

# VIROLOGY

WORKBOOK



CHAPTER 7

UNDERDOG STRATEGY



## UNDERDOG STRATEGY

Who is the most talked about person in the talent show, or in the Olympics, or just about any event you can think of. Who is it that melts everyone's hearts, and gets the whole crowd rooting for them to win?

It's the Underdog! Everyone wants the Underdog to win, and everyone's talking about them. Whether its Eddie the Eagle, the ski jumper, or the Jamaican bobsled team. There is almost always someone in a competition who is disadvantaged in some way, and captures the hearts of the audiences. Not only does everyone root for that person to win, but it is them that everyone talks about.

Can you imagine having a brand like that? One where everyone is rooting for the brand to win? It's very powerful.

One of the most powerful strategies a brand can use to create word of mouth and viral spread is underdog strategy.

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## Underdog Strategy

There are two main ingredients to making marketing content, or even an entire brand, an underdog, and motivating word of mouth and a loyal following.

First, you must create the illusion of *Genuine Unfairness*. Its not enough just to create an illusion of being disadvantaged. People need to develop an understanding that the source of disadvantage is genuinely unfair.

Second, you need to create the illusion of *Effort over Ability*. This is where you create an impression that the person or brand or situation is using effort to try to succeed, nothing to do with existing skills or abilities. In other words, the focus is on the brand, or person, or entity in a situation Trying to succeed, independently of their ability and skills.

These two elements will be discussed on the following pages.

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# Genuine Unfairness

The first criteria is Genuine Unfairness. If you create a character in marketing content, or the brand itself, it's essential that the story you create communicates an unfair disadvantage, not just any disadvantage. The disadvantage suffered by the character needs to be genuinely unfair.

An unfair disadvantage creates a sense of injustice, whereas a simple disadvantage will tend to be ignored. People won't necessarily feel empathy towards someone who's simply disadvantaged in some way. Creating a disadvantage without unfairness might even have the opposite effect of what is intended and create a sense of what we call 'schadenfreude', which is a human tendency to derive pleasure from the misfortunes of others, not the intended empathy and sense of injustice that you're aiming for.

One simple way to portray a disadvantage as unfair is to humanise the disadvantaged

character. Take for example a homeless person on the street. Unfortunately, homeless people tend to be ignored, and although most people might feel some degree of empathy for them, they don't tend to dwell on it for too long.

But if the homeless person's name and story is known, it humanises them, and people are more likely to feel their circumstances are unfair. What's their name, their background, how did they end up on the streets? Do they have a family somewhere? Once people understand the similarities between the disadvantaged person and themselves, it humanises the disadvantaged person, creates a belief of unfairness, and therefore stronger empathy and willingness to help, or root for the person to ultimately succeed.

## GOLDIEBLOX

One of the most difficult markets to get a foothold in is the toy market. It's a billion-dollar market dominated by a handful of very large behemoths. Notoriously difficult to succeed in.

One brand that did extremely well entering

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the toy market and establishing a foothold was Goldieblox. They did this by identifying a target market that they thought they could build a successful underdog strategy from, and they were incredibly successful.

The target market they chose was young girls, still at school. They made use of a recent OECD study that found young girls lacked self-confidence in their ability to solve mathematics and science problems, and generally achieved worse results in school in these subjects than they otherwise should. They're at a disadvantage compared to the boys.

Their campaign centred on the fact that girls were unfairly disadvantaged at school, and this in part helped them to build a strong underdog strategy, and enter the market.

The Goldieblox theme was: "Little girls are underdogs, and our brand is here to help them triumph by using our toys".

The brand not only emphasised that girls are disadvantaged. But that the disadvantages they have in a male dominated world are unfair.

That's the secret with any underdog strategy.

You have to lead the consumer to believe that not only is there a disadvantage. But that disadvantage is somehow very unfair. That is what activates people's empathy, and gets them on your side. Goldieblox did this very well when entering the ultra competitive toy market, and as a result did very well.



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# Effort over Ability

The other part of building a successful underdog strategy is emphasizing effort over ability. The difference between effort and ability is that effort is perceived to be under someone's control, but ability is perceived to be not under someone's control. Effort is directly associated with the task at hand, and people who try hard are generally more respected than those who don't try hard but have a capable ability.

The Goldieblox brand nailed the effort over ability angle in their [video movie](#), which at last count had over 3 million views.

They created an advertisement that showed the young girls, when faced with boredom watching TV, decide to demonstrate their analytical and engineering potential by constructing an elaborate *Rube Goldberg* machine using only their girly toys—demonstrating effort over ability. Most people's perceptions of young girls are as

cute and vulnerable little people. But in the advertisement the girls are intelligent, powerful, and capable human beings, triumphing over adversity by performing an impressive and surprising feat.

Their Princess Machine video advertisement about young girls claiming their place in a male dominated world currently has close to 3 million views on YouTube.

But let's compare the success of the Goldieblox brand entering the toy market, with a brand where things didn't work out so well.

Powerade were number two in the sports drinks market behind Gatorade. They produced an advertisement that featured the "[Powerade Basketball team](#)" in a locker-room being given a pep-talk by their coach just before a game. The coach reminds the team that although their opponents may have better resources, gold uniforms, star players, and the crowd on their side, they can "power through" and triumph.

Now, does it signal an UNFAIR advantage?

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Well no. Although it is clear in the movie that the Powerade team might not have the same equipment and star players, the disadvantage is not perceived by the viewer as being Unfair. Its simply a disadvantage. The coach made several comparisons between the Powerade team and the competition to create an illusion of disadvantage, but the apparent advantages held by the opposing team did not create the illusion of genuine unfairness.

If the story included some mitigating factors that were preventing them from matching the opposing team, perhaps because of financial hardship or other, then perhaps the illusion of genuine disadvantage could have been created.

In terms of effort over ability, there is also no evidence in the Powerade movie that the PowerAde team are TRYING to succeed. Unfortunately, the whole movie was filmed in a locker-room. To get that part right they would have had to show the players playing, or some other actions to communicate effort.

In contrast, the Princess Machine successfully communicates effort over ability by demonstrating how the young girls were able work together using simple toys to build an elaborate and impressive spectacular.

If you're trying to take an underdog strategy with content, you need to effectively communicate that the characters, which might include the brand incidentally, is expending incredible effort (in other words they're trying), and this effort is independent of, and doesn't necessarily rely on, any skills the character or brand might have.

# Action Plan

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### TASK

Comedians like Chris Rock have long known that people are strangely attracted to the unfairly disadvantaged. It can make people laugh, or it can melt their hearts. People are naturally drawn to support the underdog, and people derive great satisfaction when they see an underdog win. For brands, positioning themselves as an underdog is a shortcut to rapid success, but it's not so easy to activate people's sense of fairness and justice necessary to get people sharing.

Creating an illusion of unfair disadvantage, where effort outshines ability is the key to creating a successful underdog campaign. Think about a story idea for a brand advertisement incorporating a genuine unfair disadvantage, and emphasizing effort over ability.



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