

How Engaging Your Customers
and Employees Can Make
Your Business Thrive




The Book of **Business Awesome**

Scott Stratten

Author of *UnMarketing*

The Book of **Business UnAwesome**

A large, dark, splattered ink blotch is centered on the lower half of the cover. The ink is black with some red and brown tones, and it has many fine, radiating lines extending outwards, suggesting a splatter or a hole in the paper. The background is a textured, aged, light brown paper.

The Cost of Not Listening,
Engaging, or Being
Great at What You Do

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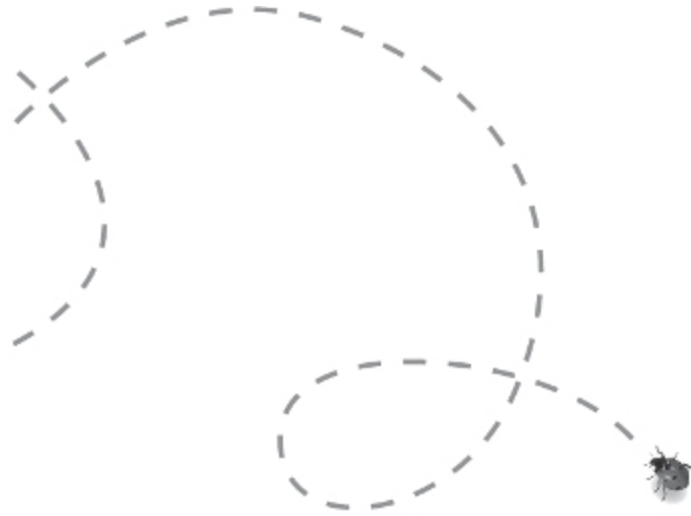
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Awesome Acknowledgments

Inspired by "Here's to the Misfits" campaign for Apple.

Here's to the misfits.

The entrepreneurs. The lone wolves in companies. The ones who believe businesses are built on relationships, not interruptions. To the ones who realize social is what social media is all about.

To the brave souls who would never cold-call or mislead just to gain a dollar. To the business start-ups who build their companies on the belief alone that they can do it.

The ones who realize that to have an awesome business you have to be awesome yourself.

This book is for you.

Chapter 1

How One Man Changed a Billion-Dollar Brand

Every employee is your brand ambassador, your marketer, and the face of your company.

I was in Hartford at the Hilton Garden Inn, on stop number eight of my 30-city UnBook Tour to promote *UnMarketing, Stop Marketing, Start Engaging*. The tour was amazing, but it also meant that I was living on airplanes and in hotels.

I rolled out of bed and headed downstairs for breakfast around 9:45 am. Did I mention I'm not a morning person? It's actually one of the great problems I have in life: I love breakfast, and I hate mornings. The lobby had a breakfast buffet, and I'm not talking about the "continental" breakfast that most hotels throw in as a bonus with some Danish and something that resembles juice. This was a full spread of eggs, bacon, sausage, hash browns, cereal, bagels, you name it. I was pretty impressed with myself for being up in time for this feast, especially after crossing the continent the day before.

I told the chef that I'd like eggs, bacon, sausage, and hash browns (shut it, foodies); grabbed a juice; and took a seat. As soon as I sat down, I noticed they turned off the lights around the buffet. Score! I got there just in time.

Apparently not.

I dug in to my food, and it was bad. Old and cold. A bad combination for anything in life, let alone breakfast meats. I forced down some bacon, and after testing each of the other items, I couldn't continue. The waitress walked over with my bill and placed it on the table, without saying a word.

Most of the time in situations like these, what do we do? We take out our phones and share our bad experiences with the world, all the while quietly accepting them in real life. Most people would just allow this to happen and walk away, but I called her over. If I owned this business, I would want to know if something was up.

“Hi, the food was really bad. It was cold and old.”

She just looked at me, not knowing what to do, and mentally took out the customer service playbook and said the “right” thing.

“I'll go get the manager.”

And she walked away. I never asked for the manager or to have the bill taken care of. The manager came over and was nice and offered to have the chef make an omelet or something special for me. I declined, letting him know I really wasn't hungry anymore. I explained to him that I wasn't looking for a freebie but thought he needed to know. He picked up the bill and said they'd take care of it and apologized again.

This is where the customer service “apology” usually ends for 99.9 percent of businesses in the hospitality industry. Really, to be great at customer service, you need to be only mediocre, because everyone else sucks.

But not here.

The sous-chef, Forbes, ran out, stopped me from walking out, and looked shaken. Not in a shaken way like he'd been chewed out by anyone, but a sincere look of being upset. Did I mention he was about 6 foot 4 inches and 220 pounds? And that he ran at me? I have to admit, for a moment there, I regretted giving my feedback at all....

He caught up to me and said, “Sir, I’m terribly sorry about your food this morning. A few things—although not excuses, we didn’t know until we were cleaning up that the water underneath the food trays that keeps everything warm was gone, hence the food was cold. And I also should have never given you the food that was sitting out that long; I could have made you something fresh right there, but I thought you looked like you were in a hurry. Regardless, I’m terribly sorry; this is not how we operate, and we’d like another chance to make it up to you.”

Wow.

This guy gave a damn that a guest had a subpar experience and he needed to make it right. We can’t stop screwups, only how we remedy them. And the solution usually isn’t hard. Most people who complain just want to feel validated, able to walk away feeling that someone has heard and understood them.

I didn’t threaten to “tweet about it” or use “Do you know who I think I am?” I was just another person staying at the hotel. He could have simply talked about how much of a moron I was to his coworkers or brushed it off by saying, “You can’t please everyone.” He truly cared that they screwed up. He owned it. He changed my view of the Hilton Garden Inn and the Hilton overall. And he didn’t have to.

To me, Forbes is the Hilton. Not their mission statement or logo. Every employee is your brand ambassador, your marketer, and the face of your company. Employees make a difference. Forbes made a difference for a billion-dollar hotel brand to me.

As I walked away and headed back up to my room he said, “I’d like to make this right.”

And my reply was, “You already did.”

Chapter 2

Marketing Is a Verb

We need to hand off the branding baton to everyone in our company; everyone is a marketer.

Welcome to the Awesome side, fine reader. If you've chosen to start reading from this side of the book it's for one of three reasons:

- 1.** You are the optimist, who sees the glass full because you just filled up the second half. You may or may not own a shirt with a unicorn on it.
- 2.** You are the pessimist, so jaded by years in business that you are just hoping this side will give you hope and save your soul. You will last about three chapters before you switch over to the UnAwesome side, laughing diabolically...until you realize there is a part written about you in there. (By the way, the author fits here with you into Choice 2.)
- 3.** You fall into the group thinking, "Wait! There's another side to this book!?!?" Or you bought this purely for the Awesome. Or you're my mom. Or you're reading this in the bookstore, and you haven't even noticed the other side yet. You're waiting for the stock clerk to get you the latest *Twilight* novel, aren't you? Spoiler, he dies at the end.¹

Whatever the reason, I'm glad you're here. To be awesome at business, you first have to realize that it can't be a policy.

You can't mandate being awesome; you can't demand it. You have to hire awesome. You have to inspire awesome in others, and you have to be your awesome self. Awesome has to go through every level and every step of your company. Just like creating a great poster for a crappy movie doesn't make the movie any better; fantastic advertising for a horrible product won't change how people react once they use it. A known product name with a horrible return policy will hurt the original product. Every point of contact with your market is an opportunity to show them just how great your business really is.

Marketing is a verb. Awesome is a verb. You have to do it. People may come in because of great marketing, but they come back because of the experience. Loyalty isn't built through plastic cards; it's built through amazing experiences. No one ever said, "This restaurant was horrible, but did you see those ads in the paper!?! We have to come back!!" It's our front lines that engage the market, and without them, our marketing means nothing. And sadly, although it is our front line, who have the first and most important contact with customers, they are often the lowest paid and least appreciated. We need to hand off the branding baton to everyone in our company; everyone is a marketer.

According to some really brilliant research about customer service by Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman, as companies we should be focusing on the "Peak End Rule."² We judge our experiences with companies on the peak experience—either the worst or the best—and the end result. When people think about your business, they're going to focus on how good or how bad things got and on how everything worked out in the end. A really great salesperson who helps with an exchange can erase negative experiences along the way. The long wait in line and the bad music in your changing room are both forgotten. As long as

you can out-awesome mistakes and resolve issues, customers will have a positive brand experience. Think about that.

We spend a great deal of time and energy focusing on what our competitors are doing when we should be working on improving ourselves, especially our front lines. We pour money into designing logos and brochures while we allow poor customer service to be the norm. We listen to statistics about when we should schedule our newsletter and ignore feedback from our employees. Did you know that, on average, a company saves more than \$7,000 for each employee suggestion that is put into practice? These are the employees we value least, with the highest turnover. We brush them off, when we need to be handing them the brand baton.

In *The Book of Business Awesome*, we are going to look at how we can ensure we hand off the brand baton to every part of our business. We will look at how marketing, human resources, and public relations are all really under the same roof in business.

Some people will ask if this is another social media book. The way I see it, *social media* is simply another term for *communication*. Everything about business is communication. Whether you're trying to build brand awareness, improve customer service, or fill a vacancy, it's about people and their impact, good or bad, on our bottom line. So yes, this book is about people—what they say and what they do.

As you are reading, I want you to be thinking about how we can get better. Everyone is always jumping ahead to what's new, but I want us to make this the year of getting better at what we're already doing. We need to shed a few social pounds and stop trying to add more social media networks to our repertoire. Instead, let's get better where

we already exist. Social media isn't about how many places you can be. It's about being amazing where you are.

1 #TeamWesleySnipes, <http://bit.ly/UnTwilight>.

2 <http://onforb.es/PeakEndRule>.

Chapter 3

Companies Aren't Awesome; People Are

We can't all be Zappos.com or work somewhere supercool like Google. And I'm glad that we can't, because if we were all the same, we'd all be perfectly ordinary.

When we see awesome companies at work around us, a few things can happen. As customers, we love them for it. They make the day-to-day chore of being a consumer so much more fun. We've all seen enough boring commercials. We actually spend time and money on ways to avoid being sold to, so the last thing we're looking for is another boring sales pitch. Let's be honest, we get excited as customers when we're just not treated badly. We can't help but lose our minds when something great happens.

As business owners, the effects are a little more complicated.

For me, seeing and reading about the great things people do in business makes me feel like I can do great things, too. That's why I love to share them. But sometimes, these examples can be intimidating and even limiting. It's very easy to see a company in action and think that you'll never be able to do the things it can do. Whether it's because you're just getting started, you don't have the same budget or resources, your industry isn't cool enough, or you're sure

your customers wouldn't like it, other people's awesomeness can sometimes make us feel a little small.

Too often, feeling intimidated becomes our excuse not to be awesome.

I want to make sure that as you read this book you put yourself in the picture. Don't be overwhelmed or think that you need to mimic the stories I'm going to share. Instead, be inspired to find your own brand of awesome, that only you can bring to the table.

I know what you're thinking, and I want you to know you're absolutely right. We can't all be Zappos.com or work somewhere super cool like Google. And I'm glad that we can't, because if we were all the same, we'd all be perfectly ordinary. We spend too much time trying to be like others in business, when we should be focusing on finding our own story. I promise you, we all can find our window of awesome in our job and our companies and great things can happen. That's what this book is all about.

So how do we keep ourselves from being intimidated or overwhelmed? Business is built on relationships—on the simple act of people interacting and engaging with others. And that all starts with the individual, with you. In every great business story there is an individual who started it all. Every great marketing campaign started with someone deciding to take a chance and step outside the norm. The outstanding customer service a company is known for was executed one contact at a time and started with one voice deciding to care. They may not have always executed it on their own. But at the start there was one.

I call this *situational awesome*, and we can all do it. We have access to it every day—in our attitudes and in our interactions. It starts with the passion we have for our work and our product. It can be as simple as just giving a damn about our customers. Sometimes it's the smile we give across a store counter to someone looking for a little help. It

might sound simple, but this is the start of every great story I share in this book. Someone decided to care or to try. This can be a cashier at a pet store, a janitor, or a volunteer.

Next we have *occupational awesome*, which although similar to situational awesome, comes with a little more definition.

Occupational awesome is about our roles and how they define windows of awesome for us. For example, customer service agents have a special opportunity to make amazing things happen in their companies every day. As we will speak about often in the chapters ahead, frontline workers, especially, are capable of making a huge impact on brand perception, because their jobs give them so many opportunities to engage with customers.

Other positions in a company come with their own opportunities. Although it might be easy to assume that more senior positions would have an easier time finding opportunities for awesome, this isn't always true. Every single job in a company is important, and every single person a part of your branding and marketing.

Next up, we have *divisional awesome*. This is all about groups and the amazing things that can happen when people come together and the results are truly greater than the sum of their parts. Here we also start to see the opportunity for situational or occupational awesome to start spreading throughout a company. This is where one person's passion can start to shape an entire company. And when one division of a company starts to shine, it's hard for the others to ignore.

And last, but certainly not least, is *institutional awesome*. This is where you find companies that, through the work of individuals and groups, have created brand-wide amazingness. These are the companies known for their outstanding customer service, products, services, and campaigns.

This level has an especially powerful role to play, through hiring and human resources. Here, a company can create opportunities for awesome at every level, from the individual up. At the institutional level we also see what public relations (PR) can do for a brand and how awesome PR will not only do damage control but will make the company come out looking even better than it did before the mistake.

Together, all these levels become your brand voice, the message, and the image people think of when they think about your company. No matter whether your business is a one-person show just getting started or a multinational corporation, whether you are a frontline worker or a top-level executive, you can create awesome. The individual is the start.

How are you going to be awesome today?¹

¹ Scratch that. You're reading this book, which makes you already awesome by default. High-five.

Chapter 4

Remarry Your Current Customers

Push those beds back together and start treating them the way they deserve. This is how we create ecstatic customers.

Most of the time, we focus our sales and marketing on acquiring new customers—even though it's a well-known fact in business (as stated in many fancy studies I've never read) that it costs *waaay* more to acquire new customers than keep your current ones. Above and beyond the greater cost, when we lose customers, we also lose the opportunity for word-of-mouth, one of the most valuable ways of marketing we have. We should be working harder to take our customers from static to ecstatic, to get their mouths moving, sharing great experiences they've had with our company.

We treat our current customers as though we've been married to them for 47 years—and the past 46 weren't so great. We're not even talking to them at breakfast. I want us to court them and remarry our current customers. Push those beds back together and start treating them the way they deserve. This is how we create ecstatic customers.

When I went to my bank a few months ago, I saw that they were offering new iPods to anyone who opened a new account. Sweet, right? I like iPods. I've been with the bank for more than 20 years, and when I asked them if I could get a new iPod, they said, “We're sorry; it's only for new

accounts.” To get this incentive, I literally had to close my accounts, end my business, and start off new. That's no way to treat a loyal customer.

Cell phone companies are notorious for this practice. After completing what seemed like a 57-year agreement for my BlackBerry, I was excited to hear I'd earned an upgrade. However, when I looked into it a little further, all my “upgrade” meant was that I could get a new phone and renew the same long-term contract I had already been using. There was no incentive for loyalty, no reward for the roughly \$15,000 I had spent over the duration of my contract. I was treated exactly the same as any new customer who had wandered through their doors that day, and it didn't exactly leave me feeling warm and fuzzy.

We are losing customers in the name of getting new bright and shiny ones.

According to the Harris Interactive, Customer Experience Impact Report, 89 percent of consumers report that they quit doing business with a company because of a bad customer experience, up from 59 percent four years ago.¹ That's a number you cannot ignore in the name of finding new customers, and it is growing fast. Social media and smartphones mean people are sharing their customer service experiences like never before. We have more and more options at our fingertips. So when your service sucks, I can find your competitors in one click. Or even better, if they're smart, when I complain about your brand online, they will find me.

We are losing our customers because of poor service. We need to stop this trend and start working hard to keep our current customers happy. The people on the front line who are responsible for customer experience, from first impressions to handling complaints, are our least paid and most underappreciated. The fact that these important people are undervalued shows through in how our

customers experience our company. Good hiring, providing training, and creating a culture of value for our front line is our best marketing tool.

In the next few chapters, we're going to review some customer service case studies, both in person and online. We'll look at the ways social media can be an amazing tool for social and publicized customer service, and we'll examine new ways to bring more awesome into our businesses. For updates to customer service stories and for new examples of awesome, visit

www.TheBookOfBusinessAwesome.com/CustomerService.

¹ *Source:* Harris Interactive, Customer Experience Impact Report. <http://bit.ly/CSEIR>. Right Now, Headquarters in Bozeman, Montana. 2011.

Chapter 5

The Sun Rises Online

If fans are sharing their love for your event, product, or service, you should be taking advantage of these ecstatic, rabid fans to let others know just how awesome you are.

It's no secret to those who know me that I'm a sports freak. And one of the benefits of all the travelling I do is having the opportunity to see sporting events in different cities all over the world. During the UnBook Tour for the first book, I was able to take part in the Sport Addicts Trifecta in Boston, seeing a Celtics, Bruins, and Red Sox game all within four days.

One of the coolest things for me at sporting events is checking out how each team uses social media. I end up paying a lot of attention to how each team manages their brand online and engages with fans in real time during events. What could be better than bringing together sports and social media, two of my favorite things? As expected, what I find is a whole lot of variety, with some teams really embracing social media while others completely ignore it.

When I was in Phoenix, I really wanted to see a Coyotes hockey game and a Suns basketball game. I checked my schedule and their schedules; everything worked, so I went online and bought tickets on Ticketmaster. I didn't go in expecting to have any kind of social media experience. I bought a ticket the same day and was able to score a seat

in the first row of the upper level, which is a great spot to watch a basketball game, or any sport for that matter. I was really excited about the spot, which made me somewhat curious as to how I was able to get such a good seat the same day as the game. I figured it was just luck and didn't think anymore about it. Then I headed off to the game.

I had heard a lot about the Phoenix Suns and how they had embraced social media in a great way. I had never actually connected with anybody from the team before deciding to go to the game. I didn't tweet to them beforehand, didn't tell them I'm kind of a big deal on a fairly irrelevant social media site that falsely inflates my ego, and ask for a free ticket. I paid my own way. I don't like to leverage my artificial clout for free things,¹ so the Suns didn't know I was going to be there.

I arrived at the game and sat down in my seat, realizing very quickly why it had been available at such short notice—there was a pole right in the center of my field of view. I couldn't see half the basketball court. I had to sit awkwardly, leaning into the aisle, to see anything.

What would you do? Usually, when I'm not happy with an experience as a customer, I let the company have a chance in person to make it better. But in this case, not knowing the arena, and feeling pretty lazy after the trip there, there was no way I was going to get up and hunt down customer service—especially since I knew that if I did find someone, they would most likely point out the disclaimer on the back of my ticket and do nothing for me at all. But I still wanted to give the Suns a chance, so I did the next best thing I could think of and sent out a tweet.

I added the Phoenix Suns account name to it so that they would have the chance to catch it and waited to see what they would do, if anything at all.

Please understand, I wasn't happy but I also wasn't upset enough to storm out and demand my money back. I was a

static customer, they had my purchase, and I had chosen them and given them my business. I would have watched the game and left, having a mediocre experience. This is where most customers sit, in static mode. They are just there, not overly pleased, not overly angry. They just exist. Letting them sit there is the wrong mentality for brands to take. We shouldn't be looking at how many customers we have but at how many *ecstatic* customers we have. Static customers come and go very easily, not angry enough to tell you why they're upset—and not happy enough to have any loyalty. When we do things to shift them into being ecstatic, loyalty increases. Ecstatic customers are also more willing to tell you when they become upset, giving you an opportunity to keep them from leaving. Instead of a revolving door of static customers, create ecstatic ones and they'll bring people in the door for you.

Back to the Suns game.... Next thing I knew, less than 10 minutes after my tweet, the Phoenix Suns account tweeted back! They were listening! They asked me to please DM them my seat location and told me someone would be right there to fix everything. Sure enough, Vice President of Digital, Jeramie McPeck himself, came to my seat and escorted me down to the Phoenix Suns luxury suite, from where I watched the rest of the game. Before you get your manties in a bunch and say they treated me this way only because of my large following online, I was not the only one in the suite. There were seven other people from Twitter there. It was a special promotion, where they were upgrading random fans who were using Twitter. After the game, they had a Twitter press conference for fans to come and ask the president of the team questions. The Suns showed me that they really understood one thing about business online: social media isn't a campaign; it's a way of business. Social media is an extension of business.

Why wouldn't you want to listen? If fans are sharing their love for your event, product, or service, you should be taking advantage of these ecstatic, rabid fans to let others know just how awesome you are. A simple reply letting fans know how much you appreciate them can make a world of difference. Of course, I understand that this can be hard to manage, but look at the value that can come out of it. Answering the phone every time someone calls is hard to manage, too, isn't it? But we understand that we need to get people on the other end of those calls and make our customer's experience as good as possible. A tweet is no different, except this time when we make things right, it's public and it's social.

1 But I'm more than happy to accept any of the free things you want to send me, so let me know.

Chapter 6

Sporting Event Awesome

Social media isn't just talking sometimes. It's reducing the barrier between company and consumer and between people—opening up opportunities for awesome.

When I'm on stage, I ask the audience to leave their phones on. I want them to tweet about the talk. I want them to make everyone who isn't there in the room with us jealous. At the same time, it's my job to hold their attention. I want them to constantly be in this state of distress—between wanting to share the awesome stuff coming from stage and not wanting to miss anything while they type. I think that should be the goal of every live event. If what is happening on stage isn't engaging enough to keep your audience from playing games on their phones, that's really your problem, not theirs.

When done right, not only can fans share how awesome they think an event is, but they can add to the event. A perfect example of a fan adding to a sport by using Twitter is the story of Julia Probst, a German soccer fan who is deaf. During games, she reads the lips of players and coaches and shares what she sees online with her followers.

I love this story because she uses Twitter to both share her experience and add to the game she loves. One of her followers brilliantly pointed out that by reading lips, she actually is taking in parts of the event we can't—that she is not the one who cannot hear; we are. She's raising

awareness for the deaf online in one of the most awesome ways I've ever seen. It is such a cool use of her skill combined with technology. I only wish I could speak a little German so that I could understand what she's tweeting. You should check her out here: www.twitter.com/EinAugenschmaus.

We talk a lot about human resources (HR) and hiring coming up later on in the book. I can't stress enough that marketing, HR, public relations, sales, and customer service are really all seen as one by your market. Usually we focus on the negative side, driving home that what you tweet may keep you from getting a job or cause you to lose the one you have, but in the case of Jerry Rizzo, tweeting landed him the job offer of his dreams.

Jerry was a longtime fan of the 76ers¹ and a social media addict. The team was running a contest to choose its new mascot, and Jerry and one of his friends noticed that neither of the finalists, one Phil E. Moose and a B. Franklin Dogg, had a Twitter account. So the duo took it upon themselves to open the accounts and began tweeting on their behalves. In very little time, the accounts had a number of followers and were adding to the fan excitement about the contest.

The accounts quickly gained fans and the attention of the team. At first, there was some dispute as to whether Jerry had stepped over the line and who could really claim ownership for the accounts. In the end, Jerry was rewarded beyond what even he could have hoped for. Jerry and the friend he was working with on the accounts were given box seats and season tickets.² In the end, 76er CEO Adam Aron was so impressed by their creativity and hard work that Jerry was offered a job as the official social media coordinator for the team.³

How's that for some Twitter ROI (return on investment) right there? I love this example of how a fan saw a window