Toppling giants

By Douglas Kruger

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Legacy no longer matters. How are you innovating into their world today?

About a year ago, I sat on a couch at the Maggs on Media studio beside a representative from Yellowwood marketing agency. I was there to be interviewed about a book; he was there to discuss a fascinating shift in South African consumer consciousness.

A shift in the landscape

"We conducted a survey, and the shift is this," he explained. "South African consumers no longer care about legacy. In fact, it's leaving them cold. They are responding only to 'how you are innovating into my world today.'"

I was fascinated by this finding, and premised my book on innovation on this critical development, in a chapter titled, 'The Meteorite Strike that no one Noticed.' The more we look around, the more we see this principle at play. What's more, it's gaining momentum.

The recent student protests could not have made a stronger case for Yellowwood's findings, even beyond the world of consumer brands.

Struggling students, previously a demographic largely in thrall of the ANC, loudly announced that they couldn't care less about the government's political legacy. 'What are you doing for us today?' they demanded. It's the exact dynamic the survey described.

Personally, I am adamantly opposed to violence and destruction of property in protests. It saddened me to see reporters on the international news network, BBC World talking about 'violence in South Africa' with a dearth of surprise. Nevertheless, the principle revealed by this shift is interesting to business owners.

An opportunity for radical innovators

The takeaway is this: In the face of decreased love of legacy, hungry, upstart, innovating brands can gain serious market-share. The odds are actually in their favour, if they were only aware of it.

What's more, old giants can be toppled, if they speak self-aggrandising language, and fail to answer the question, 'What are you doing to improve my world today?'

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So perhaps the question to ask this week is: Who's your giant? Who is the industry legacy brand present in your domain since the dawn of time?

What if you opted to use that one principle - the shift in the public consciousness - to attempt to topple them?

Study the legacy brands - their shortfall is your opportunity to innovate

Examine their language closely. Look at their business model. They may well be caught up in legacy speak and self-serving systems, leaving customers cold and leaving themselves wide-open to a full-scale broadside by a radical innovator.

Could you swoop in and innovate into their customers' world - find a way to help them, today, where the legacy brands are failing? If so, you might well own your industry tomorrow.

The Yellowwood survey went on to say that South Africans *are* responding, very favourably, to 'the energetic now.' So don't speak history. Speak solutions. Don't draw attention to the size of your buildings. Speak, instead, about the problems you're solving - now, today, in order to make their lives better.

Legacy is dying. Innovation is where the new life-blood is to be found. Someone please tell the government.

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