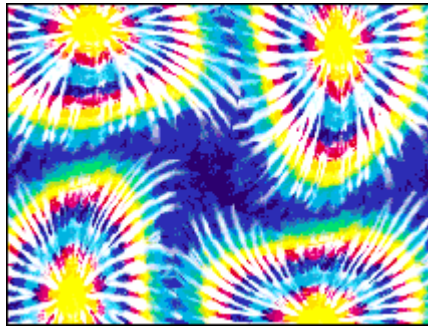
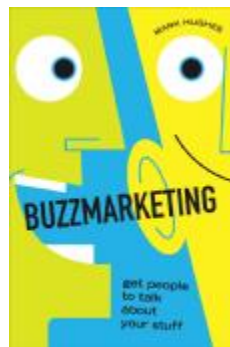


Buzz Everest:

The Story of How Tie-Dye Came To Be



By Mark Hughes, CEO of Buzzmarketing.com and author of “Buzzmarketing” endorsed by Steve Forbes (Editor in-Chief of Forbes Magazine), Ben Cohen (Co-founder of Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream), Brian Swette (former Chief Marketing Officer of Pepsi and COO of eBay), and Warren Phillips (former editor of The Wall Street Journal and CEO of Dow Jones).



Penguin/Portfolio

The Fourth Secret—Climb Buzz Everest

What is Buzz Everest?

And why climb it?

Buzz Everest is making buzz history. Buzz Everest represents achieving the pinnacle of buzz—transforming your brand by doing things no one else has been able to do. Reaching the pinnacle means generating hundreds of news stories that start conversations all across the country.

Buzz Everest is achieving what 99 percent of your competitors would never even attempt. Conquering Buzz Everest is a feat that few will ever attempt, much less achieve. Buzz Everest is treacherous—it's easy to fail if you don't plan and if you don't have courage and faith in your own abilities, and if you don't have follow-through. But if you conquer Buzz Everest, you will experience the greatest feelings of achievement and realize the greatest amount of buzz—beyond your wildest dreams. Best of all, the payoff from Buzz Everest is huge.

Buzz Everest is when Pepsi created the Pepsi Challenge, and spent millions of dollars on research to prove that “more Coke drinkers prefer the taste of Pepsi.” Buzz Everest is convincing a town to rename itself and thereby putting your brand on the map of the U.S.A. But Buzz Everest is more than just creative thinking outside the box; it happens by increasing the size of the box and reinventing your company or product with a story that, to most people, is unimaginable.

In today’s marketing environment, everyone is following a similar path. The traditional path will get only traditional results. And traditional results mean performing the same as everyone else—being satisfied with mediocre or average levels.

If mediocre is good enough for you, stop reading right now. But if you want to experience exquisite and breath-taking results, that’s what we’re going to look at in the next few pages.

There are two reasons to climb and reach the top. First, you’ll prove yourself to be smarter and more creative than others in the profession of marketing. This alone will capture consumer and media attention. But the second reason proves to be far more important. The second reason to climb Buzz Everest is because customers will know that what you have done can’t be replicated by your competitors. And customers will respond. In the Pepsi Challenge, Pepsi spent several million dollars in research and endless in-person surveys to justify their claim about Coke drinkers preferring Pepsi. If Coke tried to replicate the research, by the time they finished it would have been too late. Climbing Buzz Everest puts you in a unique position that few of your competitors can ever reach.

Buzz Everest Saves a Doomed Brand

The story of RIT Dye is a story of how climbing Buzz Everest saved a doomed brand.

RIT Dye?

For several years, I've had the good fortune of being the owner of a Bernese Mountain Dog. Just about every day, I walk my Bernese on the college grounds in the eclectic little town of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. One day there I met a fascinating man by the name of Don Price, who has an Alaskan Malamute. Through walking our dogs together, we got to know each other.

I was already working on this book; he asked me to tell him some of the principles and after my very quick synopsis, he said, "You know...that's exactly the approach I used with RIT dye."

I had never heard of the product.

Don Price then told me one of the most fascinating stories I've ever heard. It turns out that he was the man who made tie-dye what it is today. But he didn't popularize it through TV, radio, or print. He didn't do it through multi-level marketing. In fact, he did it with zero advertising dollars. In my terminology, he did it by climbing Buzz Everest.

It Started Out Dandy

In the early 1960's, Don went to work for Best Foods, a prominent consumer brand company with products like Hellman's Mayonnaise, Entenmann's Cookies, Arnold bread, Thomas' English Muffins, etc.

It was a prestigious company, and Don had the good fortune of being hired as brand manager for a marquis brand—Hellman's. He was given a coveted corner office in their New York City headquarters, and he was ready to lead Hellman's mayonnaise to a higher stratosphere. His job at Best Food started out just dandy.

But he immediately found his new, high profile position to be disappointing. His superiors told him that they loved him, but Hellman's was too big a brand to mess up. All the *real* decision making took place at higher levels—not at his level. “Then what do I do?” he asked. They admitted that he would not be doing very much.

Don was a sharp, bold thinker and quickly proposed the following to his superiors at Best Foods: “Since I'm not going to have much decision making responsibility because of the importance of the Hellman's brand, do you have any low-profile brands I could run? You know...brands I can manage on my own. Brands you could care less about if I screw up?”

“Oh, heavens, yes, we've got dozens of those!” he was told. So shortly thereafter, Don Price was put in charge of an odd little brand called RIT dye.

A Brand With No Future

At the time, RIT dye was a powdered product used primarily by older women to color things like drapes, furniture coverings, etc. The dye was sold through supermarkets, craft stores, and chains like Woolworth's. Its market share was abysmal compared to the leading brand, Tintex. Overall, the brand was dying because its rapidly aging consumers were dying and so no longer dyeing; (sorry—couldn't resist).

In summary, RIT dye had all the ingredients of a dead end: declining sales trends and an entrenched competitor with huge market share.

It was a brand with no future.

But it sold for about forty-nine cents back in the 60's and cost only seven cents to make. It was clear that the only thing RIT dye had going for it was a healthy profit margin.

Don lobbied for advertising dollars to revitalize the RIT dye brand, only to be summarily denied. Management told him, "You can spend all the time you want on RIT dye, but you have zero dollars for advertising!" His easy path was blown up. So Don was faced with the only other choice. He had to climb Buzz Everest.

Maxim #1: Find Your Buzz Everest and Climb It!

Okay. No advertising dollars meant no traditional marketing approach. Management respected Don, so they were willing to let him do whatever he wanted with RIT, as long

as it didn't involve advertising expenses. One of his first stops was to the research and development guys.

It was rare for R&D guys to see someone from marketing so frequently—most of the marketing honchos were out spending company money. Don's angle, though, was to find an entirely new use for RIT dye. Cataloging all the possible uses for dye, one of the researchers found that it was used in Africa and India to decorate and imprint clothing. The process was called tie-dye (but very different than the tie-dye we see today in America). African and Indian tie-dye had very symmetrical, repeated patterns, almost as if done on a printing press. There might be some international opportunities, but Don decided he would bring the tie-dye process to America. If it caught on with a younger audience, maybe increased sales would reflect the youthful market.

But how? How could he influence Americans to use this ancient process still widely used in Africa and India? This was in the early 60s, when news was spreading of a fast-growing hippie movement. Psychedelic colors were becoming the rage, and the hippies might actually be a market segment interested in using psychedelic dyes to tie-dye their individualistic garb. In New York City, Greenwich Village was the area for opinion leaders and influencers of the hippie movement. So Don went to Greenwich Village to get a feeling of whether he might be able to stimulate interest in tie-dye. He found artists who were willing to experiment with the tie-dye process. They were enthusiastic, but the process was rather messy as multiple colors mixed and leaked. Don went back to the researchers and convinced them to package the dye products in no-mess

liquid dispensers that could be squeezed onto fabric. For example, by keeping the colors from running together, a garment could have yellow dye in the center, with purple swirls around it.

Using this new RIT dispenser, artists were able to create the multicolor designs they desired with ease and without mess. So artists, opinion leaders, and influencers took to tie-dyeing almost as if it were a new psychedelic substance. Janice Joplin began wearing tie dye and was even rumored to wear tie-dye panties—all made using RIT dye in the new container.

Although it was exciting to have the likes of Janice Joplin getting intimate with the RIT dye brand, tie-dye was confined to a small circle of users and wasn't expanding. Trying to figure out how to spread the tie-dye phenomenon, Don Price invited several fashion editors to Greenwich Village. His hope was to show them that tie-dye was catching on in the Village, and have them endorse it as the next new fashion trend in their articles.

The Madison Avenue editors told Don that the tie dye fad was just a Greenwich Village thing. Although that was where life was shaking free in New York, as far as the editors were concerned, what happened in the Village had no real impact on fashion trends in general.

For Don, Buzz Everest was getting steeper.

The message Don got from these upscale editors was that it took three key elements to spread any trend —

It had to be associated with something big, something newsworthy

It had to catch on in middle America

It had to be the fashion (meaning truly fashionable, not just a fad)

About this time, Don told me, his Greenwich Village hippies heard about a musical gathering that was to take place in rural Woodstock, New York. They grasped that it was going to be a big event, and probably memorable. Nobody could have imagined just how big and how memorable.

Two of the well-known artists in Greenwich Village asked Don if they could tie-dye several hundred T-shirts to give away at Woodstock. They said they would need a dryer to make that many in such a short amount of time. Don had salted away enough money in his corporate budget to pay for a dryer and several hundred T-shirts. And so, the project began. Tie-dye T-shirts lined a loft space the size of a football field, hanging from criss-crossed clotheslines, taking up every inch of space.

To the droves of people ended up coming to Woodstock, the tie-dye T-shirts were eye-catching. The idea caught on...big. Joe Cocker wore tie-dye at Woodstock. Mama Cass wore tie-dye. Janis Joplin wore tie-dye. Tie-dye became a symbol of anti-establishmentarianism. It was a visual statement of “I’m young and independent,” and most importantly it was *your* shirt. No one else could have the same shirt as you. It was a

statement of being an individual. And the cause of individualism was the biggest thing in America in the 60s.

Right after Woodstock, sales of RIT dye began to increase, reversing the prior trend but not skyrocketing. Don's project had caught on with Woodstock. But the danger was that RIT dye would be riding the coat-tails of a fad that would quickly fizzle out. He had to move tie-dye into the realm of fashion, and figure out how to make it catch on in middle America.

So Don began pitching a tie-dye fashion line to designers in New York City. He was rejected by twenty-three designers. But he found one who saw possibilities, and that one was a biggie: Halston. The top of Buzz Everest looked like it might be in sight. Halston was a master of buzz himself. He designed hats for many celebrities including Jackie Kennedy. But hats were going out of style in the early 60s, and he was looking for his next fashion statement. Halston liked the tie-dye concept, liked the line, and took a chance on it. Halston sold his tie-dye to the likes of Cher, Catherine DeNeuve, and Ali McGraw. Soon enough, Ali McGraw was featured on the cover of a major national magazine...wearing tie-dye. Shortly after, Halston began using the tie-dye motif in many of his department store boutiques, and tie-dye took off as a bona fide fashion.

A big and buzzworthy fad at Woodstock. Then as a fashion with Halston. Middle America would become Don's next step.

How much more Middle America can you get than the Girl Scouts? Don took the idea to the Girl Scouts to create a tie-dye merit badge (not your typical marketing path). Sure enough, several months later, there was a Girl Scout tie-dye merit badge. There were also several appearances on shows like Captain Kangaroo to capture Middle America.

A Long Way To The Top of Buzz Everest

In essence, tie-dye started as the antithesis of traditional marketing in corporate America (e.g., Hellman's mayonnaise). Give most brand managers the option of a job as brand manager for Hellman's mayonnaise or for RIT dye, most would choose the easy path of Hellman's. It would be a great job: no hard work, don't rock the boat, and you've got it made. Don, however, took the hardest assignment anyone could imagine: dying sales, a huge competitor, and a dying installed base of customers.

He ended up climbing Buzz Everest for RIT. By reviving RIT dye through non-traditional means, he achieved multiples more than if he had been given a huge budget for traditional advertising. Taking the traditional path would have produced traditional results. Don did things brand managers don't ordinarily do. Instead of taking the much easier path, he chose a path that brought him the exhilarating experience of climbing Buzz Everest. And not only did he transform a loser into success by making tie-dye what it is today but he has made himself one of heroes of modern day marketing.

Maxim #2: Take The Risk

In any business, if you want to see a *huge* difference in results, you've got to take big risks and do things like climbing Buzz Everest. You've got to be realistic when choosing your marketing direction. Traditional marketing is something your competitors can

replicate. Traditional marketing will produce average results. Average results don't build careers, average results don't increase market share, and average results don't skyrocket profits. Climb Buzz Everest. It will make all the difference.

Climbing Buzz Everest requires resourcefulness, follow-through, patience, and faith.

Buzz Everest is typically pursued in the face of adversity...when you've got nothing to lose.

But only rarely do you find companies willing to climb Buzz Everest when things are going fine. You've got to extricate yourself from the traditional path—the easy path. But turning your back on tradition carries extra risk. What if it fails? How will that reflect on you as a manager or a businessman? Yet you can't eliminate risk *and* have break-away growth.

A New Attitude Toward Fouls

Most managers want huge results with little risk. It just doesn't work that way. You've got to encourage risk-taking without penalty. Americans by nature hate to lose. We're willing to take risks when there's little downside, especially if we can see a huge potential upside. But when things are going fine...we shy away from taking risks. Not a good idea!

In corporate America, too often it's one foul and you're benched. But in the NBA, every player is allowed five fouls per game. Company managers and executives should be establishing a five-foul rule, and making it known to everyone.

Think about how some of the most successful coaches in the NBA view fouls. If LeBron and Kobe end the game with zero fouls—you know they're not playing aggressively. You

Chapter 12 from *Buzzmarketing* Not for resale

know they're not playing their best game. If they end the game with four fouls, they've pushed it to the limit...and chances are they've scored more points, gotten more rebounds, and gotten more steals. Once in a while, you foul out. That's part of the game. Winners know one thing all too well—you're not going to win every game.

Let your players (employees) get their fouls. Innovations will come faster, sales will be higher, and you'll learn from failures. At Johnson & Johnson, R.W. Johnson, Jr., used to say "failure is our most important product."ⁱ Create a *foul-allowed* environment where you can contemplate climbing Buzz Everest ... and then enjoy the climb.

Remember the traditional path is risk-free, but it will produce average results, average market share, and average profits. Unless you climb Buzz Everest, you may never know what you missed.

ⁱ Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies, James C. Collins, Jerry I. Porras (Harper Collins, 2002).

