

45. Burnt by Dot.coms

E-commerce remains a business inferno. You can choose from among a vast array of products with a mere flicker of a mouse, cling to your cozy hearthside, consume less gasoline, render few sales taxes, warm to discounts, and withstand practically no incompetence from blithering intermediaries, your excuse to get even and singe the system. Why shouldn't end-users plug directly into providers eager to sell trivial items unlikely to be returned? Why preserve a salesforce? Yet another back room livelihood was on the firing line, more waste to smoke out.

It's not like computers haven't torched other professions. Linotype operators in 60's made \$20/hour setting hot type on hard to handle contraptions. Along came personal computers and *killer apps* that captured their expertise and reduced this livelihood to ashes. Advertising increasingly blazes with clip art and digital snapshots instead of on-site shoots and repro-grade processing. But it's not only pricey specialists who fry. Before word processing, industry's ovens were tended by legions of minimum wage clerks and typists. Today, professionals blast out their own memos, calcify them with editing tools, and zap them like plasma arcs over Intranets. Centralized keyboarding has fizzled. CAD/CAM immolated armies of blueprint operators and drafters. Nobody has money or time to burn, said techno-zealots, who were candescently correct. Communication had to accelerate. Why pay unskilled prima donnas when you can do it yourself? Why not reduce hands touching projects? Too many cooks spoil recipe. Businesses buy into any scheme that brightens prospects and cauterizes costs. Will your charcoal suited choleric salesforce soon be soot?

Even though Internet has been around for 30 years, interest only ignited when sending pictures became practical. Pictures could already be digitized, but scanned files sizes dwarfed text; to desiccate that old adage, 1,000 words/bytes barely equaled a tiny picture. It took NASA to develop a standard, JPEG, for rapid transmission across vast distances from Voyager. File compression helped quicken graphics sent over wires and taken up by 1 candle-power modems, so they open glowingly onto your screen. Retailers were soon using these advances to make products sizzle on Web. Electronic advertising combined with electronic credit. E-commerce caught fire, stock issues lit up exchanges, and result was a conflagration now employing over three million. This morsel of

history, better baked elsewhere, points to how innovation explodes into other areas, businesses, careers, lives.

Something gets toasted whenever there's a technological shift. Selling things on-line, they don't have to stock shelves in stores, don't need as many salespeople, and use each transaction as an opportunity to spy on you. Consequently, they ship you half-baked stuff or wrong items at your expense. Cash paid retail was far less intimidating. Or take word processing. No longer only for wordsmiths; anyone can vent a verbal volcano. What you once got in print was a reliable alloy of authorship, illustration, editing, proofreading, research, teams of experienced content specialists maintaining highest production values. There were balances and checks, talents smelted with censorship and cooperation. What you often see on Internet are chain letters begging for dollars, connections to others, cogs in a machine, interwoven links, smoldering agendas, and tacky porn blistered by misspellings and offensively bad grammar. It's a burning wheel begging, "What's next?", "What have you done for me?", "What are you going to do for me right away, how I want it, immediate gratification?" Impatient, smoldering links. *Quality* is sacrificed by those for whom words have little meaning, those who broil instead for *equality*. For them Internet equals empowerment. It sends up their burnt offerings to widest clientele, World itself. Even so, society is slow to react. Libraries haven't petered out and retail book sellers continue to crackle. As long as they remain familiar, old standbys still enlighten expediently. But change is irrevocable. Advancements are like hearths; people want a good flame before tossing on another log. As it begins to offer universal information access, Internet will inevitably incinerate all infrastructure readers take for granted. Books will someday become charred fetishes few can afford, except, ironically, those who forged fortunes by early investing in dot.coms and getting out before their meltdown.

When it comes to profit, many e-commerce sites have flamed out. It's not because Internet isn't many honest suppliers bidding openly against each other. What gets electrocuted is salesmanship. Dot.coms go wrong by missing an essential human need for simple patience, sincere persuasion, and social contact. Urls are fine at flashing details, grilling prospects, and sparking curiosity. Website pages are atomic age mail-order catalogs. But no matter how many virtual walk-throughs they present, that isn't *selling*. It's only purveying what's already been sold some other way. Real salespeople are always *closing*, getting signatures onto bottom lines, fanning a deal to flash point when it wasn't even smoldering. Dot.coms can

be hell when problems arise with purchases. Internet makes a good billboard, catalog, hot postcard exchange, idea cauldron, news source, and warehouse. It's not any of the following:

Showroom—Without retail stores, people can't try products, so all they do is make uninformed decisions. This means paying double for shipping costs receiving and returning, not cost productive or practical for consumers, profitable but wasteful for petrofuel driven carriers. Stocking nodes in your distribution chain works better, so retail showrooms persist. Besides salespeople actually sell, close deals, turn prospects into customers. But there's pressure to do away with breathing bodies and costs of staying open: hiring help for controlling inventory, displaying stock, and providing security, and utilities of electricity, heat, and water.

Classroom—Since you have to grade students by testing, cheating would be rampant. Despite encryption and passwords, students could get anyone to step in remotely and take a test by proxy, so system would be subverted. Anyway, quality of information on Internet is suspect at best. For good reason, church doctrine calls for congregating, dispensing benefaction, and offering thanks collectively. Religion is all about communion, not alienation, which sets it apart from club and solo bicycling and web surfing.

Library—More goes on at libraries than distractions. Their mission is to make knowledge attainable to unwashed masses, people without computers. They break down cultural misapprehensions, connect applicants with skills, distribute media for free to those who otherwise couldn't afford it, foster compassion, and provide safe shelter to kids after school. In some cases, they attract society's castoffs. To cut costs, cities and towns everywhere are limiting hours that they stay open, which only immolates lowest classes. Only the rich who have their own libraries applaud tax cuts. As long as you can enter a library and open a book, you're allowed to think for yourself, the very foundation of freedom.

Café, Club or Mall—Email and list servers give only a veneer of community. For any real interaction, you have to meet people face to face. About the best feature of a mall is how much walking you must do, the only penance obese patrons must endure. Being separated from smells and ways of other humans desensitizes you to their needs, makes you imagine things are okay just because you don't hear from them, and promotes bad decisions on how best to help, which, conversely, would consist of letting them do their own thing but treating them with dignity when they ask for help. Instead, those who ask for help are labeled crackpots and cranks, when they're usually the only kiln dried intellects around.

After buying National Cash Register back in 1884, Patterson was shocked that registers didn't sell themselves, so fused exclusive territories and pre-rehearsed patter into a system of selling that still persists, particularly among companies trying to sell high price, low volume products. A few years ago Xerox's CEO Thomas tried to reorganize copier sales around company types rather than territories. Experiment fizzled and Rick was fired. Yet it was an attempt to offer solutions rather than push products, to understand customer needs, not wilt relationships through needless expenditure. Business pundits say this may prove an ideal model.

According to industry sources, despite many new opportunities, there's been a net loss in sales positions. A core melt down might serve them right. Many salesmen are loud louts who get away a lot, since their good at lying. It's no wonder they're feeling heat. Computers never nap, work 24/7 without complaint, do only what you tell them. Can anyone compete against such withering attributes? Why get incensed by a little advice? While still a corporate acolyte, Al cooked up this Sales Alphabet:

- a) *Arrogance* doesn't sell; it *alienates* those who would warm to you.
- b) *Be your brand*. Know every detail of product being sold.
- c) *Confidently compare* competitors' features against yours.
- d) *Do what Dot.coms do*. *Duplicate* their speed. Don't make prospects wait. Email now; follow up. Leads evaporate in <3 days.
- e) *Earn* prospect's attention and trust. Dot.coms are already inside. Are you as easy to do business with?
- f) *Focus* your humanity to sense what prospects *fear*. Dot.coms do a lot of talking, but little listening. Empathize then redirect.
- g) *Greet* customers' needs; let these *guide* you. *Give* good solutions.
- h) *Happy hunting!*
- i) *Ignore* I. On teams there's only *we* through z.

Sales motivators say such practices energize deals. Dot.coms may sparkle right away, but as soon as self-serve shoppers begin asking questions or encounter problems, they turn elsewhere. Everyone reckons it's reasonable to say no. Without a guide through brimstone of buying, remorse is bound to scorch future decisions. Salespeople are still the best interface between a company's commodities and an indecisive, uninformed marketplace. As long as salespeople do what's in both company's and customer's best interests, they'll always be warmly welcomed, you'd think, given companies run by normal managers, which seldom occurs. Minds of master merchandisers are always forged without any impurities such as compassion.

Nothing good ever happens until a sale is closed, because that's what ignites every other process in business. Be thankful not everyone's seduced by ambition, but rather moved to help others. Managers who are paid to do little make everything cost more than it needs to. Some companies were pan sauted to swindle investors. Waste has a cascade effect, which consumes everything like a firestorm. Writing articles to rev up sales persons was a waste, because selling attracted insensitive amateurs who had no intention of serving clients; you'd think they'd be grateful for all that personal contact with strangers—as well as confidence and warmth it brings. Preceding alphabet was totally true. Customers and prospects are always right. If you don't prove attentive you never light the pilot.

Among salesmen, success breeds 3 things: competition, envy, and imitation. Imitators can help you, make you appear better by comparison and more an asset. Competitors always detract from your gains, but, again, can fan flame hotter. Those who covet and grab are bad barbecuers. They don't want to earn their own markets, they'd rather steal what you've stoked, as if it were something to put into a bag and sneak off with. Greedy pigs get put on a spit and rotisserieed. Incendiary Sodamn Insane and violent Iraqi army couldn't keep Kuwait, so they scorched it, another crime against humanity for which convicts are hung. America is not its buildings, factories or money; America is its people and their collective will. Iraq remains a desert scattered with peasants and ruins. Yet an impenetrable enamel forms over bad leadership and corporate malfeasance, and joint resources become fiery furnaces for a few invincible demigods.

Dot.com associations always flared his resentment for Departments of Transportation. As a bicycling advocate, what he expected from them was, "Respect Instead of Doing Only Tokens." They don't care. It's not that bicyclists are so terribly afraid to ride, they are just hesitant, bike only where traffic is light, lack confidence that reasonable accommodations might encourage. Selling ideas to them was like trying to rekindle a flame without fuel. His Molotov cocktails of provocative email had no effect on castiron indifference and moldy bureaucracy. You can't sell to those who already steal it from you with impunity. Arrogance and entitlement douse any public outcry, yet, if you never fan this flame of franchise which is you, you personally never get anywhere but burnt out, and wind up swept aside like ashes.

One can be clever with puns and shades of meaning. He wrote several pieces based on elemental themes: air, earth, fire, water, each a nonstop pun which people hardly noticed, straight over

their heads, just something more to puzzle over and obscure any deeper meaning. As he finished this installment, its need evaporated and it was never published, nor repurposed, until now. The timing couldn't have been more inopportune.

Soon thereafter was that horrible tragedy in which a nearby nightclub fire claimed a record number of lives, ironic, as if a fire station catching fire. Was his fixation on flames a premonition of event? This local holocaust consumed nation's media along with it.

Over Station Fire media burns.
Wimps detail lust, their unholy desire.
Video bunny primps, lamely fusses;
sternly discusses on camera for money.
You wonder just what anyone learns.

No obligation to critique the present, as if living in present makes anyone an expert, what does anyone know, anyway? Only what each feels and thinks, because current media tells only half-truths and warps situations to their own advantage. They blow up, drag on, exaggerate, seek closure, then move on. Those in charge never emotionally grieve as a soul must, seldom find ways to prevent disasters from details. Mass death is a hot story assignment, nothing more. Worthless culprits slither away like salamanders, while valued lambs are immolated as sweet savor on the altar of sacrifice. Bigger tragedies preempt commiseration, and memories of victims disappear like wisps of smoke. An Internet reference rages, perhaps, but no definitive solution will be derived from facts, which ensures a tragic repeat, and with it more stories to sell. Some dot.com smothers grief that comes from such a horror. Who ever learns from their mistakes? Or do men dance around bonfires like savages with no more thought in their heads than sex and vengeance?

