


VIROLOGY

WORKBOOK



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Dr. Brent Coker

INTRODUCTION

It's hard to believe that just 30 years ago—the idea that anyone could get their message shared by millions of people around the world in just a day or two—was unheard of.

To me the internet is more than a place to read the news each morning, or catch up on photos from my friends. The internet is a place of hope: People with business ideas can recruit the support of others and find funding, people with talent can become overnight stars, social movements can rise and challenge injustices and abuses of State power.

“ The internet is like the night. Without it, we'd never see the stars.

The internet has allowed us to do something no-one could have ever have predicted. Something that's fundamental to human nature—the ability to maintain a sense of recognition, respect, and acceptance through social connectedness.

If you take away someone's ability to be social, they suffer. Those who complain that the internet has increased social isolation and withdrawal could not be more wrong. The internet has increased the intensity of social and civic engagement to a level that we never thought possible. Back in the day we might have spoken to five different people in a day, and nowadays we routinely broadcast to thousands. No one could have predicted the world would become as connected as it is now.

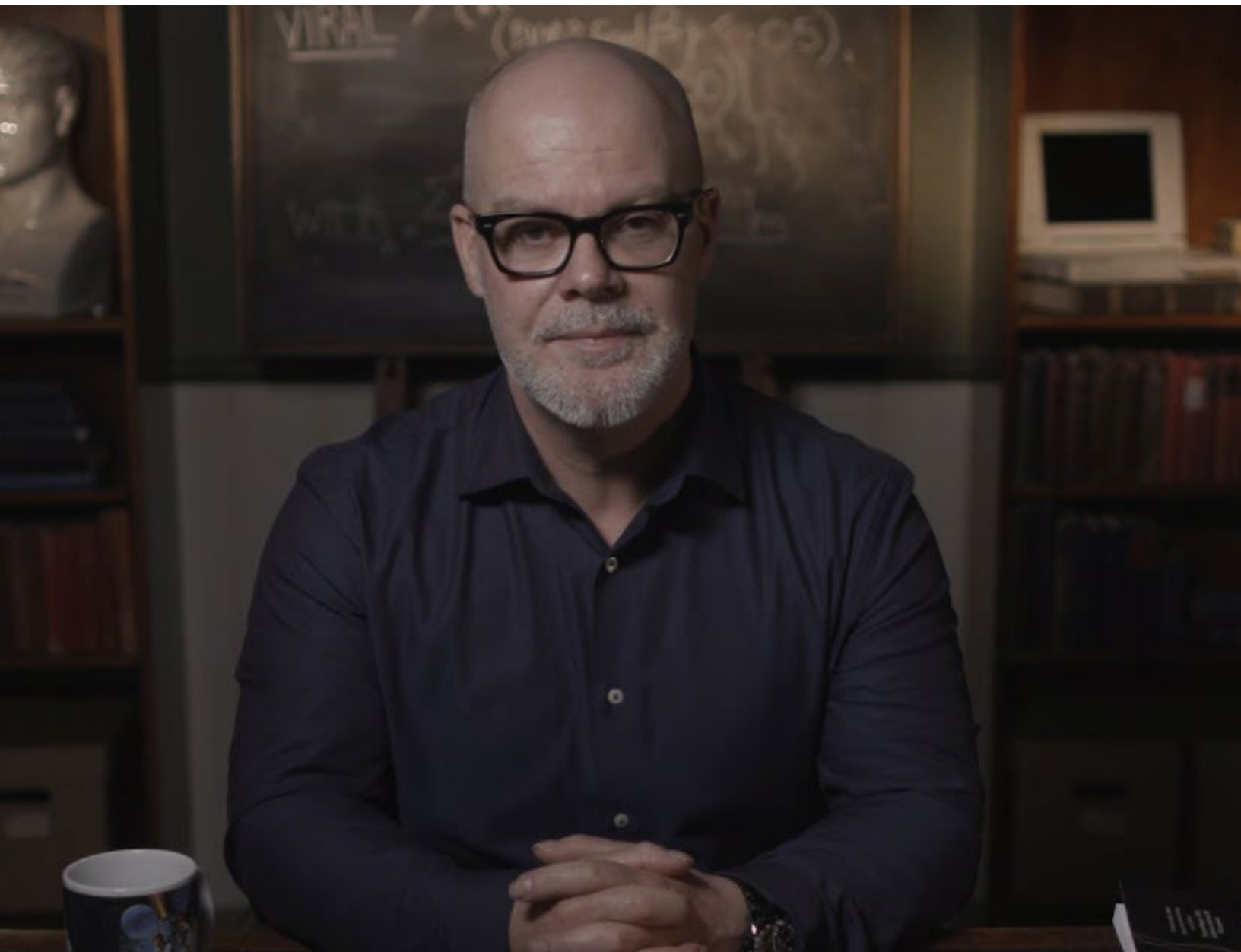
We can be joyful in the hope that social connectedness brings the world together, opening the door of opportunities to everyone, giving rise to a universe of fairness and equality.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

WHO THIS CLASS IS FOR, AND WHAT YOU'LL YOU LEARN

This class is for anyone who has a message they need to get shared.

And not just brands trying to make some marketing message go viral—even though that's probably where the greatest interest lies. You'll learn a lot of things about why people behave the way they do when it comes to sharing information with others. Why are people attracted to some information and not others? What makes people spread good things about you, and how do you get noticed?



YOUR INSTRUCTOR

I started to research why things go viral pretty soon after I got hired by the University of Melbourne as a lecturer in Marketing. Around the time YouTube was starting to get really big in 2008.

I'd just finished my PhD in electronic commerce, and I had an interest in something called Workplace Internet Leisure Browsing, which is people who use the internet in the workplace for personal reasons instead of working. This was back in the days before smart phones.

So I ended up doing a study that was looking at how much money was lost each year from people browsing the internet when they should have been working. The so-called "Freedom to Surf" study.

I had a theory that actually no money was being lost, contrary to popular beliefs at the time, since employees needed external access to the internet while at work to organise their lives. If you blocked off access, then employees would be resentful, and less loyal. Ironically, less productive. In other words, blocking employee access to the internet was the wrong thing to do.

Well, soon after I completed the study, and the University put out a press release, I woke up one morning to thousands of emails and my

phone ringing off the hook. The press were reporting that new research had found that it was ok to surf the internet for fun while in the workplace. Something everyone wanted to do.

My study had gone viral. But I remember feeling pretty uncomfortable with what was happening, My study was perhaps interesting, but also relatively trivial—there were others who were discovering drought resistant crop strains to solve world hunger, or important advances towards curing cancer. It seemed to me they weren't getting the attention they deserved, while my trivial study was getting a lot of attention.

So I started to study why things go viral. Surely it can't be a function of randomness I thought. I wanted to uncover why things go viral, and the secrets to building a strong brand.

I'm Brent Coker. And this video series on Virology is an account of what I've learned.

FREEDOM TO SURF

Brent's Freedom to Surf study was reported in over 350 mainstream newspapers in 2009, including the New York Times, Washington Post, and The Guardian

Building a Strong Brand

Whether it's a bank robber risking his freedom, a gambler gambling his last dollar, or a trader buying bitcoin in the hopes of the price increasing. Risk is always correlated with reward.

In business, it's the same. Business owners borrow huge sums of money in the hope that whatever it is that they're selling solves a big enough problem so that people will want to buy it. It's risk.

What a business owner spends all of his time doing is essentially reducing risk, to keep the wolves from the door. In some sense, your brand is that door.

I study people and money. Essentially that's what Marketing is—how to make money.

Money makes the world go around, as they say, and I've always been curious about how people react to having money, not having money, and spending money.

I read a story about a guy in China who sold his house, and liquidated most of his assets to buy bitcoin. This was near the end of

2017 when the price of bitcoin rose almost 2000% that year. He'd invested everything he owned into a cryptocurrency exchange that unfortunately went bankrupt, and so he lost all his bitcoin—essentially everything he owned.

They found him a few days after he lost everything on the steps of the office of the exchange, holding a razor to his wrists threatening to commit suicide. The pain of losing his money was unbearable, and he no longer wanted to live.

Most people will do almost anything to get money, but they'll also go to great lengths to avoid losing money. People feel the most terrible pain when they lose it.

So it's not just about making money in business, it's also learning how not to lose money. In other words, minimising risk.

Reducing risk in business begins by building a strong brand—one that everyone trusts and respects. One that everyone talks about, and wants to succeed. You can have a great product, but a mediocre brand, and you might succeed. But people aren't very forgiving, and the chances of growing successful is going to be a struggle.

But when you're a strong brand, you can get away with a lot more. You might

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put out a substandard product, or make a mistake that gets people riled up on social media. But you'll live through it.

The most effective way to reduce risk in business is having a brand that everyone trusts—one that gets people talking and earns respect.

BRAND PERSONALITIES

Brands have personalities. Strong personalities get talked about.

My most important advice for anyone wanting to build a strong brand is try to be unique. Ultimately that is what will grow your company and attract customers to you over your competitors. You're creating an entity that is to be admired, so you have to stand out from the crowd, and give a reason for people to admire you.

Compare UPS and Fedex. Or Apple and Microsoft. These companies are in the same market, competing for the same customers, but their personalities are very different from each other.

Consumers form an impression about your brand with every point of contact they have with you. From their interactions with your staff, to how clean your company van is—each point of contact adds to an image of what your brand is all about. How likable you are.

Treat your brand like a person. Build a strong personality. Every social media update, the colours you use, style, and actions—everything needs to be consistent.

Match the belt with the shoes. ”

The strongest brands out there are not defined by their size, but rather the feelings that people feel when they think about the brand.

You gotta have a consistent brand, but you also gotta be memorable.

Action Plan

BUILDING A STRONG BRAND

Brent is passionate about building strong brands, and he usually starts by analysing ‘touch points’—those times when customers make contact with a brand. It could be calling your office, chatting with an employee, or even seeing your van driving down the street. Every time someone sees something connected with your brand, they make a judgement—usually within seconds (it’s always a good idea to wash your vans!).

Each judgement forms an overall impression about your brand—known as ‘Associations’. These judgements and associations are the same cognitive processes that arise when people make judgements about others. Do I trust this person? Do I admire them? Do I support them? Do I want to see them again? Did I enjoy interacting with them? Do they have character and are they interesting? Are they memorable?

The strongest brands in the world excel at creating strong, powerful, and positive associations.

TASK 1

Imagine your brand is a person, and answer the questions on the next page.

PRO TIP

This task requires you to think objectively about your brand as if it existed as a person today, not your ideal of how you would like your brand to be.

For a more accurate representation of your brand, ask these questions to a set of representative customers in a focus group

**IMAGINE YOUR BRAND IS A PERSON,
AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

What type of profession does your brand have?

What type of education does your brand have?

What style of clothes does your brand wear?

What types of hobbies does your brand have?

What types of people does your brand associate with?

What values does your brand have?

What would your brand die for to uphold (what is the most important thing in the world)?

TASK 2

Congratulations! You know have a fairly comprehensive understanding of your brand. Now, go through each of the points you made above, and answer the following questions.

If the person you described above is not who you want your brand to be, what characteristics would need to change?

How does your brand communicate the most desirable associations of your brand?

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