

The world changed at midnight - marketing, too

 By [Walter Pike](#)

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The business of marketing is the business of spreading ideas. We may want to spread the idea that people should trust in us, to believe in us...

We may want people to trust and buy our product or service rather than someone else's, to come to our music event and we may want people to vote for our candidate. We want people to change the way they think and change the way they behave to something that suits us. We want those ideas to spread.



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How we set out to spread ideas is dependent on the media technology we have access to. In the old media landscape most of us are familiar with, if we wanted a two-way conversation we had it with one other person. If we wanted to speak to many people, we took the same message and we gave it to everyone. The "science" of marketing and advertising was built with this understanding. Branding and brand management, as taught in all our marketing degrees and by our advertising schools, is based on the effective use of broadcast media.

But the internet happened.

The internet is the first medium in history, which is good at both two-way and mass communication. This made media more

than just a source of information, it has become a site of coordination, because the people receiving the information could also gather around and talk about it. The evidence is all around us, from destructive Facebook memes to news events we hear about first on Twitter, to brand new business models. From iTunes to Alibaba to Uber and Airbnb, these new hot businesses are built on a model of coordination and sharing.

It was coming to this realisation that made me quit teaching strategic brand management. I realised that the fundamentals I was teaching had been undermined by these profound changes in the media landscape. The brand no longer controlled the message and because consumers no longer trusted the message, all the tools were suddenly much less effective - maybe even irrelevant. In fact, many of the methods and theories that work for broadcast no longer hold true in the social era.

Internet technology allowed the power in idea spreading to move from the originator of the idea or message to the person spreading the message, because social networks can become very big, very quickly. It has become imperative to understand this part of the idea spread - it has become a world of connections. Now, instead of being concerned about the one-to-one or the one-to-many, we need be concerned by the many-to-many. But we aren't.

When you look at how this has been dealt with by brands and agencies, we realise that our thinking remains broadcast thinking. Media is no longer:

- Merely a channel to market.
- A highly segmented advertising delivery tool, or
- Merely a way to connect with customers

It is the way that customers connect to each other. It is the most effective, cheapest method of spreading ideas ever invented.

Why don't we use it like that? If we had, we would know the most important aspect of this new world are connections, not content. It's through connections that ideas spread. These aren't audiences each neatly wrapped up in LSMS. Social networks have structure - the influence of a social media player doesn't depend on merely the number of followers he has nor the number of likes on his page. It depends on his position on the network the extent of his 'betweenness' or how much of the ideas need to pass through him. It depends on his ranking and his credibility and it depends on the clusters that form around him and what they care about.

If we understand these connections then we can understand how to influence the way ideas pass through them; we can understand how they coordinate and we can influence how brands are created and how ideas spread.

Marketer, look at the world that you are operating in. Did you notice that all the rules changed? If you did, you already have a jump on the rest of us, because the rules changed at midnight when we were all asleep.

ABOUT WALTER PIKE

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