

DOUG ZARKIN

YOUR BRAND

MOVING [^] OUT OF THE FRIEND ZONE



**A Modern Day Guide To
Strengthening Your Brand's Value Equation**

MOVING YOUR BRAND OUT OF THE FRIEND ZONE

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Content Launch Press

"I've had the front-row seat to the remarkable brand transformation Doug orchestrated at Pearle Vision – a masterclass in rallying a business around a singular, powerful vision. The depth of lessons encapsulated in this journey is so profound that I dedicated an episode of The CMO Podcast to dissecting this success story with Doug himself. His book, 'Moving Your Brand Out of the Friend Zone,' promises to be a treasure trove of insights, a testament to Doug's adeptness in nurturing brands from familiarity to heartfelt devotion. Believe me, any leader aspiring to forge deeper connections with their audience will find this read invaluable. Doug is not just a brand builder; he's a creator of love stories between brands and their audiences."

— Jim Stengel, Founder & CEO The Jim Stengel Company, Host of "The CMO Podcast," former Global Marketing Officer of P&G.

"Doug Zarkin's illustrious career has uncovered a wealth of wisdom, reminiscent of the lessons I've learned in my own journey. His unwavering commitment to fostering authentic human connections with his customers and his team reflects a crucial theme in my book, 'Molly's Game.' In a world of ruthless competition, Doug's enduring kindness, humanity, and empathy shine through. This book eloquently articulates and offers guidance on his heart-centered yet remarkably pragmatic and highly effective strategies, underscoring the enduring value of thinking human in business. Doug's expertise is a testament to the transformative power of connecting with people on a profound level, and his work aligns beautifully with the core principles of my own experiences."

— Molly Bloom, Author of 'Molly's Game'

"I know what you're thinking, not another marketing book! Well, in a way you're right because this is not just another marketing book. Doug has created a blueprint; a roadmap for anyone in marketing, regardless of level on the art and science of building a brand. And he does so by using the perfect blend of humor and conversational tone mixed with real-life experiences, of which he has many. Doug pulls back that curtain and then some to get to the heart of what marketers, advertisers, brands, and all points in between need to understand in order to be successful both today and in the future. Not an easy feat I assure you. Yet that's precisely what he has created. You can thank me later."

— Steve Olenski, Former Forbes Writer and host of The CMO Whisperer

"Building a successful brand is the dream and aspiration of every marketer. Many play the game but few actually win. One of the few is Doug Zarkin ... a master brand builder. Doug's unique blend of intelligence, experience and 'heart' makes him one of our industry's most powerful and influential leaders and a marketer extraordinaire".

— Bob Liodice, President/CEO, Association of National Advertisers Inc

"Few individuals grasp the intricate dance between the human experience and the digital ecosystem as profoundly as Doug. As a pivotal member of our Executive Advisory Board, Doug knows that a company's digital presence is driven primarily by Google, and everyone needs a back stage pass. Doug has the ability to cut to the chase as fast as anyone in the business. His new book isn't just a testament to his marketing prowess—it encapsulates his profound understanding of the potent blend of human-centric narratives and the ever-expanding online reputation ecosystem. Doug doesn't just show you the path; he takes you on a journey of discovery and transformation. I highly recommend picking up this book—it's more than a read; it's an experience that promises to redefine the tenets of brand love in the digital age."

— Joe Fuca, CEO of Reputation

"As Co-Founder & Co-CEO of Brand Innovators, I am privileged to interact with the brightest minds in marketing daily. Doug stands out remarkably in this esteemed group, known for his innovative strategies and genuine, human-centric leadership. His insights into brand building and marketing are nothing short of top-tier. Doug's approach inspires admiration and passionate engagement from his teams, making him a favorite among speakers within our community of leading brand side marketers. His first book, 'Moving Your Brand Out Of The Friend Zone,' encapsulates Doug's forward-thinking philosophy. It promises to be an indispensable resource for anyone eager to excel in the modern marketing landscape. I look forward to Doug signing it at our events!"

— Brandon Gutman, Co-Founder and Co-CEO Brand Innovators.

"Back when Doug's daily ad agency work uniform was a shirt, tie, and suspenders, I saw something special in him. It wasn't just his undeniable charisma and passion that drew me in, but a spark that promised great things. That's why I didn't think twice about bringing him on board at Grey Advertising, eventually co-founding G-WHiZ! Youth and Entertainment ad agency.

I've watched Doug grow from a great presenter to someone who truly understands the heartbeat of consumers, a nurturing leader that anyone would be proud to follow. His approach? Simply human, touching lives and building genuine relationships between brands and people.

Now, Doug stands as more than a leader. He's a living testament to personal growth and innovation in our industry, guiding brands and brand teams to connect with audiences in the most heartfelt way. I can't recommend Doug's book enough. It's a heartfelt guide into the world of marketing, seen through the eyes of someone who genuinely cares. Trust me, lean in and soak up his wisdom; it's truly inspiring."

— Barb Martino, CEO The RoundTrip Group

"During my time with Doug as my mentor, I felt truly understood in a way that transcended the professional sphere. Doug possesses a remarkable ability to identify untapped potential within individuals and nurture it with a blend of empathy, wisdom, and genuine care. Throughout our mentorship, Doug emerged as a guiding force in my journey, helping me better understand my strengths and develop my 'superpowers' to bring me closer to my goals. His book not only underscores his exceptional business acumen but also offers readers the same warmth, encouragement, and insightful guidance that I had the privilege to receive. Doug, you're not just a distinguished leader; you're an exceptional individual who excels at inspir-

ing the best in others. I extend my deepest appreciation to you for your transformative mentorship."

— Viktoria Bratushka, Adweek Executive Mentee 2020-2021, Head of Brand Activation Italy at Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health

"When Doug was in college, I'd often send him clippings from newspapers or business magazines with a little note saying, 'FYI, Love Dad.' I just did it out of habit, never sure if they caught his eye. To this day, I joke that I'm not even sure he finished high school! But when he shared he was penning a book, my heart swelled with pride. Naturally, as his dad, I'm a touch biased. But both his mom and I have always said this about Doug: his passion and authenticity are unmatched. He genuinely adores his work and thrives on challenges as a leader and individual. So, from one proud father, give his book a go. It's written from a genuine desire to guide others to their best selves."

— Norman Zarkin, Doug's dad

Foreword

Before the times when LinkedIn became our professional matchmaker, it was all about personal networks, a bit of luck, and some solid advice to carve our career paths. As I was nearing the completion of my MBA, a golden nugget of wisdom was handed down to me that soon became my mantra: **to indeed lead, start at the back-end, and gradually but surely make your way to the forefront.**

This isn't just a stroll through the park; it's a rigorous but rewarding expedition where you'll learn every nook and cranny that goes into building a brand and business. Getting your hands dirty in various roles as you move forward, mastering the unique language of each, that's what it's all about. By the time you reach the front, you will be fluent in the complex dialect of brand-building and primed to lead a team to come together and craft something truly extraordinary. This advice was nothing short of *the cornerstone* of my exhilarating journey in branding and marketing.

You might be wondering, "Why listen to Doug?" I've started from the back and worked my way to the front, learning the ins and outs of building a brand, business and high performing teams. My journey, I think, can offer you some valuable insights or maybe even inspiration as you set out on your journey to either build, rebuild or accelerate your own brand. Here's a quick look at my path.

In my late twenties, I was tapped to build something extraordinary from the ground up: G-WHiZ!, a new division within the Grey Advertising family focusing on youth and entertainment marketing.



G-WHiZ! Client & Experience Roster

It was a whirlwind; in just a few years, we went from startup mode to handling over \$40 million in billings, working with big names like Reebok, W Hotels, The Food Network, Konami Video Games, ABC, The NHL, and Warner Bros.



The Reebok Retreat

The Core Room at
The Reebok Retreat



Reebok Master Trainer,
Yumi Lee, with Harold Perrineau



Lance Bass from N'Sync



Yumi Lee with Steve Kmetko



Lance Bass filming for Extra



Master Trainer, Petra Kolber, with
Sharon Lawrence

Reebok Retreat Project At Sundance Film Festival

Then, I switched gears, joining Avon - (you read that right) and the book promises some great stories and lessons from my time at Avon, including becoming an “Avon Lady”. Here, I spearheaded the creation of “mark.”, the makeup you can buy and sell. It became a hit with college girls around the globe. My marketing plan and partnership platform was recognized as the Best Executed Launch Strategy from the beauty industry's biggest name, WWD. I also earned my first exciting accolade, being named Marketer of The Next Generation by Brandweek.



After that, I joined Limited Brands, helping to catapult Victoria's Secret PINK from a product line into a \$450+ million national sensation. My journey didn't stop there; I took on critical roles in the fashion industry at Warnaco and Kellwood, working with brands such as Warner's, Calvin Klein, Baby Phat, and XOXO.

In 2012, I stepped into what turned out to be nearly an unprecedented eleven-year run at Essilor Luxottica as the Chief Marketing Officer for their optical franchise and healthcare services brand Pearle Vision. I had a vision (no pun intended) to shift the brand's focus from discounts to trust and care.

The results? Years of solid profits, attracting new audiences, snagging a top spot on Entrepreneur's list of Best Franchise Brands, right along side giants like McDonalds, and Dunkin'. I was also lucky to snag a few accolades along the way, with mentions on a handful of the “Top Marketers List” and nods to the innovation of my thinking, plans and programs from Forbes, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The Economist, Entrepreneur Magazine, and Crain's New York Business.

I humbly write this book as someone who loves to teach, mentor, and unlock the greatness inside people.

On this journey, I've discovered a deep passion for helping others grow in the industry. I've linked arms with stellar programs, like The Association of National Advertisers Education Foundation, connecting to community colleges and four-year universities. I've also been a part of Adweek's Executive Mentor Program for several years, where I work directly with members of the next generation to revolutionize this industry. I've had the chance to lecture at places like NYU, George Washington University, and even Harvard. But I've got to say, there's nothing like the buzz of sharing stories with the students at my daughter's high school—they really keep me grounded and excited about what's next!



Teaching The Pearle Vision Case Study At Harvard

Speaking of Harvard, they even created a case study focused on the challenge I faced revitalizing the Pearle Vision brand. It's surreal that my experiences are now teaching material for future business leaders.

I'd be honored to have you join me on this journey, where I hope you'll find some inspiration, a few laughs, and maybe even see a bit of your path in my story.

I am deeply grateful for those who have been instrumental in my journey. I am forever thankful to those who have offered unwavering encouragement and support. Thank you to those who went beyond words and showed me the ropes, teaching me the best way to navigate the twists and turns. And to those who lifted me when I stumbled, giving me the strength to rise again, I owe you a debt of gratitude.

Yet, I also write this book for those who weren't and maybe still aren't exactly rooting for me, those who threw unnecessary roadblocks in my path—those who could have extended a helping hand but chose not to. Call me “intellectually lazy” because I don't need \$50 worth of thought for a \$5 problem. It might sound petty, but truthfully, they were an unexpected source of inspiration. So, in a way, this dedication is also a little reminder that I won't be easily deterred.



Presenting At The ANA CEO Annual Conference

I carry a permanent intellectual chip on my shoulder, but I hope I've channeled that chip for good, not evil! Are you outthinking me? Unlikely. Outworking me? Doubtful. It doesn't mean I'm always right or come out on top every time, but I strive to speak only when my thoughts are well-considered and purposeful with the best intentions.

A simple thank you to my family—those who have been with me through thick and thin, for my wife, my kids, and even my dad, who probably still doesn't fully grasp what I do for a living (he likely thinks I "create commercials" and secretly wishes I had pursued a career in law). And I do this for my mom, who left this world too soon. Though she didn't witness the full extent of my career's growth, I believe she's watching over me, proud of the path I've forged. With humility, appreciation, and a "fire in my belly," I pres-

sent this book as a testament to my journey and the legacy I've tried to leave behind.

This book is filled with all kinds of stuff; some of the things I discuss you may call wisdom, and other things, you may strongly disagree with. But at the heart of it all, remember this: embrace the opportunity to make a difference as a human being and as a marketing leader with a sense of humanity. Strive to do the right thing, even when nobody's watching, because a little extra goes a long way.

My hope as we venture into the depths of this book is that it serves as a guiding voice, helping you navigate the intricate world of branding with the same kind of candor and wisdom I'd share with you in a face-to-face chat or if you were a member of my marketing team.

And trust me, it's a wild ride worth taking. Anything was better than the alternative....going to law school!

Introduction

Can I tell you a secret? I can't spell. And I have a love-hate relationship with Autocorrect, too. So, what made me think that I could write a book? Well, I might not be able to spell, but that doesn't change the fact that I have something to say. And I think—or at least hope—that others might benefit.



When navigating the marketing landscape, both in job hunting and marketing plan development, a dominant conversation emerges: Are you specialized in performance marketing (science) or brand marketing (art)? This question, often posed in interviews, aims to pigeonhole your skills and experience into either tactical execution (performance) or strategic storytelling (branding). But framing it as an "either-or" proposition is misleading and, frankly, unhelpful. Such a question deserves to be permanently sidelined at the intersection of senseless and absurd.

The challenge isn't about choosing between art or science; it's about understanding how these elements can cohesively drive a brand's success. A great marketing plan, like a great marketer, must be both, and a plan must have both. Performance can't perform (at least not well) if the brand has no soul or resonance. And brand marketing that doesn't drive brand consideration and differentiation isn't worth the dollars that went into producing it. But after building brands for twenty-five-plus years across various categories and formats, I've realized there is no exact right way or wrong way to go about building a brand; there are all different ways. **So, what exactly is the goal here?**

I am glad you asked; the goal of this book is to identify a set of fundamentals, a guide if you will, that you can use to help you (yes, you!) along your journey to choose “a way”—that is right for you, your brand, and the particulars of the marketplace you're looking to win in to ensure your brand doesn't find itself in the dreaded Friend Zone. A book that suggests ways to help anchor your thinking or how you process the challenge you're facing to support you in finding what “your way” is going to be. And to drive those sustained results you strive for and that passionate relationship with your customers that you'll come to appreciate. It is the only way to ensure sustained success.

If You Haven't Guessed It Yet

As you read this book, you'll see that I love using analogies and metaphors to help strip out the complexity of something and make it more understandable or at least more relatable. I've been told I enjoy a good sports metaphor, so let's start with one. As a player and coach, I've had more winning seasons than losing seasons across a variety of industries that include sports (naturally), entertainment, QSR, fashion, beauty, hospitality, retail, video games, CPG, health-

care, and a variety of formats; franchising, licensing, wholesale and end-to-end retail.

But don't kid yourself; the lessons from those losing seasons are perhaps even more valuable than the reasons why we were winning, and so I've ensured those lessons are woven into this book. Not everything I've done has worked or come true, but the lessons from those losses, or as I like to refer to them, "successful failures," are woven into the content here.

Using the traffic signal as an "intellectual/metaphorical guide" for a road trip we are taking and if you are ready to begin the journey to unleash your boundless potential as a marketing leader, here's how the content in this book will flow:

Red Light 8 (Part 1 – Park And Process): Chapters 1-5

Imagine an **intellectual red light; before we begin our journey we need to stop and layout some foundational elements** including most obviously, explaining the concept of the Friend Zone, and discovering why it's not where your brand should linger. Coming out of that will come a natural and deep exploration into what I call the currency of trust. This is probably the first moment I hope to truly influence how you approach a topic by viewing things through a particular lens I'll outline. We'll talk about the fallacy of the role of grand gestures in earning trust. Exploring how trust is built is time well spent, especially as you think "execution" and the ability to show, not tell. Spoiler alert: No trust, no Brand Love!

Even if you think you understand the difference between a "product versus a brand," it's worth taking a few moments to really break these out and simplify it for easy comprehension and application as you think about the journey of your brand.

As we move forward, as a marketer and, importantly, as a leader of people today, we'll address some significant shifts post-COVID-19 without overwhelming you with pandemic talk. We'll focus on establishing criteria for defining a high-performing team (news flash: doing it alone is nearly impossible), outline a construct for how to build one yourself, and critically discuss something often overlooked, especially early in your career: the importance and dimensions of “the how” not just “the what.”

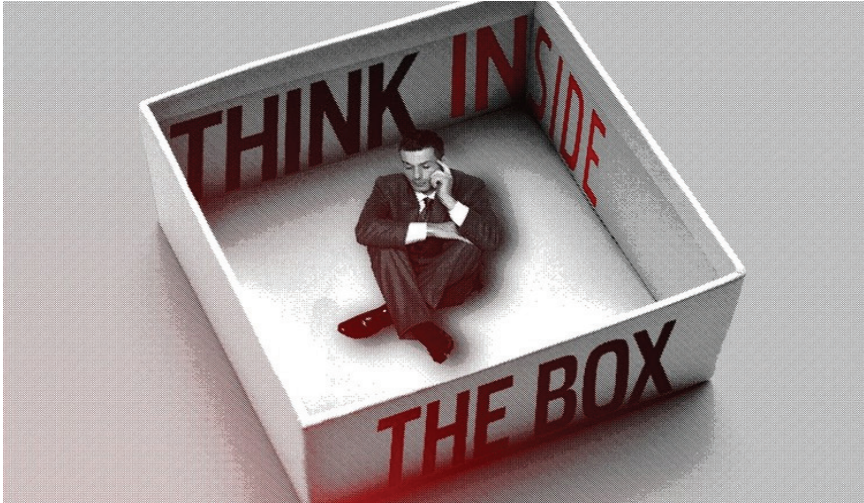
The pièce de résistance of this section is the **Brand Value Equation**—the heart of it all. Less daunting than Einstein's theory or the Pythagorean theorem, it's the foundation upon which everything else rests. Brace yourself for the revelation—this sets an organizational focus for differentiating your brand.

Yellow Light 8 (Part 2 – Moving Forward With Purpose): Chapters 6-10

For this section, put the car in gear; as we cautiously move ourselves and our brand ahead, we'll focus on some essential guidelines.

With an extensive review of something that drives me at my core, an approach that I call “thinking human,” we'll start to talk about how to motivate consumers effectively. We'll dive into the role of emotion and address the “elephant” in the brand war rooms—the role of data. Spoiler alert: Data doesn't make decisions! What did he say!? Don't worry; data is undoubtedly an essential tool for marketers, but have you ever thought about the questions the data is answering? Where do those come from? We'll talk about this data-driven dynamic and how you approach getting yourself and your brand into the right mindset.

At this point, you'll be ready to “think inside the box.” No, this isn't a typo; we'll talk about what this means and how it can unleash a brand's ability to adopt what I call a **challenger-brand mindset**.



Lastly, we'll tackle the marketer's Mt. Everest—defining brand positioning. Building a powerful brand positioning takes time, deep thinking, and discipline. It's like making a tough dinner choice when everything looks delicious.

If you think you are now ready to head for the summit, there are always a few different routes to consider based on the conditions of the mountain. Bringing this whole mountain climbing analogy back down to the world of building brands, when it comes to marketing, determining the optimal route to the top comes down to where your brand values (the truths of your brand) intersect with your target audience (the human truths)—a core construct for any marketing plan and creative brief.

This simple, yet powerful construct will become your guiding light for all internal and external efforts, offering solutions to the com-

plexity at any organizational size. This approach has proven successful across diverse verticals, retail formats, and brand lifecycles, but we will examine this construct in action through the experience I had revitalizing the Pearle Vision brand. At a minimum, this should instill confidence that this is not a theory for filling pages in a book, but something pragmatic and proven to consider applying to your marketing challenge.

With purpose and clarity, we will transition from moving ahead to truly stepping on the gas and accelerating the trajectory of your brand and yourself as a marketing leader!

Green Light (Part 3 – Outsmarting Your Competition): Chapters 11-15

Who's up for a pit stop to eat some cake? Because who doesn't love cake, right? But what does cake have to do with crafting a comprehensive marketing plan? In today's fragmented media landscape, choices are abundant. Picture building your marketing plan as making a delicious multi-layer cake as we create a framework to navigate through countless media sales emails promising “100% guaranteed ROI” and pressure from key stakeholders to invest in this or that. Knowing what to do is not where the challenge only rests; it's figuring out the mix of “marketing ingredients” necessary to make a marketing plan that “tastes great,” a.k.a. drives results.

The name of the game is **prioritization**—a strategic approach that embraces the place for a test-and-learn mentality while preserving your brand's marketing plan core ingredients.



F.O.M.O. (fear of missing out) is not a marketing strategy. Still, with the evolution of marketing being what it is, you can go crazy trying to plot where, what, and when to infuse meaningful innovation into your marketing or brand ecosystem, living in fear that if you don't do something you will get left behind. Take a deep breath; we'll explore a simple yet powerful construct to evaluate innovation opportunities and bring focus to the ones you should prioritize. Can we hold hands and avoid developing yet another app that lives on your phone and you use maybe once a year? Please!

As we wrap up the book, we will explore what I consider to be the “backstage pass” of effectively building a brand, the importance of **managing your online reputation**, and how that can score you and your brand the best seats in the house to ensure your brand is visible and resonates stronger than even those brands with budgets 3x-4x what you might have.

A Summary Of The Guide

At the end of each chapter (and you'll find a compilation of all of these at the very end of the book), I'll present three critical take-aways for easy reference and sharing with your team. By the book's end, you'll hold a pragmatic toolkit of strategic constructs and approaches to help you avoid and should be, if necessary, break your brand free from the Friend Zone and ignite honest Brand Love, growth, and resonance.

Don't forget to buckle that seatbelt, no texting while driving here, let's go!

Chapter ONE: The Friend Zone Yes, That Friend Zone

So, let's dig into that awkward pause when the person you're into says, "I just want to be friends." It's like the air gets sucked out of the room. You can almost hear the screeching tires in your mind. Everything that felt like it was moving forward suddenly comes to a grinding halt.

This moment is a pivot point. Until now, you were hoping for something more, something lasting. But those words make it clear—your investment, emotional and otherwise, isn't going to yield the return you were hoping for. What typically follows is a slow fade: fewer texts, more "seen" messages, and plans that never materialize. Before you know it, you're not even on their radar. In the grand scope of things, this 'lean-back moment' almost always signals the beginning of the end.

Now, switching gears from romance to revenue, let's ponder an intriguing question: on the surface, landing in the Friend Zone with your customers might not seem like a crisis. But is this really a comfort zone your brand can afford to be in?

Let's dive into a modern truth: in today's digital world, the notion of "being liked" or being just friends with your consumer has become a commodity. Friendship indicators such as clicks and swipes are often about participation, not genuine connection. Your brand has to face this reality head on. If it's stuck in the Friend Zone, it's like handing out those familiar fun-sized candies on Halloween—easy to get but easily forgotten.

In a world of digital distractions and high expectations, 'good' isn't enough. Your brand should aim to be the talk of the town—the house that gives out full-sized candy bars on Halloween, sparking excitement. It should be the preferred choice, a beacon of loyalty and love.

We're here to thrive, not just survive. A 'like' is a nod, but Brand Love is becoming the neighborhood favorite. It transforms transactions into heartfelt connections, making your brand an authentic, word-of-mouth sensation.

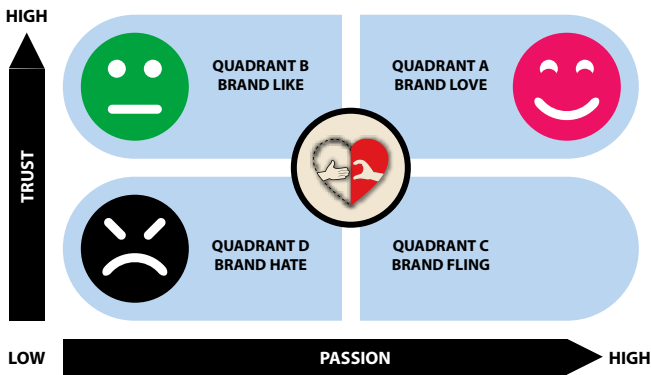
As we delve into the rest of this chapter, our journey will navigate the intricacies of the different customer relationship zones. We'll dissect the nuances of each zone, uncover the dynamics that drive them, and reveal why merely dwelling in the Friend Zone can be risky for attaining sustained, long-term success.

The true triumph lies in being celebrated, not simply tolerated.

Defining The Zone Of Your Customer Relationship

We've all experienced something like this before, but let's break it down visually for a clearer understanding. Imagine using a straightforward four-box matrix. Picture the x-axis (horizontal) representing **passion**, and the Y-axis (vertical) representing **trust**. Passion and trust are the fundamental building blocks of any relationship, whether it's in business or our personal lives. In this matrix, each quadrant represents a unique combination of passion and trust - cornerstones that set the stage for the depth of a connection, be it a friendship or a full-fledged romance. As we dive into each quadrant and explore their distinct dynamics, we'll start by aiming for the pinnacle: creating Brand Love.

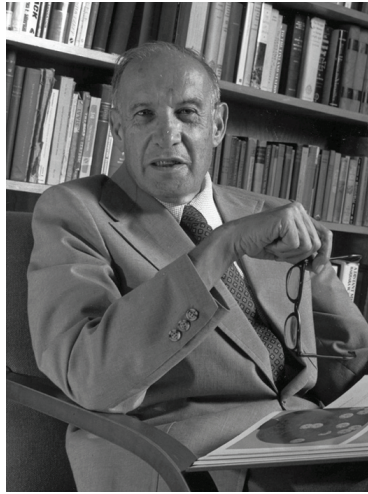
CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP ZONES



Quadrant A (Brand Love): Think of this as the ultimate goal. You've hit the jackpot here—high passion and trust are in play. This is the sweet spot where your customers passionately believe in your brand and have complete confidence and reliance in it. It's the golden zone every brand aims to achieve in the eyes of its customers. It isn't easy to reach, and even fewer brands maintain this fervent loyalty.

In my tenure working on an automotive account back in my days at Grey Advertising, the industry's wisdom resonated deeply: "You're not just selling one car; you're selling a lifetime of cars." This echoes Peter Drucker, the seminal management consultant, who wisely articulated, *"The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits them and sells itself."*

But here's the catch: Immediate business pressures often steer us toward short-term gains. It's like winning a sales battle, but ultimately losing the sustained business performance war. This is where Brand Love and understanding the Love Zone dynamics becomes critical.



Peter Drucker

The Love Zone isn't a static space of comfort, but a dynamic arena filled with high rewards and expectations. Being in this zone is less about resting on your laurels and more about continuously delivering on the immense trust and passionate advocacy your customers have vested in you. Brands like Apple, REI, and Four Seasons Hotels, exemplify this—each in their own unique way. They're not merely providers but an integral part of their customers' lives, reflecting their identities and values. Such a commitment demands an unceasing effort to maintain these deep-rooted relationships.

But why is this Love Zone so essential? A Harvard Business Review study finds that acquiring a new customer costs between 5 to 25 times more than retaining an existing one. Thus, the Love Zone is where the symbiosis of loyalty, respect, and trust becomes not just beneficial but vital. Your brand becomes an enduring aspect of your customers' lives, shifting from being a mere option to becoming their go-to solution.

Brand Love and the Love Zone is not about fleeting engagements or temporary commitments; it's a lifetime pact. While your custom-

ers may occasionally be tempted by the special offers from other brands, their roots remain firmly planted in your brand's values and overall experience.

The challenge and the ultimate goal for any brand is not just to reach this Love Zone, but to stay there and maintain its high standards consistently. It's not just a strategy; it's an ethos that yields sustainable rewards. In essence, the aim is not just to create recurring transactions but to cultivate relationships so enduring that your customers not only come back but also become fervent advocates for your brand.

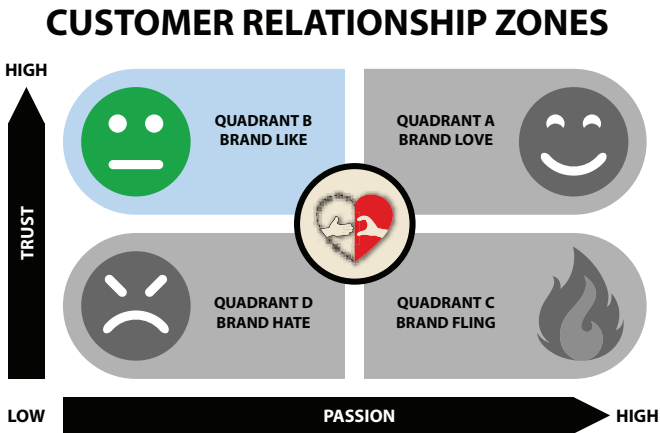
So, the Love Zone is not merely a target but an ongoing commitment. The high level of trust and passion your customers show for your brand isn't just a boon; it's a responsibility that, when well-managed, turns into a long-term, rewarding relationship for both parties.

The Best Part? They'll Do Your Marketing For You!

Sustained sales and greater business planning predictability are just the early benefits. Customers in the Love Zone (quadrant A) become your unstoppable marketing dream team. They don't just talk about their great experience with your brand; they shout it from behind their all-powerful smartphones. They become your fierce brand fanatics on and offline, spreading the word like wildfire.

These folks are on a mission. They're out there, organically promoting your brand, sharing their experiences with anyone who will listen or reaching out to them for a recommendation. They're like customer superheroes with smart devices that have perfect cell service and stop at nothing until everyone knows just how freaking amazing you are. This organic, word-of-mouth marketing puts your brand on the map and leaves your competitors wicked pissed and panic-stricken.

Brand Love comes with benefits (and strings attached), and this advocacy is one of the big ones. When that happens, holy shit, it's fantastic. Challenges will happen along the way; but these types of rewards will make every drop of blood, sweat, and tears worth it.



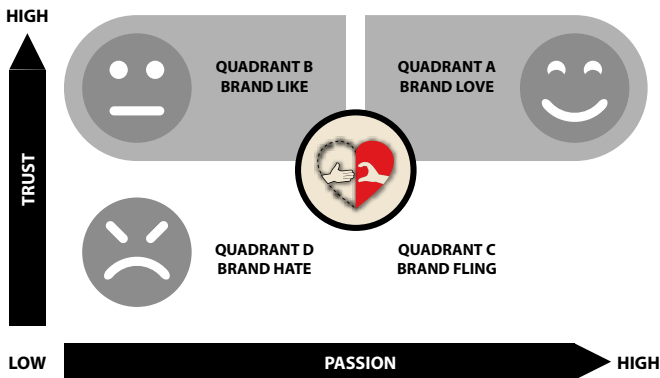
Quadrant B (Brand Like): Let's delve deeper into Quadrant B, which I like to call Brand Like. Here, your brand is a reliable staple, akin to over-the-counter medication or insurance companies — brands with products that aren't exactly glamorous but are indispensable when needed. Being in this quadrant isn't awful, but it comes with its own set of risks.

Without an emotional attachment, customers in this category may switch to a competitor if they see a better deal or find a more convenient option. According to a study by the CMO Council, nearly half of U.S. consumers will abandon a brand if it repeatedly provides a poor, impersonal, or frustrating customer experience. Take the example of BlackBerry—a brand once trusted for its secure email services but which lost market share when it couldn't compete with the emotional appeal and user experience of iPhones or Androids.

Another example can be drawn from the financial services industry. Companies like Vanguard are known for their services, but they're not generally brands people "love." Yet Vanguard manages to retain its customer base through a reputation of trust and integrity. The challenge for such brands is to inject more 'passion' into the equation. Trust may get your brand a seat at the table, but it isn't easy to become the guest of honor without emotional engagement.

In summary, Quadrant B is a good place to be, but it's not the endgame. To elevate your brand, you'll need to find ways to build emotional engagement without sacrificing the trust you've worked so hard to earn.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP ZONES



Quadrant C (Brand Fling): This quadrant is the domain of high passion coupled with low trust. Think of it as the Tesla of the dating world—undeniably captivating, but with a reputation that can sometimes make you second guess your commitment. Like how Tesla's cars might get your pulse racing with their innovative technology, but the brand still wrestles with questions about reliability or service. Customers here are magnetized by the brand's allure yet remain

guarded, as skepticism tempers their enthusiasm. It's where initial curiosity and high excitement meet the sobering reality of unmet expectations.

What's Wrong With A Little Fling?

The year is 2000, and "Who Let the Dogs Out" by Baha Men blares from every radio. It's catchy, it's everywhere, and for a moment, Baha Men are kings of the music scene. Fast forward to today, and they're primarily forgotten—a one-hit-wonder that couldn't make lightning strike twice. Now, think of the "Fidget Spinner" mania. In 2018, these tiny gadgets practically became a societal reflex, spinning in hands everywhere you looked. Yet, here we are, the spinners collecting dust on store shelves or in your desk drawer or junk drawer.

Here's the hard truth: Baha Men and Fidget Spinners are cautionary tales of fleeting fame. They hit a zeitgeist jackpot, but that win is a double-edged sword. It offers a giddy high of rapid success but sets an impossible standard for what comes next.



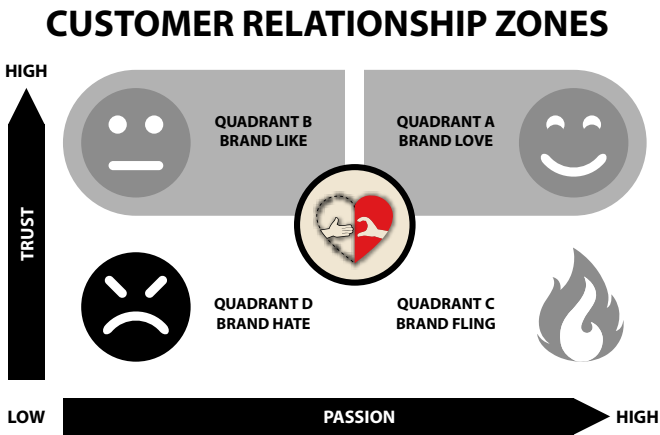
50 million units of fidget spinners were sold in the first six months of 2017



"Who Let The Dogs Out?" sold 3 million copies in the U.S, becoming certified triple platinum

See, going viral can give you the illusion that you've cracked some secret code that you've built a magic bridge to your customers. But you often don't see that this bridge is made of ice—melting quickly and not sturdy enough to hold anything meaningful for long. Before you know it, the public has moved onto the next big thing, and you're left wondering where it all went wrong.

The trick is not to be a one-act play but to script an ongoing narrative. To not just dazzle with a spectacle but create something lasting and meaningful. We'll unpack that in the chapters that lie ahead, charting a path from viral sensation to iconic brand. This is about turning fifteen minutes of fame into a lifetime of relevance.



In Quadrant D, ironically dubbed Brand Hate, we find businesses that appear to defy conventional wisdom. At a glance, their robust sales figures can create the illusion of brand health. CEOs might even pat themselves on the back, erroneously thinking they've cracked the code to customer loyalty. But here's the subtle twist:

These companies aren't thriving because they're beloved; they're succeeding because they're needed, a situation that's far from ideal.

Think about utility companies—gas, electric, and water providers are prime examples. These are often the kings of Quadrant D, recording steady profits not because consumers adore them but because they're the only game in town. It's a fragile empire built on a lack of alternatives. Customers tolerate high prices, service issues, and hidden fees because what choice do they have? They operate in a near-monopoly environment, ensuring that they're indispensable despite often being intensely disliked.

Living in Quadrant D is like being the last or only resort rather than the first choice. Sure, you're in the game, but you're far from winning it. A brand lives here not because people want to engage with it but because they have to, a precarious position that's a mere policy change or disruptive innovator away from toppling.

In this zone, any semblance of emotional connection or trust is usually missing, substituted by a grudging acceptance that makes customers ripe for the picking when a better option does eventually appear. The stark reality: If your brand is in Quadrant D, you're living on borrowed time. You have customers, but you don't have advocates. You're the subject of rants, not raves. And in a world that's rapidly innovating, that's a dangerous place to be.

But if your brand resides in the Brand Hate zone, or Quadrant D, don't lose hope. While many companies seem content to remain here (think cable companies that must know they're disliked but do little to change), if your brand truly wants to evolve from this zone, the key is to shift from a purely transactional relationship to one that begins to build trust and maybe even emotional ties.

While the information, stories and examples in this book can't deliver a miracle, do expect that these tangible strategies can take you from disdain to neutrality or better. Even minor improvements can significantly alter your brand's trajectory in a competitive market.

The Friend Zone: Balancing On The Tightrope Between Passion And Trust



Welcome to the Friend Zone, where brands dwell in the center of the four quadrant metric, the complex intersection of moderate to low passion and at best, lukewarm trust. In this ambiguous landscape, you have enough customer interest to keep you afloat but need more loyalty to ensure steady growth. You're good enough to hang out with but not enough to commit to. This conundrum isn't just confusing; it **destabilizes your business's foundational elements.**

Being in the Friend Zone makes effective brand planning nearly impossible. After all, how do you craft a long-term strategy around ambiguity? Inconsistent customer engagement makes it hard to pinpoint which initiatives actually resonate and deserve further investment. You might be tempted to allocate resources to broad-ranging efforts, hoping something will stick. But this scattershot approach only spreads the confusion, creating a cycle of half-baked strategies that drain resources without providing clear ROI.

A Forecast In Flux

The uncertainty that pervades the Friend Zone impacts another critical aspect of business: sales forecasting. When you have a customer base that's neither wholly passionate nor deeply trusting, predicting future behaviors becomes a guessing game. This lack of clarity breeds nervous tension, especially when quarterly numbers loom large. Shortfalls aren't just numbers; they're distress signals that reverberate across the boardroom, leaving stakeholders anxious and your team in a reactive, firefighting mode.

Being stuck in this middle ground puts you in the uncomfortable position of having to answer tough questions from senior leadership. Questions like, "Why are sales lagging?" or "What's causing the dip in customer traffic?" aren't quickly answered with metrics or data when your brand is stuck in a nebulous area like the Friend Zone. The pressure to provide swift solutions can lead to hasty decisions, which often exacerbate the problem rather than resolve it.

The Friend Zone doesn't just affect your planning and forecasting; it also fundamentally alters how you interact with existing customers and the marketing strategies you deploy to drive traffic. In this volatile space, you're likely to find yourself facing difficult choices—choices that might tempt you to resort to desperate measures

you'd otherwise avoid. The following sections will delve into the high-risk maneuvers that brands in the Friend Zone often feel compelled to take, decisions that have consequences that could further distance you from your desired brand identity and long-term goals.

Pissing Off Your Existing Customer Database

The limbo-like characteristics of the Friend Zone often lead brands to a common pitfall: over-communicating with lapsed consumers. Notifications flood inboxes with messages like "We've missed you" or "It's been six months since we last saw you." Ironically, this desperation to re-engage can cause customers to disconnect even more, relegating your brand to spam folders and blocked social media accounts. The equivalent of "getting ghosted." Not good!

The Discount Drug: The Perils Of Quick Fixes

Often, brands in the Friend Zone resort to what's known as the "discount drug." It's a tactical move that generates immediate traffic and short-term revenue boosts but doesn't contribute to brand loyalty or long-term engagement. Such tactics only reinforce the transient nature of your customer relationships. These customers are not your advocates; they're bargain hunters, ready to jump ship when the next great deal appears.

Navigating out of the Friend Zone means breaking through the mediocrity of 'good enough.' Stakeholders demand more, and so should you. "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope," cried Princess Leia, and while I don't wield Jedi powers, I am going to share some strategic thinking, constructs and perspectives in this book to help you begin to step further away from the dark side of the force. I'll do my very best to help shift the way you think about your brand to create and embrace the task of creating genuine connections that will help you create Brand Love. The path forward is to

shift from just ‘enough’ to ‘excellent,’ both in creating passionate experiences and in building trust. As Dr. Seuss wisely said, *“It’s not about what it is; it’s about what it can become.”*

The 3 Key Takeaways From Chapter 1: The Friend Zone...

1. Cultivate Brand Loyalty, Not Mere Affinity: While achieving a “friend status” with your customers is commendable, it should be viewed as a stepping stone rather than the destination. The ultimate aim is to foster brand loyalty that transcends transactional interactions. This intense emotional engagement turns episodic customers into brand evangelists, activating the most authentic form of marketing—word-of-mouth.

2. Navigate Beyond The Friend And Fling Zones: The ‘Friend Zone’ signifies customers who have a fleeting allegiance to your brand, while the ‘Fling Zone’ is defined by customers who exhibit ephemeral enthusiasm but low commitment. To optimize customer value, shift the focus from mere interaction to enduring trust and meaningful engagement, thereby elevating relationships beyond these limiting zones.

3. Forge Lifelong Customer Partnerships: Instead of concentrating solely on immediate revenue spikes or quarterly growth, channel your resources and strategies toward building lifelong customer partnerships. When customers reach the ‘Love Zone,’ they not only become loyal advocates but are also emotionally invested in your brand’s success. This requires an unwavering commitment to service excellence, consistent value delivery, and an enriched customer experience that resonates with your brand's vision.