

But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will – Sam Cooke

Change has been a part of commercial life since the earliest days of barter right up to the way business is being undertaken today. Change is what makes us consider new ideas, concepts, processes, and how we create and maintain relationships. Change is what makes us and the world go round and we have always had to cope and adapt with it.

But up until the late 80's and early 90's we had quite a significant hold on the pace of change - and who and what was affected by it was reasonable easy to identify and therefore manage.

But change for the past decade has developed a new dynamic which is creating more than a little disruption. Change is now happening at a pace and from all sorts of various places that means we are at its mercy if we don't adapt – and adapt very very quickly.

Change is affecting every aspect of our lives and the lives of our customers – and if whatever you have done in the past to get you to the place you are right now is all you have, then you, your business and your future will not prosper.

I've been a marketer and copywriter for over 30 years – and that combination of creativity and commercial expertise was enough to make me valuable to my clients. But over the past 2 years I've experienced a significant slowdown. So what's the reason? Well not so many years ago you could pinpoint an election, or global changes, or perhaps a cyclical downturn and whilst I recognise we've had all of those things something else has happened which has and will continue to impact on every business and every individual client or customer you rely on.

It's taken me nearly two years of study and numerous attempts to try to quantify what is driving so much change, coming from so many different places, at such a relentless pace.

In my opinion we all have to come to terms with the fact that we are getting very comfortable not having to deal with, interact with, rely on, or need anybody else to survive and prosper. We can change what we want, when we want to and not have to concern ourselves with needing anyone to help us. I'm calling this Commercial Individualism and it is now a new and very real reality for most people.

Yes individuals will listen to other peoples opinion, yes they still need to create and maintain relationships – but if individuals need a new idea or a new relationship, then they have the control to find what they want and make an individual decision to change. A decision to change with confidence and purpose, based on self-discovery.

This is very different from just a few years ago when products or services had generic features and benefits which sort of fitted most needs. This was when suppliers had all the power because they had all the knowledge - and they only had very limited media to manage.

It's hard to imagine that 25 years ago, marketers had access to data that could tell them exactly where 20 million new and existing customers would be – sat in front of the television at a particular time on a certain date. Or supermarkets had to be begged to stock a certain ingredient if Delia Smith recommended using it – or near riots would result.

Now millions of new and existing customers can research and find millions of products or services every minute of every day.

Savvy companies and organisations have sophisticated engagement strategies that respond in real time to people's passive or active enquiries – they track this and that and use multiple media marketing activity to try and keep in the mind of the customer. But seldom is it enough.

And it will not be enough. If your business has a client age profile of over 50's white middle class university educated professional -then you're in trouble. I know this because it was only when I dug out one of my old scenario planning books from the early 90's and worked through current and future clients profiles and personas did the penny drop. My client base was rapidly disappearing and being replaced with 25 to 40 year old whose whole commercial experience has been online. Commercial relationships not based on meetings and recommendation, but relationships driven by accessible online information, free samples, fast low cost product and service propositions, and above all extensive positive third party reviews.

So what am I and possible you "gonna" do?

Well you could continue for a few years to find decision makers who prefer the old ways. There are quite a few out there, but in the medium to long term Commercial Individualism is going to win out.

Here are ten things you need to do NOW, and yes I'm doing all ten of them!

1. Top of the list is invest big time in technology. Old software, creaking servers, slow venerable computers across the organisation will make future success impossible. Artificial intelligence features now in many boardrooms and senior decision makers meetings. Total integration of data across multiple platforms is now a necessity. Face to face, real time communications is replacing the telephone conversation – can your business provide that without having to rely on skype!
2. Next undertake a 360° of what you do and ask yourself why are you offering this service or product, and why should anyone buy it at the price.
3. Analyse what you do or provide and calculate the real profit per end user. Don't take this cost from that to fudge the issue. Is the customer you are serving today actually contributing the right margin?
4. Make sure you create top quality persona profiles of everyone who can influence the success of your organisation or company. Not just the end user, but all the others who might comment or support what you offer.
5. Craft clear, credible messages that are specifically targeted at these individuals.
6. Create online and offline content on a planned basis that is rooted in truth and real context.
7. Undertake a review of where your best competitor is now and what are the stretch goals you have to have in place just to keep your current position.
8. If you have staff and line managers and you are the owner or primary manager, ask yourself are they an asset or liability? How quick do they adapt to change and how aware are they that change is relentless and unforgiving. Ask them to prepare a plan to return 25% more margin for 25% less cost. It's the question I asked myself as a sole practitioner and I struggled with getting a solution.
9. Review how you make your next ten purchases. Why did you purchase them? What channel did you use and why? What information did you need before you made the purchase?
10. If you can't face up to all these things, then just focus on numbers 1 to 5. I did a then went on to struggle with number 8.

This short working paper is just to get you thinking - if you want to debate any aspect of these ideas then please get in touch. I can be contacted on 07828 019 308 or chris@simplygreatcopy.com