

FRICTION

PASSION BRANDS IN THE AGE OF DISRUPTION

JEFF ROSENBLUM
with
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Three Sample Chapters



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Friction: How Passion Brands Are Built in the Age of Digital Distribution

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Friction
is the
difference
between
the way
things are

and the
way they
should be.

**It's the big
things that
prevent us
from being
who we
want to be.**

**It's the little
things that
prevent us
from doing
what we
want to do.**

Fighting friction
provides a system
for prioritizing
opportunities.
It provides a
framework
for creative
development.

Digital technology completely disrupted the brand-building model that worked for the last century. Fighting friction is the new way forward.

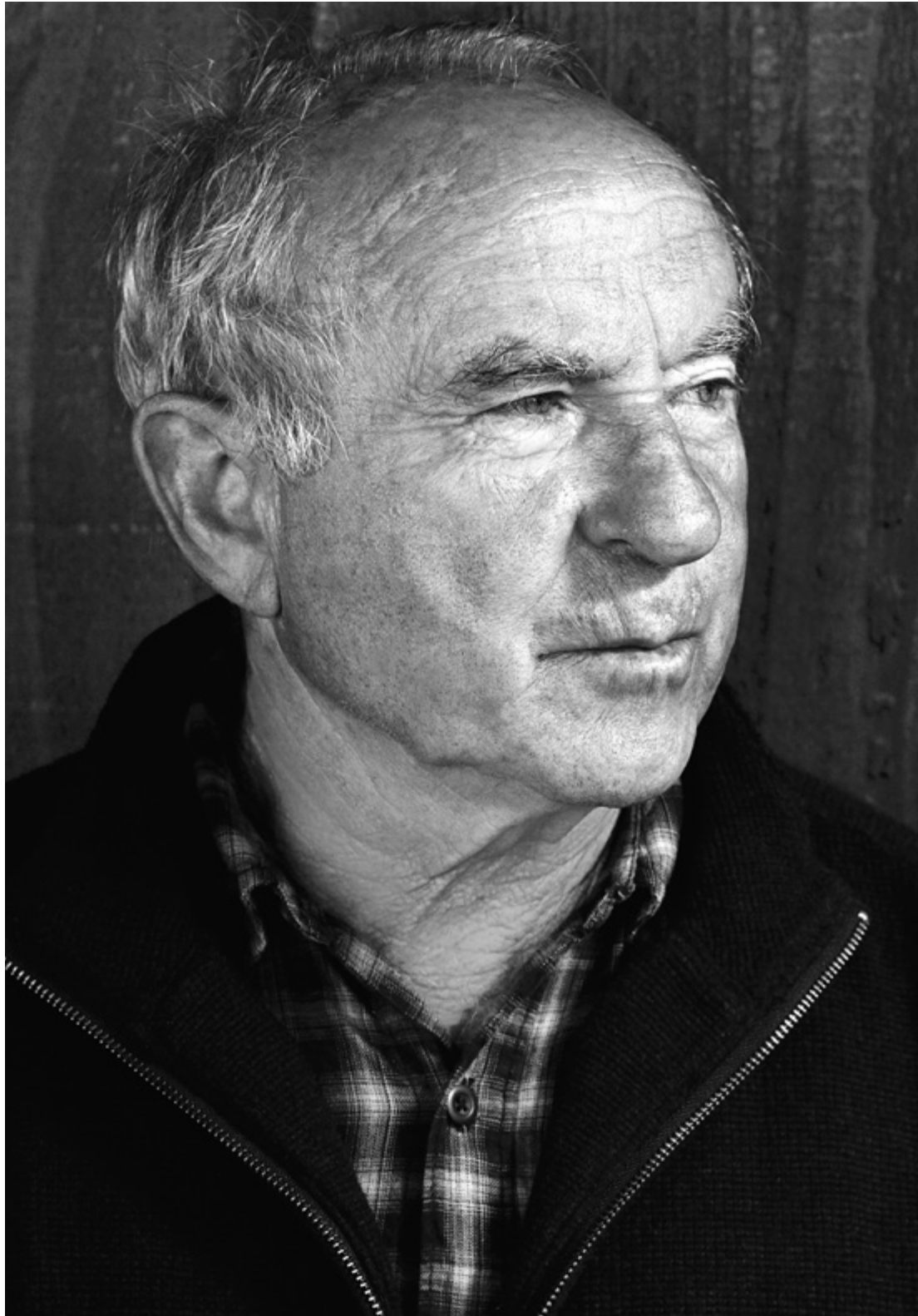
In a world where consumers are bombarded with marketing messages every moment they are awake, brands need to find a new way to stand out, get considered, build loyalty and win evangelists.

Fighting friction enables brands to divorce themselves from legacy business models. It is a revolutionary approach to building unprecedented customer relationships and unparalleled financial performance.

one

Revolution

**Great
brands
are built,
not
bought.**



1.1

Welcome to the revolution.

When Yvon graduated college, he and his friends called themselves dirtbags. They meant it as the highest of compliments. Dirtbags didn't care about capitalism. They didn't care about material things. They didn't care about anything except enjoying the great outdoors.

Yvon was part of the 1964 first ascent of the North America wall of El Capitan in Yosemite, using no fixed ropes. Over the next few years he spent countless months rock climbing. When he needed a break from rock climbing, he and his dirtbag friends went to the beach and surfed. That's it. That's all they cared about.

They cared so little about the finer things in life that they lived off cans of cat food, which they mixed with oatmeal for extra sustenance. They weren't even regular cans of cat food. They were the dented cans that they bought for pennies.

Advertising did amazing things. It took brands to places they'd never been before.

Even when you're eating cat food, you still need pocket money. So in 1957, Yvon bought an anvil. When he took a break from surfing, he pounded on metal until he invented new kinds of pitons that enabled climbers to tackle routes they could never scale before. Yvon originally sold them out of his car, but soon grew his company to a huge success.

He no longer needed to live off of cat food. Then one day in 1970, he was rock climbing in Yosemite and saw something that he had never seen before. There was a hole in the rock. A scar. At first, he couldn't figure out what caused the hole. But it tormented him.

Finally, Yvon realized what was damaging the thing that he loved the most in the whole world. It was the pitons he created. His invention was scarring the rock.

For a dirtbag, Yvon had become relatively rich from those pitons. He had more than enough money to climb and surf to his heart's content. But the thing that was helping fulfill his dreams was also hurting what he adored the most—the rocks he loved to climb.

When I first heard this story, it made me think of the equipment that corporations use to grow brands. Specifically, advertising. Like Yvon's pitons, advertising originally did amazing things. It made brands wildly successful and took them places they'd never been before.

But eventually advertising started to scar what brands love the most in this world—their reputation with their customers.

Yvon didn't try to solve the problem with his original equipment. He threw out the old designs and created new aluminum rock climbing equipment called chockstones. They enabled climbers to scale the rocks without leaving a mark. The clean climbing revolution was born.

Ultimately, his new equipment led to the creation of Patagonia, one of the world's most successful outdoor gear and apparel companies.

From the start, Patagonia used a revolutionary approach to virtually everything. Nowadays it's common for companies to have on-site childcare and cafeterias dedicated to healthy choices. Patagonia had both in 1984. In 1986, it first committed a share of its revenue and profits to environmental causes. It demanded the

use of organic cotton in 1994, before most people knew what organic was.

This is core to how the Patagonia brand is built. Patagonia rarely uses traditional advertising. Instead, they use a platform that removes friction. They understand that to enjoy their products, their customers need a healthy environment.

So they donate to environmental causes, create content that exposes the damage that their own manufacturing does to the environment and print collateral that asks their customers to buy fewer products.

This spirit was exemplified in their revolutionary initiative that took over their website and marketing collateral. It had a picture of a new Patagonia jacket and urged customers in a giant font: "Don't Buy This Jacket."

By asking their audience to purchase fewer jackets, they could help reduce the amount of garbage from old jackets and manufacturing by-products from new jackets. This was not just a passing PR gambit. This was a friction-fighting platform.



*Brands need
tools that
don't create
scars.*

The friction that exists for Patagonia customers is that the creation of outdoor gear actually damages the great outdoors. So Patagonia built a platform to remove the friction. They empower the audience through education.

In spite of doing things that seem contrary to their direct interests, their approach is working. Patagonia has never performed better. That's the power of removing friction.

Fighting friction works because the digital revolution fundamentally altered the relationship between brands and consumers.

Brands can no longer create scars and cover them up with slick ad campaigns. Everyone knows the truth and they know it in real-time.

Just as Yvon needed to create a new tool to climb mountains, brands need a new tool to build success. A tool that improves people's lives. A tool that helps brands prioritize how their resources are invested. A tool that leads to unparalleled financial performance. That's what happens when brands replace friction with empowerment.

This isn't a book about how to create a good brand or have a good career. There are hundreds of books on those topics. This is a book about how to create a breakthrough brand. A brand that breaks its addiction to advertising and creates an army of evangelists. A brand that cuts through the hype of the latest media technology tools. A brand that focuses on behaviors over messaging. A brand that empowers its customers and dominates the competition.

**Brands that
fight friction
empower.**

**Not just
interrupt.**

twoc

Branding

**Brands are
defined
by their
behavior,
not their
messaging.**



2.1

Friction kills.

Humans have had a rough understanding of friction since the Sumerians invented the wheel. Centuries later, Leonardo Da Vinci was the first to recognize that the motion of the wheel was ruled by mathematical principles.

In the 19th century, the military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz applied friction in a way that also applies to modern business competition. He defined friction as the difference between war as we think it should be and war as it is.

Some of the world's most influential and creative people work in marketing. They are excited about this change.

Now it's brands' turn. Disrupted by search, mobile and social technology, brands realize that their cozy relationships with customers are in disarray. People have stopped looking at traditional forms of marketing. They have technology to tune out the thousands of brand messages they receive a day. They're cutting cords. They're downloading ad blockers. They get annoyed at the little things and amplify it through their digital connections.

We need a new paradigm to confront a new reality. Removing friction provides a path forward. It creates a system for embracing transparency, engaging audiences, building armies of evangelists and unleashing

unprecedented growth. It is the modern and long-term way to build passion brands.

Some of the world's most influential and creative people work in marketing. They are excited about this change. They see that there's an opportunity to conduct business in a way that benefits both behemoth corporations and folks living on Main Street.

Brands were previously limited to communicating through an 11-inch print ad, a 30-second TV ad or a 300-pixel banner ad.

The creative canvas is now virtually unlimited. Brands have the ability to create utility and tell stories in completely new ways.

They no longer need to interrupt people. They can truly engage them. Not merely to entertain, but to bring value and meaningful experiences to their lives.

Machiavelli wrote that it was more important for a leader to seem virtuous than to actually be virtuous. That's the old model. It's why the advertising industry has been known for obfuscation and duplicity.

With the fall of traditional advertising, brands now stand naked in front of their customers. This transparency frees marketers to make long-term investments that affect people in positive ways.

Fighting friction can be as simple as helping people cook a better meal, play a better guitar solo, sign up for better healthcare or have better control of their personal finances. Fighting friction is about relationship building. It's about brands authentically finding a place in their customers' lives.

These new frictionless platforms are not cutting into margins as one would predict. Instead, they are delivering huge financial rewards. They are creating a new definition of advertising. One that puts less emphasis on projecting the image of being great and more on actually being great.

2.2

Friction is critical because it provides us with the framework we've all been looking for. It's the roadmap. The why and the how.

Inherently, we understand that a consumer revolution has taken place. We recognize that technology has permanently altered the relationship between brands and consumers.

But this communication disruption has only led to business disruption. Every day, stalwart brands find themselves losing market share while upstarts have captured our collective consciousness.

Trillions of dollars are being made and lost while brands grasp for the newest media and technology tools, not recognizing that the strategic underpinnings need to change.





2.3

Brands spend billions creating friction.

Traditional advertising is based on a reach and frequency model, which focuses on how many people brands reach and how frequently they can reach them. While the industry has spent decades perfecting this model, it hasn't stopped to think what that frequency is based on: interruptions!

In virtually no walk of life are interruptions considered a powerful tool for building relationships. They are one of the least appealing forms of communication. They are rude. They are annoying. They shut down the audience's ability to listen. But they have been at the core of the industry's strategy.

The old model was reach and frequency. **The new model is reach and empathy.**

The future for building true passion brands is not about simply buying interruptions on various platforms. It's about creating meaning and value. This is a sustainable approach based on real leadership—not a continual search for relevance on yet another platform. It will work now and continue to work in decades to come.

Finding friction is only half of the equation. The second half is the exciting part. It's about replacing friction with empowerment. It's about brands moving people's lives forward one small step at a time.

The marketing industry needs to replace reach and frequency with reach and empathy. Rather than relying upon paid media to interrupt people and hope they care, the objective is to create content and experiences that are so powerful people go out of their way to participate in them and then share them with others.

Content and experiences that are so powerful, people are affected on a visceral level, building a true relationship between the brand and its audience. A relationship similar to one they have with friends. One based on open communication, loyalty and understanding. It's about getting the audience to truly care.



The biggest question in any business decision is: **who's picking up the tab?**

The biggest question in any business decision is: who's picking up the tab for all this? That's the easiest part of the equation.

Corporations spend billions each year on paid media for their reach and frequency model. The money goes to TV ads, pre-rolls, mobile pop-ups, billboards and all the other annoying crap that gets in the way of consumers doing what they want. The great irony is that brands invest billions creating friction rather than fighting friction.

Every new technological advancement—web browsers, social media, mobile applications—seems to bring with it a new excuse to create friction. Marketers keep making ads, and the audience keeps running away.

Right now, for example, the business world has gone gaga over Millennials because they're starting to have disposable income. They now represent \$1.3 trillion in annual spending. But Millennials were raised in a connected, transparent world.

It's easy to call this insane, but the simple fact is that it's institutionalized muscle memory. Marketers keep doing the same thing because that's what they know how to do.

Let's dig into the changes taking place to understand why friction fighting is so critical. For years, advertising built brands, no question. Launch a product, advertise, people purchase, invest in more ads. Do it at scale, and a P&G is born.

The innovation that first gave consumers the ability to fight back against advertising was shockingly mundane. It was a piece of indexing technology known as a search engine. It had all the sex appeal of a phone book.

If we are in the early stages of a business revolution, the rise of search engines was the Boston Tea Party. It was a signal event that promised violent change.

Search engines shifted power from brands to consumers. They no longer had to watch jingles on TV to learn what new toys to buy their kids. They simply had to ask Google. Instead of being mildly helpful, interruptive ads became annoying sales pitches from people they really didn't trust.

The problem only deepened with the advent of technologies built for outright avoiding ads, such as DVRs, spam blockers, ad blockers and do-not-call lists.

But that's just the physical avoidance of advertising. What's worse is the emotional avoidance of ads. Up to 89 percent of TV ads are ignored according to recent ethnographic studies—and not because of DVRs or remote controls.

The audience simply looks down at their mobile devices. They mess around on Instagram and email for a few minutes and look back up when the ads are done running.

In this model, advertising still has a core role. An empowering experience without advertising to build awareness is like a **candy store in the desert.**

But TV isn't the only casualty. Most marketers regard 2015 as a watershed, because that's when brands finally woke up to the fact that their customers were not sitting around watching TV commercials anymore. So they shifted the bulk of their money toward digital. 30-second TV spots became 30-second pre-rolls. Print ads became banner ads. Junk mail became spam.

Think about it: Digital has fundamentally changed the way that human beings interact with the world around them. And what was the business world's response to this world-changing technology? Pop-up ads. Motherfucking pop-up ads.

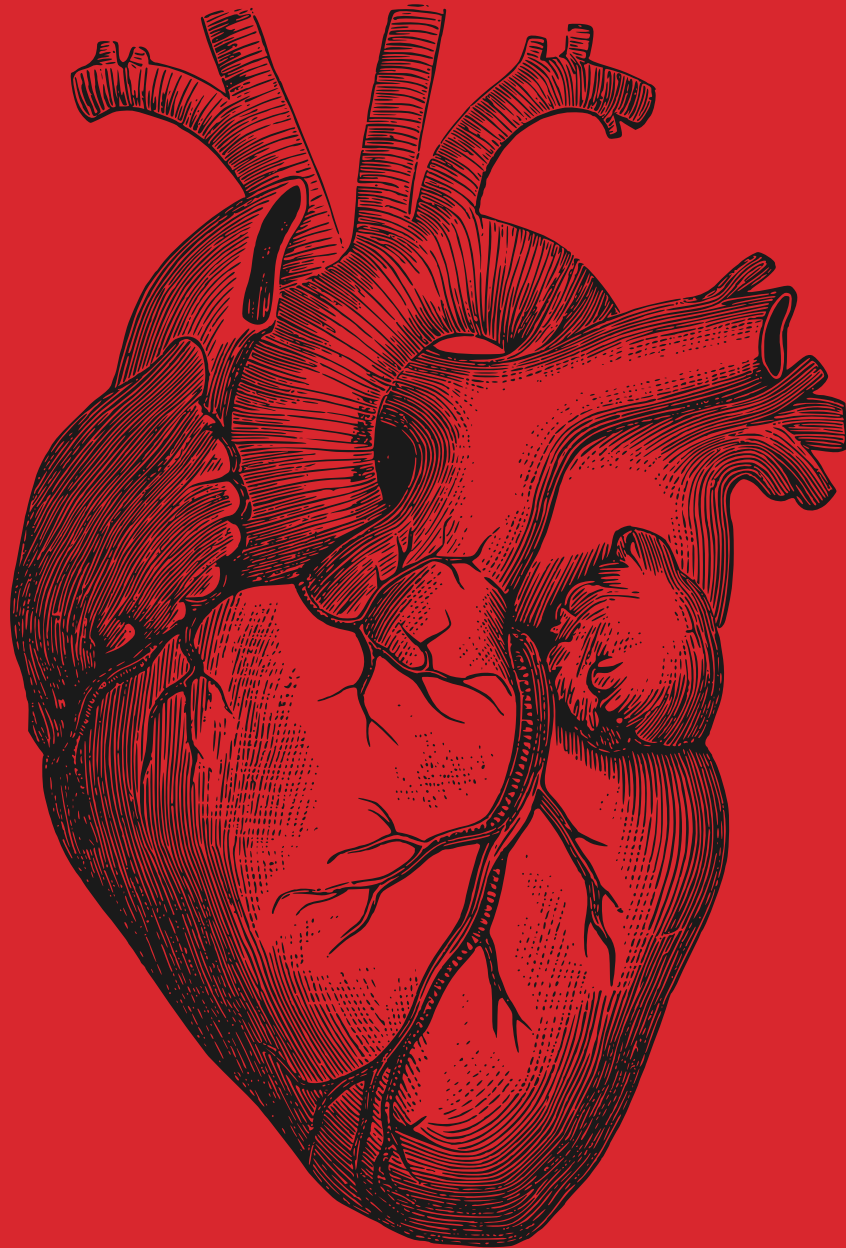
It's no surprise to find out that they aren't working. Data proves that you're mathematically more likely to survive a plane crash than click on a banner ad.

That's because the new interruptive ads are even more annoying than the old ones. Digital media has changed the way we look at the world and our expectations of how quickly things should happen.

In this model, advertising still has a core role. An empowering experience without advertising to build awareness is like building a candy store in the desert. Advertising must be used to generate traffic. But it simply needs to provide a gateway to immersive experiences. It no longer needs to tell the complete brand story.

Brands need a shift in strategy that is commensurate with the shift in consumer behavior. We're asking advertising to do too much. That's why the new branding model is empowerment over interruptions.





2.4

Removing friction shifts brands from transactional to **emotional.**

Transactional brands offer the right product at the right price at the right time. They launch ad campaigns that capture the audience's attention. People pay a fair price, they are not particularly loyal, and the relationship is completely rational.

Emotional brands, on the other hand, create irrational relationships—irrational in the most positive ways. They generate irrational enthusiasm. They charge irrational prices. They have customers who ignore the competition. They have evangelists who proselytize with clothing, online reviews and impassioned conversations around the dinner table.

Good brands are transactional. Great brands are emotional.

The best way to understand the power of an emotional relationship is to simply look at someone you love, like your children. Sure, your kids are extremely cute. But nobody gets more pleasure out of their photos and their videos than you.

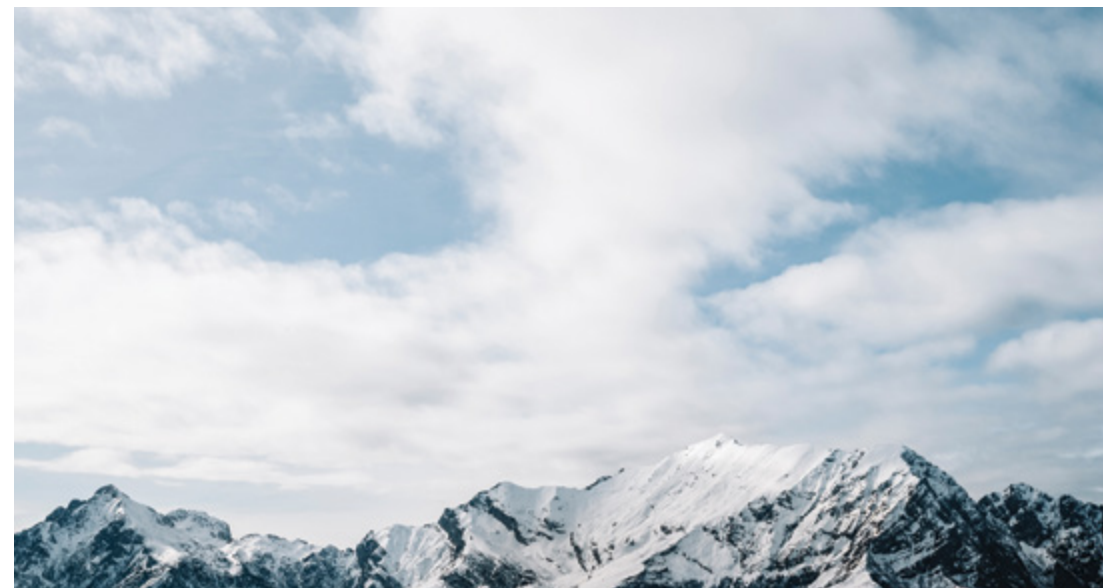
The relationship that you have with your children is not rational, it's emotional, and that's a beautiful thing. They look better to you than to anybody else. They're cuter to you than to anybody else. They're funnier and smarter and more entertaining to you than to anybody else. That's the power brands have when they shift from a rational, transactional relationship to an emotional relationship.

You know who some of these brands are: SoulCycle, Apple, Patagonia, Under Armour. At this point you may be sick of hearing about them. But irrational brands are popping up in the most surprising of categories.

Take Yeti coolers, for example. They charge \$650 for a cooler. Sure, they make a much better cooler than the competition, but they charge ten times as much as needed for a decent product.

It's not just that their customers happily pay this amount; they consider it a point of pride. As crazy as this sounds for a company that makes coolers, Yeti is a full-blown lifestyle brand. Those who can't afford a Yeti cooler will proudly purchase a Yeti hat.

While rational brands purchase 30-second interruptions and hope to God that somebody actually watches one, Yeti has a series of videos that extoll the virtues of outdoor adventures ranging from kayaking to fly fishing. They've been watched and shared millions of times over. Rather than simply sell products on the Yeti website, they use it as a storytelling platform. The site has dozens of the most inspiring stories I've ever seen.



In the videos, the Yeti brand is almost invisible. In one video about a death-defying all-night kayaking trip called the *Texas Water Safari*, they feature everyday people who push themselves to the breaking point for the sake of winning a patch that has no financial value and no bragging rights outside of a small group of fellow competitors.

The video is absolutely mesmerizing. With small cameras mounted on the kayaks, Yeti captures the thrill and danger of the event. It's unlike anything most people have seen before. It captures viewer's attention for a full 7 minutes.

By comparison, the typical interaction with a digital ad lasts 1.6 seconds. The only time the Yeti brand is clearly displayed is at the very end of the video on the hat of a competitor who passes out in the grass after the event. The product placement is fun, authentic and completely frictionless.

What Yeti proves is that removing friction is not only about taking away problems in the interactions that a brand has with its audience. It's about providing value throughout the entirety of the journey that people go through in life.

Yeti makes coolers that are certified grizzly bear-proof. Seriously, there's an organization called the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, and it endorsed them. That's clearly a piece of friction for those who are camping and fishing in very specific areas. But the greater piece of friction is that people desperately want to be inspired.

Yeti fans don't just watch the videos to be entertained. They are thought-provoking. They are motivating. They help Yeti fans envision a better version of themselves, one that is more active. More adventurous. More fun.

Rapha is another brand with seemingly irrational behavior that is creating irrational results. They charge more than \$200 for a cycling jersey. That's four times as much as most other jerseys.

Rapha customers don't just happily buy the jerseys. They flaunt them. The brand is a badge. It's a source of pride.

Yes, they create very high-quality clothing and gear, but their customer loyalty is driven by something much bigger. Rapha focuses on enriching the cycling community. Rapha fans are not just looking for a great ride. They want to be part of a group of passionate, like-minded individuals.

The need for belonging is one of the most basic of all human instincts. Rapha customers don't just want to ride their bikes. They want to share stories and experiences. They want to push and be pushed to greater levels of performance. They have an insatiable need to be immersed in cycling culture.

So Rapha retail stores don't just sell products; they serve food and drinks and provide communal tables where riders can meet and greet each other. They are places where riders can tell tall tales and feel, innately, like they belong. Rapha helps riders get more out of cycling than simply exercise or transportation.

But the true beauty of Rapha's ethos can be found in the little ways they fight friction.

For example, they realized that many of their shoppers take a bike to the store, and most of these bikes are expensive. So they've built bike racks inside the store rather than out front. That type of behavior at face value is irrational.

Their location in New York City is one of the most expensive retail locations on the planet. And yet they're using space to give people a place to put their bikes rather than using it to sell products. It's unprecedented and absolutely not needed. But it shows a deep-rooted understanding of the audience. It demonstrates respect. It builds trust.

It's easy to dismiss the lessons of Yeti and Rapha because they compete in the outdoor category. There will always be something implicitly cool about outdoor adventure. But emotional brands can be built in the most unlikely of places.

USAA is a financial services firm for military personnel and their families. The friction that USAA removes is that people want more control and earning power from their personal finances, but ironically, most financial services do the exact opposite. USAA, on the other hand, makes transparency and control key performance indicators.

Recently I received a call from USAA. To be honest, I was barely paying attention. I was just listening to make sure I didn't miss a payment. Since it was USAA, I was willing to semi-listen.



*It's not
about
acquiring
customers,
it's about
building
tribes.*

After a few minutes, I realized something and interrupted. “Wait, are you calling to tell me you are giving me money back?” I asked. “Yes, sir” was the reply in a sweet Southern drawl. Apparently, I had two different products with some crossover. They realized I didn’t need them both, adjusted my account, and gave me money back. The total was \$176. That’s not chump change, but it’s not life changing either.

What was changed, however, was my permanent perception of the company. As I go through the stages of life, I will consider and trust USAA before any other financial services company.

That doesn’t make me unique. 92 percent of USAA members plan to stay for life. That’s an insanely high number, particularly given that loyalty is often the most important predictor of business success.

Loyalty isn’t simply a goal for USAA. They structure every aspect of their business to build loyalty through empowerment.

One quarter of its annual hires served in the military or come from a military family. They offer free financial advice to those being deployed or returning to civilian life. Their Educational Foundation conducts close to 850 financial management presentations annually to 50,000 attendees in the military community.

Despite the fact that USAA is fundamentally smaller than the competition, they’ve been leading innovators. They created an app that enables members to make deposits simply by taking a photo of a check.

While this technology is commonplace now, USAA owns the patent. They developed it so that overseas military personnel could remove the friction of depositing checks from the opposite side of the world. That’s not just technology. That’s empathy, empowerment and respect.

Looking back on the last 100 years of advertising literature, most people consider brands a promise or a story. That’s insufficient. Ultimately, brands are a shortcut. Consumers are now bombarded with thousands of marketing messages every day. That’s more than any human being can manage. They need shortcuts. They need brands they can relate to. Brands that inspire them.

So Yeti’s videos about outdoor adventurers, Rapha’s indoor bike rack and USAA’s customer service may not seem like much. But they help turn those brands into shortcuts. The audience knows that if the brand understands them at a fundamental level, then it’s a brand they can have a relationship with. It’s a brand they can fall in love with.



**We all have
an innate
desire for
improvement.**

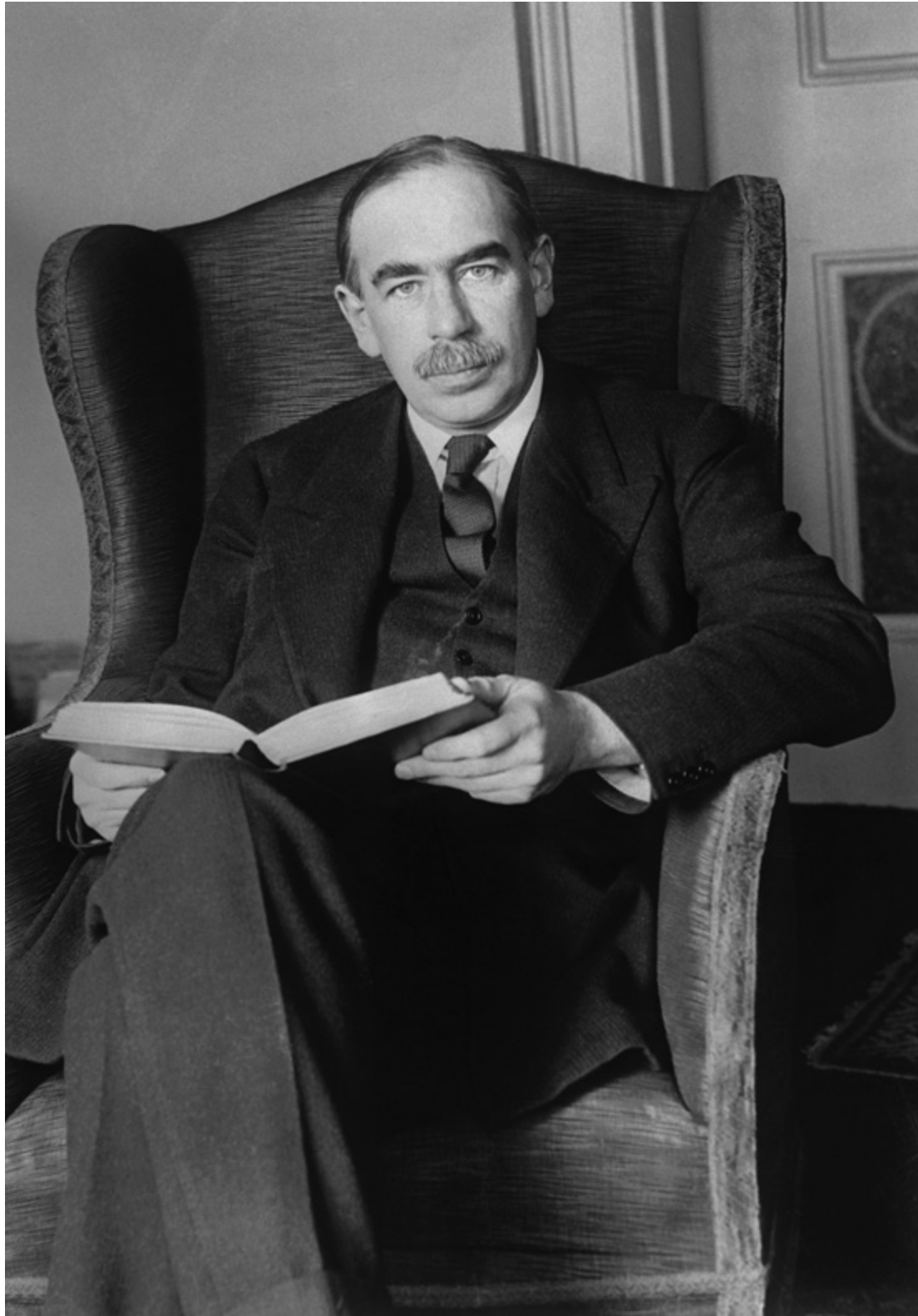
**When brands
empower,
thousands
of years of
evolution
naturally pull
the audience
to those
experiences.**

three

Categories

Macro friction is at the category level.

Micro friction is at the brand level.



3.1

As in economics, friction can be categorized into **macro** and **micro**.

Macro friction sits at the category level. It's the gap between the way things are and the way they should be in an entire industry. Removing it helps people have better vacations, gain better control of their finances or become better musicians. It helps people become a better version of themselves. Removing macro friction creates an emotional connection to a brand.

Remove macro and micro friction to create **emotional** and **rational** connections.

By contrast, micro friction sits at the brand level. It's not the big-headline, empowering stuff. It's the difference between the way things are and the way things should be in how brands sell and support products. It's anything that makes it hard to make the right purchase decision or get the most value out of products that are already purchased. Removing micro friction creates a rational connection to a brand.

To understand the difference between macro and micro, let's look at Uber, since it's a brand we all use and understand. The macro friction is that millions of people need a more convenient tool for short-range travel. So they created a safe, easy, reliable way for people to get a ride. Both drivers and riders simply need to use a straightforward mobile app. That's what removes macro friction. They elevated an entire category.

Yet, it's the micro friction aspects of the experience that are equally powerful. It only requires one click to provide your home address or share your music playlist with the driver. You never need to take out your wallet to pay, and you don't need to calculate the tip. What I find truly fascinating is that both drivers and riders are extremely nice to each other because they are policed by the five-star ratings.

It's the granular micro friction—fighting tactics that make it such an appealing experience. The user base for Uber is so passionate that the only advertisements you see for the brand are to recruit drivers to keep up with the consumer demand. That's the power of removing both macro and micro friction.



Remove macro friction by empowering people to get more value out of a category.

Let's dive deeper into macro friction. Patagonia removes it by fighting the ironic aspect of the category, which is that manufacturing products to enjoy in the great outdoors actually harms the great outdoors. Take, for example, those amazing board shorts that dry within minutes of getting out of the ocean. Mother Nature didn't make those shorts. When Patagonia makes those, it creates by-products, some of which are harmful to the environment.

So how does Patagonia manage this friction? Not by refusing to make board shorts, but by empowering intelligent choice. It created a tool called the *Footprint Chronicles* that shows customers the entire supply chain for its products so that customers can find out how Patagonia products impact the environment and what Patagonia is doing to improve. This empowers customers to decide if they want to buy or not, without the hype or obfuscation of marketing messages.

This isn't simply a campaign. It's part of a platform. At the moment that I sit writing this chapter, the first panel of their current website's home page isn't gear or apparel. It's a book called *Patagonia Tools for Grassroots Activists: Best Practices for Success in the Environmental Movement*. In their retail stores, they have bookshelves dedicated to similar content. They also produce documentary films that they promote through every possible channel they own and screen in their stores.

They use every touchpoint between the brand and the audience to hammer home a single point: We need a healthier environment. Patagonia is clearly passionate about the great outdoors. That's core to their culture. But it's also good business, because removing macro friction creates an army of evangelists that carry the brand forward much more effectively than paid advertising.

When I go fly fishing, it's shockingly consistent how heavily the guides are covered in Patagonia labels. By definition, those guides are the most influential people on the river. And you're damn right that people are influenced to purchase what the guides wear.

Interestingly enough, as Patagonia became a massive success, other brands misinterpreted the results and tried to be green, too. That's not the point. People don't expect that, and they don't reward it. They don't wake up in the morning expecting brands to hug the trees and save the manatees. Coke is out saving polar bears, but no one actually thinks Coke really cares.

Rather, this is a relationship story. Brands speaking to the audience in a way that's never been done before. Enriching people's lives in a relatively small but authentic way.

Patagonia's key competitor, The North Face, demonstrates this point brilliantly. It competes in the same exact category, but it tackles a completely different source of macro friction. The North Face realized that to fully enjoy the outdoors requires intense training.

They have Mountain Athletics, which is a series of training events led by experts that take place rain or shine. They have a speaker series where the audience gets inspired by tales from some of the world's great adventurers, and they fund nonprofits to enable the next generation of outdoor explorers.

Some of North Face's content and tools have changed over time. I was enamored with a series of North Face training videos that feature the world's best athletes in sports such as rock climbing and skiing. Apparently, they didn't catch on as the brand hoped, so the videos are less prominent.

But that's the beauty of an empowering platform rather than a campaign. The core philosophy lives on in perpetuity while the individual activations morph and optimize.

The key to removing macro friction is that it elevates the entire category, regardless of whether the people using the content are customers of the brand that created it. Patagonia's environmental platform helps anyone interested in the health of the planet. The North Face's performance platform helps anyone interested in outdoor fitness. It certainly appears unfocused to invest in content that could be used by a competitor's customers, but the point is to prove at an instinctual level that the brand truly cares about its positioning and its customers.

You can find macro friction in any category. It's why products and services are developed in the first place: to solve problems and fill a need.

But consumers want more than products now. They want experiences. Not arbitrary experiences. Not simply fun or entertaining experiences. They want experiences that move their lives forward, one small step at a time.

Remove micro friction by making products easier to purchase and use.

Only half the equation is removing macro friction. Admittedly, it's the fun half. Removing micro friction is the more rational but equally important component of the equation. Micro friction sits at the brand level. It is anything that impacts someone's ability to purchase or use a product.

It's everywhere. It's the plastic packaging that requires a machete to open. It's the instruction manual that requires a Mensa genius to comprehend it. It's the airline boarding pass that requires a magnifying glass to find the gate number. It's the telephone support that leaves a caller on hold indefinitely. It's the person behind the counter who doesn't smile when asked a basic question.

Fighting micro friction has increased in importance because the relationship between brands and consumers has become increasingly complex.

Not long ago, there were primarily two key touchpoints between a brand and its audience: advertising and retail. Brands like The Gap could develop a clean, organized, bright retail environment with relatively cool products and dominate the competition.

Now, there's an almost infinite number of ways that brands touch consumers, and most of them are digital in nature.

This digital-centric relationship has created exponentially growing sources of micro friction. It can be found on the website that isn't optimized for mobile, in videos that take too long to get to the point, in the hidden ratings and reviews, in the confusing error warnings, in clumsy checkout processes, in pop-up windows, in failed log-ins, in malfunctioning voice recognition replies, and thousands of other places that create stress.

We are witnessing entire industries being revolutionized by brands that remove macro and micro friction. Take restaurants for example. The macro friction is that food should nurture, but oftentimes it simply makes us unhealthy.

So brands like Sweetgreen offer completely organic meals that are served as quickly and conveniently as fast food. But it's the micro friction—fighting tactics that bring the macro friction platform to life. There is virtually no friction in the entire experience.

The containers are completely recyclable. You can't buy bottles of water, but they'll give you a cup for free water. There's information about calorie counts and food sources. You don't even need to wait online. Their mobile app enables users to place orders and pick them up at predetermined times with complete meal customization.

One might think this is some elitist brand that doesn't represent mainstream users. When I sat down to conduct research with customers at one of their locations to discuss this exact topic, a maintenance worker from my building walked in to pick up the lunch he ordered on his app. I'll take that as a pretty strong data point coupled with some ironic timing.

Consumers have too many options to have patience with a bad brand relationship. If they run into headwinds, they can quickly shift to a different brand or merchant.

It only requires one simple click for users to abandon a brand and less than a minute at the keyboard to bitch about their experience to millions of others.

Removing either macro or micro friction will make a good brand. Removing both creates a passion brand, one with a user base that is not only loyal but actively proselytizes. It doesn't work to fight one without the other, because each depends on the other.

Removing macro friction without addressing micro friction will make the brand seem inauthentic. Removing micro friction without addressing macro friction will fail to make an emotional connection.

People are bombarded with brand messages every moment they're awake. Decisions are made in seconds. People read social posts, not Shakespeare. All this has changed the way brains function.

Human beings are not patient. They don't need to be. There are too many new start-ups that focus on removing friction through digital tools. There are too many competitors in any category. Removing macro and micro friction is not only about creating a passion brand, it is critical for survival.

It doesn't
matter what
category
you are in,
Uber is your
competition.

Customers have
no empathy for
your brand.

They only have
heightened
expectations.