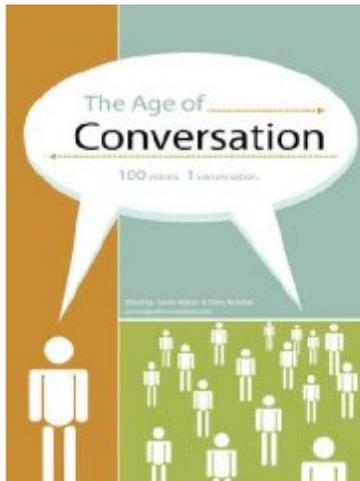


Technology Is Recreating Business Intimacies Reprinted from Age of Conversation

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Customers from India, Canada, New Zealand and Europe. Technology swings open the doors to a global marketplace. Our cyberspace offices and storefronts keep the lights on 24/7/365 allowing us to conduct business with a mere click and an internet connection. Life is good. Or is it?

In their rush to enter this new environment companies often sacrificed personal connections with their customers and other stakeholders. Understanding the individual needs of a growing and often geographically dispersed customer based is not an easy or inexpensive undertaking.

Attempting to service and engage customers, some organizations turned to non traditional solutions including: out sourced online service “chat reps” who often had limited understanding of the business’s culture; interactive websites that flashed messages that were pretty but of little value; and email tactics where questions were gobbled up by cyberspace gremlins who of course never responded back.

Misunderstanding and brand devaluation were frequently outcomes of *non relationship service*. Customers wanted high touch along with convenience of immediate access to information. Even businesses with only a local focus were being challenged with how to stay connected to their clients.

About this time a strange dichotomy began to occur in the world of virtual business. The technology, that fostered impersonalization, was being used to create “corner grocery store relationships.” Through funny little websites called blogs companies began to engage with their customers in *people-to-people* conversations. Those conversations occurred not with the marketing, PR, tech

support “departments” but with *people* within those departments who shared common interests and passions. The exchange was richer, deeper and more satisfying relationships for both customer and company.

When we get to know people more than product information is usually exchanged. That’s exactly what happened online. Stories about personal interest from wine to family vacation were “blogged.” Photos were shared. Relationships that were as intimate and important as those created by neighborhood green grocers were being formed.

Through social media marketing initiatives: blogs, podcasts, vlogs, mash-up communities, social book marking and photo sharing organizations were rediscovering that the corner grocery store relation was attainable in an online environment and more important than ever before to foster and maintain.

“It's not personal, Sonny. It's strictly business,” said Michael Corleone to his brother. However, the son of the Godfather was wrong. Dead wrong. **Business is personal.** Technology is fueling the emotional engagement that leads to long-term customer interactions.

Reprinted from *The Age of Conversation*, a book that brings together over 100 of the world's leading marketers, writers, thinkers and creative innovators in a ground-breaking and unusual publication.