

COLUMNS

Adapting to consumers' multiscreen behavior

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By [Gary Schwartz](#)

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I was speaking with David Epstein, the founder of The Unreasonable Institute, the brainchild of Unreasonable at Sea, the Google-sponsored innovation ship that is presently sailing from port to port globally.

Mr. Epstein's mission statement is borrowed from George Bernard Shaw, who in 1903, wrote in *Man and Superman*:

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

The Unreasonable Institute is based in Boulder, CO, and is working to bring entrepreneurs, innovators, thinkers and investors together for social change. He now has these same folk on a ship sailing the world with that disruptive mandate.

What Mr. Epstein is championing, and what Mr. Shaw posited over 100 years ago is applicable, if not essential, across all verticals today.

In the 2010s, when industry after industry is being rudely disrupted, we may need to be more unreasonable about our search for solutions and our adaptation to the new status quo. We have to become superbrands.

Man and Superman

Music, retail, media buying, broadcast and publishing are all incumbent industries that have, or are, about to pivot in a profound and irreversible way.

Indeed, many extant business models will dry up. Many old revenue streams will become commodity channels or be circumvented over-the-top by new technologies or new business models.

Telecommunications, more than any other industry, has profoundly impacted businesses. Some bemoan that “mobile” innovation has horizontally cut many companies at the knees.

Telecommunication innovation and disruption is not new. The history of telecommunications is the history of open systems and the invisible hand that attempted to close these systems: From RCA closing down FM Radio and early television.

It is the same recent history of Apple disintermediating the wireless carriers with an “Internet device” and then turning around and using the same iPhone to shut down the mobile Web with a closed App Store.

What is new about telecommunications in the 2010s is the pervasive nature of the technology, the democratization of information and access, and the liberation of the consumer.

The new entrepreneurs, innovators, thinkers and investors that are sailing on Mr. Epstein’s ship are the crew of innovators that needed to rethink the way we communicate with this new consumer.

And this requires a motley crew.

Chief unreasonable officer

Labels, retailers, brands, publishers and broadcasters cannot simply open innovation labs in the vain hope that they can reinvent their business from within.

Forces are at play in the mall and in the media houses that will require some unreasonable thought. The walls of our store are porous, per Walmart Stores Inc. CEO Mike Duke, and the Internet cloud is in our malls to stay.

To paraphrase Shaw: The reasonable person adapts to the world; the unreasonable person proactively turns the tables.

How do new-age brands become unreasonable?

1. Industries need to understand their new world and their new consumer.

This world is made up of consumer moments across their connected-screens during the course of the day.

Ten years ago, you never needed to follow these consumers. Now you need to plot their screen journey in minute detail.

2. The value may not lie exclusively on the screen but in connecting these screens.

In a world where, according to Google's Multiscreen Report, more than 90 percent of people use more than one screen to accomplish a single task, brands need to focus on the "digital Velcro" to connect these screen experiences.

One screen + another screen = a multiple of value: (1+1=3)

3. Stop relying exclusively on third parties and social networks to find your consumer.

"Dating services" are important, but you need to get out more. Forge a direct relationship with this new connected consumer.

4. Be unreasonable. Believe that your consumers can love your product and can share a common dialogue with your brand on their private and personal screen.

- This maybe simply the ability to shop for a brand seamlessly across screens, understanding the needs of the consumer at that moment of the day on a particular screen form factor.

- This maybe establishing a common interest such as wellness or nightlife and become part of the consumer's multiscreen narrative.

The new chief digital officer needs to create superbrands, and to do that she needs to be unreasonable across all her consumers' connected screens.

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