

"I've seen the future of business,
and it's The Cluetrain Manifesto."

— from the foreword by

Thomas Petzinger, Jr., The Wall Street Journal

the
cluetrain
manifesto

the end of business as usual

rick levine + christopher locke +
doc searls + david weinberger

THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO

The end of business as usual

RICK LEVINE

+

CHRISTOPHER LOCKE

+

DOC SEARLS

+

DAVID WEINBERGER

PERSEUS BOOKS

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book and Perseus Books was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in initial capital letters.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 99-068460

ISBN: 0-7382-0244-4

Copyright © 2000 by Fredrick Levine, Christopher Locke,
David Searls, and David Weinberger

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America.

Perseus Books is a member of the Perseus Books Group

Jacket Design by David High

Text Design by Rose Traynor

9 10—03 02 01 00

First printing, December 1999

Perseus Books are available at special discounts for bulk purchases in the U.S. by corporations, institutions, and other organizations. For more information, please contact the Special Markets Department at HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022, or call 1-212-207-7528.

Find us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.perseusbooks.com>

THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO

FOREWORD

TAKE A POT OF WATER THAT'S JUST ABOVE THE FREEZING MARK. Now, crank up the heat and wait. Temperature rises. Wait some more. Go all the way to 211 degrees Fahrenheit and nothing looks much different. But then, turn it up one more tiny degree, and wham! The pot becomes a roiling, steamy cauldron.

Don't look now, but you're holding such a catalyst in your hands. THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO is about to drive business to a full boil.

Let me tell you how it took me to the tipping point. Not long ago I was sitting in the Hotel Nikko in San Francisco on a reporting mission for "The Front Lines," a weekly column I spent four years writing for THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. Between interviews, I was checking e-mail from my readers. (The Internet puts me in touch with thousands of them who act as my scouts.) On this particular day, one of my correspondents urged me to check out a new site at www.cluetrain.com.

I was dumbstruck. There, in a few pages, I read a startlingly concise summary of everything I'd seen in twenty-one years as a reporter, editor, bureau chief, and columnist for my newspaper. The idea that business, at bottom, is fundamentally human. That engineering remains second-rate without aesthetics. That natural, human conversation is the true language of commerce. That corporations work best when the people on the inside have the fullest contact possible with the people on the outside.

And most importantly, that however ancient, timeless, and true, these principles are just now resurging across the business world. The triggering event, of course, is the advent of a global communication system that restores the banter

of the bazaar, that tears down power structures and senseless bureaucracies, that puts everyone in touch with everyone.

Scrolling through the hundreds of signatories who had endorsed the manifesto, I realized this if nothing else: The newspaper gods had just blessed me with one of my favorite columns ever, enabling me to articulate much I knew to be true but never previously had the words to say.

Because “The Front Lines” was usually a narrative tale, I bored into the manifesto’s origins. Befitting its message, the document, I learned, was born in an extended electronic conversation among four Internet denizens spread from coast to coast. The authors were not the ultra-hip, just-outta-college webheads I had imagined. One was Rick Levine, a Boulder-based engineer for the giant Sun Microsystems. Another was a Boulder consultant named Christopher Locke, late of such hoary outfits as IBM, MCI, and Carnegie Mellon. There was a well-known Silicon Valley publicist named Doc Searls and a longtime high-tech marketer from Boston whose name, David Weinberger, I recognized from his commentaries on National Public Radio’s “All Things Considered.”

They were, in short, fixtures of the high-tech establishment—but being establishment made their renunciation of business-as-usual all the more powerful.

The manifesto URL leaped between cubicles like mononucleosis through a co-ed dorm. Some readers found it pretentious, bordering on smug. (To those of delicate sensibility, it was.) Some found it nihilistic. (It wasn’t.) But all found it arresting and impossible to ignore. The manifesto became a kind of user’s guide to the Internet economy—a world of new online communities; of self-organizing corporate employees; of Linux and other “open source” movements that seem to erupt from thin air.

So now, for anyone who missed it the first time and for everyone else who wants more, we have THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO, one of the first books written as sequel to a Web site.

I look at a huge number of business books, I actually read some of them and have published reviews on more than my share. I’ll mention a few ways THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO is like no other.

First, this is no feel-good book. Though the broad theme is overwhelmingly optimistic, the details will make you squirm. This is an obituary for business-as-usual. It shows how your Web strategy may be minutes from obsolescence. It reveals how the Internet has made your entry-level employees as powerful as your senior vice president of marketing. Recall what THE JUNGLE did to meat packing, what SILENT SPRING did to chemicals, what UNSAFE AT ANY SPEED did to Detroit. That's the spirit with which THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO takes on the arrogance of corporate e-commerce. (Notably, some of the best material comes from the authors' own experiences within big companies, and they name names.)

Second, this is not a how-to book, unless you need a remedial lesson in being human. For all their righteous self-assuredness about the Internet revolution, these authors don't presume to tell you how to run your business or your career. One-size-fits-all "programs" and "methodologies" are just ways for consultants to gouge clients and book buyers. Instead, this book simply describes business *as it really is* and *as it's really becoming*. You'll come away from these pages with a new set of eyes for redirecting your career or rehabilitating your company according to its own unique circumstances.

Third, this book is not boring. The whole message here, after all, involves speaking with a human voice. That means stories instead of lectures, humor instead of hubris, description instead of PowerPoint pie charts. (Imagine IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE crossed with FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS.) When was the last time you laughed out loud reading a business book?

And why not laughter? It's one of the signature melodies of human conversation. This book shows how conversation forms the basis of business, how business lost that voice for a while, and how that language is returning to business thanks to a technology that inspires, and in many cases demands, that we speak from the heart.

To rip off what rock critic Jon Landau once said about Bruce Springsteen: I've seen the future of business, and it's THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO. At first you may be tempted to hide this book inside the dust jacket for CUSTOMERS.COM or something equally conventional. But in time you'll see the

book spreading. It will become acceptable, if never entirely accepted. It will certainly become essential. Why am I so sure? Because like nothing else out there, it shows us how to grasp the human side of business and technology, and being human, try as we might, is the only fate from which we can never escape.

—Thomas Petzinger, Jr.
The Wall Street Journal

THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO

People of Earth...

A POWERFUL GLOBAL CONVERSATION HAS BEGUN.

Through the Internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter—and getting smarter faster than most companies.

These markets are conversations. Their members communicate in language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny, and often shocking. Whether explaining or complaining, joking or serious, the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can't be faked.

Most corporations, on the other hand, only know how to talk in the soothing, humorless monotone of the mission statement, marketing brochure, and your-call-is-important-to-us busy signal. Same old tone, same old lies. No wonder networked markets have no respect for companies unable or unwilling to speak as they do.

But learning to speak in a human voice is not some trick, nor will corporations convince us they are human with lip service about “listening to customers.”

They will only sound human when they empower real human beings to speak on their behalf.

While many such people already work for companies today, most companies ignore their ability to deliver genuine knowledge, opting instead to crank out sterile happytalk that insults the intelligence of markets literally too smart to buy it.

However, employees are getting hyperlinked even as markets are. Companies need to listen carefully to both. Mostly, they need to get out of the way so intranetworked employees can converse directly with internetworked markets.

Corporate firewalls have kept smart employees in and smart markets out. It's going to cause real pain to tear those walls down. But the result will be a new kind of conversation. And it will be the most exciting conversation business has ever engaged in.

9 5 T h e s e s

- 1** Markets are conversations.
- 2** Markets consist of human beings, not demographic sectors.
- 3** Conversations among human beings *sound* human. They are conducted in a human voice.
- 4** Whether delivering information, opinions, perspectives, dissenting arguments or humorous asides, the human voice is typically open, natural, uncontrived.
- 5** People recognize each other as such from the sound of this voice.
- 6** The Internet is enabling conversations among human beings that were simply not possible in the era of mass media.
- 7** Hyperlinks subvert hierarchy.
- 8** In both *internetworked* markets and among *intranetworked* employees, people are speaking to each other in a powerful new way.

- 9 These networked conversations are enabling powerful new forms of social organization and knowledge exchange to emerge.
- 10 As a result, markets are getting smarter, more informed, more organized. Participation in a networked market changes people fundamentally.
- 11 People in networked markets have figured out that they get far better information and support from one another than from vendors. So much for corporate rhetoric about adding value to commoditized products.
- 12 There are no secrets. The networked market knows more than companies do about their own products. And whether the news is good or bad, they tell everyone.
- 13 What's happening to markets is also happening among employees. A metaphysical construct called "The Company" is the only thing standing between the two.
- 14 Corporations do not speak in the same voice as these new networked conversations. To their intended online audiences, companies sound hollow, flat, literally inhuman.
- 15 In just a few more years, the current homogenized "voice" of business—the sound of mission statements and brochures—will seem as contrived and artificial as the language of the 18th century French court.
- 16 Already, companies that speak in the language of the pitch, the dog-and-pony show, are no longer speaking to anyone.
- 17 Companies that assume online markets are the same markets that used to watch their ads on television are kidding themselves.
- 18 Companies that don't realize their markets are now networked person-to-person, getting smarter as a result and deeply joined in conversation are missing their best opportunity.
- 19 Companies can now communicate with their markets directly. If they blow it, it could be their last chance.
- 20 Companies need to realize their markets are often laughing. At them.
- 21 Companies need to lighten up and take themselves less seriously. They need to get a sense of humor.
- 22 Getting a sense of humor does not mean putting some jokes on the corporate web site. Rather, it requires big values, a little humility, straight talk, and a genuine point of view.

- 23 Companies attempting to "position" themselves need to *take* a position. Optimally, it should relate to something their market actually cares about.
- 24 Bombastic boasts—"We are positioned to become the preeminent provider of XYZ"—do not constitute a position.
- 25 Companies need to come down from their Ivory Towers and talk to the people with whom they hope to create relationships.
- 26 Public Relations does not relate to the public. Companies are deeply afraid of their markets.
- 27 By speaking in language that is distant, uninviting, arrogant, they build walls to keep markets at bay.
- 28 Most marketing programs are based on the fear that the market might see what's really going on inside the company.
- 29 Elvis said it best: "We can't go on together with suspicious minds."
- 30 Brand loyalty is the corporate version of going steady, but the breakup is inevitable—and coming fast. Because they are networked, smart markets are able to renegotiate relationships with blinding speed.
- 31 Networked markets can change suppliers overnight. Networked knowledge workers can change employers over lunch. Your own "downsizing initiatives" taught us to ask the question: "Loyalty? What's that?"
- 32 Smart markets will find suppliers who speak their own language.
- 33 Learning to speak with a human voice is not a parlor trick. It can't be "picked up" at some tony conference.
- 34 To speak with a human voice, companies must share the concerns of their communities.
- 35 But first, they must belong to a community.
- 36 Companies must ask themselves where their corporate cultures end.
- 37 If their cultures end before the community begins, they will have no market.
- 38 Human communities are based on discourse—on human speech about human concerns.
- 39 The community of discourse *is* the market.
- 40 Companies that do not belong to a community of discourse will die.

- 41 Companies make a religion of security, but this is largely a red herring. Most are protecting less against competitors than against their own market and workforce.
- 42 As with networked markets, people are also talking to each other directly *inside* the company—and not just about rules and regulations, boardroom directives, bottom lines.
- 43 Such conversations are taking place today on corporate intranets. But only when the conditions are right.
- 44 Companies typically install intranets top-down to distribute HR policies and other corporate information that workers are doing their best to ignore.
- 45 Intranets naturally tend to route around boredom. The best are built bottom-up by engaged individuals cooperating to construct something far more valuable: an intranetworked corporate conversation.
- 46 A healthy intranet *organizes* workers in many meanings of the word. Its effect is more radical than the agenda of any union.
- 47 While this scares companies witless, they also depend heavily on open intranets to generate and share critical knowledge. They need to resist the urge to “improve” or control these networked conversations.
- 48 When corporate intranets are not constrained by fear and legalistic rules, the type of conversation they encourage sounds remarkably like the conversation of the networked marketplace.
- 49 Org charts worked in an older economy where plans could be fully understood from atop steep management pyramids and detailed work orders could be handed down from on high.
- 50 Today, the org chart is hyperlinked, not hierarchical. Respect for hands-on knowledge wins over respect for abstract authority.
- 51 Command-and-control management styles both derive from and reinforce bureaucracy, power tripping and an overall culture of paranoia.
- 52 Paranoia kills conversation. That’s its point. But lack of open conversation kills companies.
- 53 There are two conversations going on. One inside the company. One with the market.
- 54 In most cases, neither conversation is going very well. Almost invariably, the cause of failure can be traced to obsolete notions of command and control.

- 55 As policy, these notions are poisonous. As tools, they are broken. Command and control are met with hostility by intranetworked knowledge workers and generate distrust in internetworked markets.
- 56 These two conversations want to talk to *each other*. They are speaking the same language. They recognize each other's voices.
- 57 Smart companies will get out of the way and help the inevitable to happen sooner.
- 58 If willingness to get out of the way is taken as a measure of IQ, then very few companies have yet wised up.
- 59 However subliminally at the moment, millions of people now online perceive companies as little more than quaint legal fictions that are actively preventing these conversations from intersecting.
- 60 This is suicidal. Markets want to talk to companies.
- 61 Sadly, the part of the company a networked market wants to talk to is usually hidden behind a smokescreen of hucksterism, of language that rings false—and often is.
- 62 Markets do not want to talk to flacks and hucksters. They want to participate in the conversations going on behind the corporate firewall.
- 63 De-cloaking, getting personal: We *are* those markets. We want to talk to *you*.
- 64 We want access to your corporate information, to your plans and strategies, your best thinking, your genuine knowledge. We will not settle for the 4-color brochure, for web sites chock-a-block with eye candy but lacking any substance.
- 65 We're also the workers who make your companies go. We want to talk to customers directly in our own voices, not in platitudes written into a script.
- 66 As markets, as workers, both of us are sick to death of getting our information by remote control. Why do we need faceless annual reports and third-hand market research studies to introduce us to each other?
- 67 As markets, as workers, we wonder why you're not listening. You seem to be speaking a different language.
- 68 The inflated self-important jargon you sling around—in the press, at your conferences—what's that got to do with us?
- 69 Maybe you're impressing your investors. Maybe you're impressing Wall Street. You're not impressing us.

- 70** If you don't impress us, your investors are going to take a bath. Don't they understand this? If they did, they wouldn't *let* you talk that way.
- 71** Your tired notions of "the market" make our eyes glaze over. We don't recognize ourselves in your projections—perhaps because we know we're already elsewhere.
- 72** We like this new marketplace much better. In fact, we are creating it.
- 73** You're invited, but it's our world. Take your shoes off at the door. If you want to barter with us, get down off that camel!
- 74** We are immune to advertising. Just forget it.
- 75** If you want us to talk to you, tell us something. Make it something interesting for a change.
- 76** We've got some ideas for you too: some new tools we need, some better service. Stuff we'd be willing to pay for. Got a minute?
- 77** You're too busy "doing business" to answer our e-mail? Oh gosh, sorry, gee, we'll come back later. Maybe.
- 78** You want us to pay? We want you to pay attention.
- 79** We want you to drop your trip, come out of your neurotic self-involvement, join the party.
- 80** Don't worry, you can still make money. That is, as long as it's not the only thing on your mind.
- 81** Have you noticed that, in itself, money is kind of one-dimensional and boring? What else can we talk about?
- 82** Your product broke. Why? We'd like to ask the guy who made it. Your corporate strategy makes no sense. We'd like to have a chat with your CEO. What do you mean she's not in?
- 83** We want you to take 50 million of us as seriously as you take one reporter from THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
- 84** We know some people from your company. They're pretty cool online. Do you have any more like that you're hiding? Can they come out and play?
- 85** When we have questions we turn to each other for answers. If you didn't have such a tight rein on "your people" maybe they'd be among the people we'd turn to.

- 86** When we're not busy being your "target market," many of us *are* your people. We'd rather be talking to friends online than watching the clock. That would get your name around better than your entire million dollar Web site. But you tell us speaking to the market is Marketing's job.
- 87** We'd like it if you got what's going on here. That'd be real nice. But it would be a big mistake to think we're holding our breath.
- 88** We have better things to do than worry about whether you'll change in time to get our business. Business is only a part of our lives. It seems to be all of yours. Think about it: who needs whom?
- 89** We have real power and we know it. If you don't quite see the light, some other outfit will come along that's more attentive, more interesting, more fun to play with.
- 90** Even at its worst, our newfound conversation is more interesting than most trade shows, more entertaining than any TV sitcom, and certainly more true-to-life than the corporate web sites we've been seeing.
- 91** Our allegiance is to ourselves—our friends, our new allies and acquaintances, even our sparring partners. Companies that have no part in this world, also have no future.
- 92** Companies are spending billions of dollars on Y2K. Why can't they hear this market timebomb ticking? The stakes are even higher.
- 93** We're both inside companies and outside them. The boundaries that separate our conversations look like the Berlin Wall today, but they're really just an annoyance. We know they're coming down. We're going to work from both sides to take them down.
- 94** To traditional corporations, networked conversations may appear confused, may sound confusing. But we are organizing faster than they are. We have better tools, more new ideas, no rules to slow us down.
- 95** We are waking up and linking to each other. We are watching. But we are not waiting.

The Elevator Rap

W H E N

**(Inter) networked
Markets**

meet

**(Intra) networked
Workers**

**The connectedness of the Web is transforming what's inside
and outside your business—your market and your employees.**

Through the Internet, the
people in your markets
are discovering and
inventing new ways to
converse. They're talking
about your business.
They're telling one
another the truth,
in very human voices.

Intranets are enabling
your best people to
hyperlink themselves
together, outside the org
chart. They're incredibly
productive and innovative.
They're telling one
another the truth,
in very human voices.

**There's a new conversation between and among your market
and your workers. It's making them smarter and it's enabling them
to discover their human voices.**

**You have two choices. You can continue to lock yourself behind
facile corporate words and happytalk brochures.**

Or you can join the conversation.