by searching for unprecedented angles of attack, we help our clients create visions that represent a distinctive point of view, visions that have the power to transform markets.

The more powerful the vision, the more it vitalizes the brand. Consider Apple and “Think different,” or Danone and “Entreprendre pour la Santé” (“Taking a stand on health”), Sony and “Do not underestimate the power of PlayStation,” IBM and “Solutions for a small planet,” CNN, The Body Shop, MTV, Häagen-Dazs, BMW, Intel, and Absolut, a brand we have been handling for 20 years. All these brands have clear visions; they stand out from the crowd. They have greater value, in both senses of the word — image and financial.

Our company is the result of numerous mergers that brought together a lot of local, entrepreneurial agencies that shared parallel views on our business. In fact, all of them have always believed in the underlying principle that formed the bedrock of Disruption: strategies that are creative.

These agencies were often praised for their creativity and showered with prizes at award ceremonies. As a result, they were too quickly categorized as “creative,” which, in a simplistic, Manichean world, meant “nonstrategic.” This is absurd. The force of the campaigns for Apple, Absolut, Danone, and Sony PlayStation resides not only in the quality of the creative expression and the executional talent of the people involved, but also in their strategic insights, their courage to think big, to aim high. The people who work on these brands do not under-leverage them. On the contrary, they build them a “larger share of the future,” as evidenced by the advertising.