



The ASR33 "Birthday Machine"

**The Invention Of The Birthday Machine** by Bob Manna & Matt Manna • 004C95FA(R03)  
*"The truth about "truth" in communication is that there is none. In the same sense as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so too is the truth about a product, service, candidate, or cause."*

In 1878 author Margaret Wolfe Hungerford gave life to the now familiar idiom, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." In the nearly 135 years since, the assignment of beauty, of merit, of import, etc., remain as perceptions derived on an individual beholder basis. Thank goodness, because persuasion wouldn't be possible if it were any other way.

Perception makes persuasion possible. And every act of perception requires individual judgment; an individual opinion on the state of affairs in the world. Every act of perception requires active interpretation by individual beholders. If it were otherwise, if perceptions were the same from beholder to beholder, there would be no need for (and no) persuasion. There would only be statements of fact.

But every successful communicator will tell you that facts, standing alone, are incapable of achieving the superior results derived from a strongly felt perception. That's why we say, *a customer is incapable of thinking about a product until he or she has been guided to have a strong feeling about it.*

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The key to shaping perception, to causing a customer to feel deeply about a product, service, candidate, or cause is to create a message that stimulates the mind passionately. This condition cannot be achieved by a mere recitation of facts.

At Manna Groups we call this talent Sculpture — the ability to create messages that deeply resonate with the convictions already within the beholder. These messages represent the root of persuasion. At their best they connect a beholder to a product by way of a basic and invariable belief. Consider the following true story...

The last of the invited guests were passing through the rear doors of the conference area as the facilities' maintenance man approached the evening's presenter and said, "That was really amazing what you showed those people tonight. I couldn't believe my eyes. Was this a magic show or something?"

The "magic show" the maintenance man was referring to consisted of three pieces of equipment: a teletype machine, a telephone, and an acoustic coupler (the original modem). It was March 1965 and the presenter had used this equipment to demonstrate the latest in on-line keyboard remote access.

The demonstration consisted of typing in a birthdate volunteered by someone in the audience, pressing the teletype send key, and waiting for the teletype to "come alive" and type the day of the week on which the date fell. The process had been repeated several times and for each repetition the answer was found to be correct.

The maintenance man asked, "Can you do that for my birthday?"

"Sure" was the response from the evening's presenter, and one more time the demonstration was successfully conducted. To the system analysts and programmers in the audience that evening's demonstration was a clear and simple (albeit, rather prosaic) version of what the world now accepts as ordinary on-line processing.

But to the maintenance man it was something altogether different. As expressed in his own words: "Man, you've invented a birthday machine!"(1)

There has never been a clearer or more precise exemplification of, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." What the maintenance man told the presenter decades ago, is that perception is determined upon what customers already believe to be true.

Put succinctly, *the truth about "truth" in communication is that there is none. In the same sense as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so to is the truth about a product, service, candidate, or cause.* Consider the following:

"In 2005, corporations spent more than \$7.3 billion on market research in the United States alone. In 2007, that figure rose to \$12 billion. And that doesn't even include the additional expenses involved in marketing an actual product - the packaging and the displays, TV commercials, online banner ads, celebrity endorsements, and billboards - which carry a \$117 billion annual price tag in America alone. But if these strategies still work, then why do eight out of ten new product launches fail within the first three months?"

(From the New York Times Bestseller, *Buyology*, written by Martin Lindström)

The reason 80% of new product offerings fail is because the messages wrapped around the products do not persuade anyone to give them a try! Until a product is put into use, the truth about failure has nothing to do with what the product does, as a scientist, engineer, or ineffective communicator might think about it.

Until a product is bought and put to use, the only thing that matters is what meaning the customer's mind makes out of the communication that surrounds the product. How can it be otherwise?

The purpose of communication is not to introduce the customer to new truths. From the point of view of the customer there is no truth other than that which he or she already knows.

Communication's purpose is to produce positive, deeply felt, perceptions. This is done by re-arranging the truths that are already present in the minds of customers and prospects.

Happy Birthday, birthday machine. It's been forty-seven years since you reminded us that beauty really is in the eye of the beholder!



Photo by AlisonW

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(1): As related to Bob Manna by Dr. Dan Scott, a pioneer in remote keyboard access.

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<http://www.mannagroups.com/birthdaymachine/>

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