Building the Circle of Life:
Creating the Community Experience:
from Concept to Application

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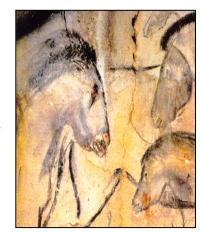
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The Roots of Virtual Reality

- Immersive environments work because they transmit complex information efficiently--by engaging the same processes our brains use to interpret information in the "real" world.

Archeologists working deep in two caverns in France a few years ago discovered a menagerie of Ice-Age animal paintings similar to the famous cave art at Lascaux. These haunting images of herds of early horses, bison, and other prehistoric beasts were formerly thought to evoke "hunting magic." But the recent discovery of bird-bone flutes in the caverns set experts on the trail of a far more modern interpretation.

Researchers traversed the ancient caves while whistling through several octaves and mapped the areas where sound resonated best. The ancient artworks coincided with those points having the most favorable acoustics. In a similar experiment at Lascaux, a researcher's handclaps in a cavern decorated with herds of bison, horses, and other hoofed animals echoed and re-echoed off the walls until a sound much like a stampede resulted. Near the rear of the cave, however, where the natural acoustics mute noise, the walls were covered with images of panthers and other stealthy and silent predators.

In light of these discoveries, it now appears that over 40,000 years ago our earliest human ancestors combined painting, music, the animation effect of flickering firelight, and sound effects to create the first multi-media presentation—Cro-Magnon virtual reality.

Today our tools may have become more sophisticated, but the principle behind them has not. **We still use multi-media presentations for the same reason our Ice-Age ancestors did: because they transmit complex information efficiently by engaging all the senses —the same way our brains process information in the "real" world.**

Aesthetics aside, there is little difference between ancient cave art, Disneyland, a museum exhibit, or the corporate multi-media training program. All use stylized images and other sensory stimulation to create what Frank Wells, the late President of the Walt Disney Company, called "soft adventures." These exhibits and experiences allow upcoming generations to access not just information, but a *feel* for the risks and rewards of the "real" world, in order to conquer fear of the unknown and test their skills *before* they venture outside—whether in the past to do battle with prehistoric beasts or in the present to cope with the pitfalls and predators of the modern world.

> **We are working at the dawn of the twenty-first century with a brain that processes information in the same manner as that of our ancient ancestors.**

In designing experiences, we often hear that "This generation of teens (or young adults, or seniors – take your pick) is not like any previous generation." But today's teenagers have exactly the same physiological and psychological needs as their grandparents did at the same age—what's changed is only the wider access to current information and choice options. How teens process that information, and the emotional drivers that pull them towards certain choices, hasn't changed appreciably since the dawn of man. They, like all of us, are trying to solve modern problems with ancient mental tools.

In evolutionary time, less than the blink of an eye separates Lascaux from the corporate boardroom, from bone flutes, pigment, and flickering firelight to audio decks, videotape, and computer graphics. There have been no significant evolutionary changes in *homo sapiens* in the past 120,000 years. How we form trust bonds—with people and with companies; how we create lasting attachments; how we interpret our place in the social order; how we determine suitable behavior in an unfamiliar environment; even the way we move through physical and digital space, are all outcomes of unconscious mental processes that evolved to suit the needs of the earliest hunter-gatherers traversing the African savanna.

Culture: Our Human Software

- Culture determines what we see and feel and recognize as valuable.

Human beings do not come into the world as blank slates. We are born with a set of mental tools that evolved over millennia to meet our physical and emotional needs. First among these is our ability to recognize patterns—a prerequisite for language acquisition, categorization, and culture. We manipulate any and all ideas, words, and space into a coherent sequence. This is how we connect the dots to create cosmos out of chaos within the sensory input that surrounds us. If we don't have enough hard data to make a coherent story, we are driven to generate our own to fill in the gaps — a practice that accounts for stories as diverse as Greek mythology, astrology, conspiracy theories, alien abduction, theoretical physics, and the Book of Genesis.

We do not generate these stories in a vacuum. Research on Neolithic cave paintings at Lascaux and other ancient sites strongly suggests that the most important result of early human creativity was not in the shaping of tools or painting on cave walls but in how these instruments were used—to support a common understanding and agreement on "the meaning of it all" among the group. This shared vision is called culture. It is the human equivalent of computer software—the "software of the mind." Just as computer software determines what appears on the monitor while it works below our visible threshold, **culture shapes what we see and feel and recognize as valuable while acting below our conscious threshold.** Culture influences both the sorts of values one gravitates towards and the form by which the mental ideal is recognized.

Aesthetics aside once again, to the interpretive functions of the brain there is no operational distinction between the ancient cave paintings, the Metropolitan Opera, Picasso's *Guernica*, a theme park, or a website. All use stylized images and other sensory stimulation to create a virtual representation or theme of another place and time.

Campfires and Symbols

- Communities have always been built around symbols of shared values.

We are a visual species. We get over half our information from what things look like. Brands, symbols, and logos are not marketing gimmicks or empty vessels: they are a powerful shorthand that draws a very real and visceral response. Communities have always been built around symbols of shared value.

As a species, human beings are classified as social primates. That means we evolved to live and work in groups. People simply need other people in order to function properly—it is no coincidence that serial killers and other social misfits such as the Unabomber are universally described as "loners."

When it comes to the value of trust, nothing carries more attractive power—cultural gravity—than the campfire environment. It is humanity's oldest information-sharing site. The campfire is a place of security where members of the tribe could come together, turn their backs on the darkness, and share food and stories about who they were, how they got there, and what was expected of them. Campfires were, and are still, a constructed stage of shared values, mutual reinforcement, and nourishment — both for body and soul. The great commerce of human ideas — omens, events, news, gossip, inventions, and discoveries, were shared and interpreted in terms that could be understood by the group.

The pull of the campfire exerts a strong pre-conscious attraction even today. When communication requires a strong element of trust, we instinctively seek out the key cultural markers of a campfire environment: light, warmth, and food. The family dinner table, the first date in a nice restaurant, the groups of retirees who gather at

McDonald's every morning to discuss the news, the coffee bars full of young professionals—all these are classic campfire environments.

In our homes, glowing TV and computer screens fill the classic campfire role — telling us stories about our world and how we fit into it. Television provides light, warmth, and mythology in the most secure environment possible—our own living rooms. The only element missing was food, so it was no accident that the first products to follow television into our living rooms were TV dinners, folding tray tables, and snack foods such as TV Time popcorn. People instinctively bring food to a campfire, which is why you can gain weight just working at your computer. You *do* snack at your workstation, don't you? The internet has become part of the global campfire.

The Subjective Community

- The power of the brand lies not in the product, but in the value set of the consumer that the brand evokes.

Buying and experiencing are mediated events, conditioned by culture. Every choice we make is a drama of mediation between buyers, promoters, influencers, users, and deal-breakers. So vital is context that we cannot truly decipher the meaning of messages unless we know who wrote them and how that writer/sender relates to us. This is the reason the ideal of community has such high value and gravitational power, especially for a culture like that of the United States in which the base unit is the individual, rather than the group, family, or nation. Since individuality is assumed, we spend most of our waking hours seeking out, negotiating, and confirming alliances. Americans join more associations than any other nationality. Various researches confirm that more than three-fourths of the conversation in the workplace is dedicated to socialization – but that three-fourths

creates the necessary platform for the actual "work" conversations to have productive effect.

Communities aren't created; they evolve in a natural progression. In the physical world, people are born and slowly acculturated into communities. This is an intensely personal process, and grows outward from the individual. Think of it as a bull's-eye target with you in the center ring. Working outward from the center, you build your community over time.

First contact is with your mother. You then move outwards towards your father or some other trusted male figure, then to siblings, other family members, friends, peers, associates, affiliates, others, and finally, outside the target, strangers. As you move outward, shared values diminish. One measure of the position any one figure occupies in this mental construct is the intensity of defense they inspire. Most people will risk death to save a spouse, parent, or child, they'll fight for close friends, they'll walk a picket line with peers and colleagues, they may write a letter in support of affiliates — they tend to ignore all others. Strangers are noticed when they appear dangerous; otherwise, they are off the mental map and of no concern, virtually invisible.

The glue that holds the community together is not geography or blood ties, but shared values. Values are simply broad tendencies of the members of any group to prefer one state of affairs over another. Values are rarely articulated, since they operate at a pre-conscious level, but they are instantly recognized in their violation. They are expressed over time as a consistent pattern of movement in the direction of a desired state. They express a deeply held feeling for the way things "should" be. In the US, some of these leading "shoulds" are:

- Individuals should determine their own destiny.
- Individuals should control their social and physical mobility.
- Actions should be judged in a moral light.
- Authority or "Bigness" should be viewed with suspicion.
- We should have as many choices as possible.
- Anything can and should be improved.
- The future should be better than the past.

Values, rather than kinship, are the common bond of the American community, **Commercial interests can attract communities by focusing on values rather than product features.** The now legendary "1984" Superbowl ad from Apple did just that, effectively pushing not just one but all the value hot buttons listed above. Over two decades later, Mac users form a community with edge overtones that approaches religious fervor. Other value-based companies, such as Disney (family), and QVC (neighborhood), can form instant communities on the Internet. **It's called branding, but the power of the brand lies not in the product, but in the value set of the consumer the brand evokes.** While Disney, for instance, has a high cultural resonance, the management and marketing decisions that drive the company often reflect values contrary to those that fans share and intuitively recognize as "Disney." When that happens, lifelong consumers opt out of the relationship, as former CEO Michael Eisner learned the hard way when shareholders revolted: not about the level of their dividends, but about what they perceived as a corporate shift away from the traditional values that originally attracted them to the company. **In the end, values create demand; marketing dollars only serve to disseminate the values.**

Application: Protocols for Building Community

- Successful communities share meaningful consistencies.

While you cannot create community from the outside, you can create the conditions—the protocols—by which communities have been known to thrive for millennia. Without these protocols in place, community cannot and will not be recognized by the consumer. These include:

1. Security
2. Location.
3. Consistency of Theme
4. Commerce
5. Activity
6. A Central Icon
7. Tangibility

1. Security

- Security must be assumed in order for communities to form.

Security is key to community. The ancient Greek word for City was *polis,* the root of the English word *polite* – also *police*. To the Greeks, the city was a safe and secure place, enabling a level of business and social interaction unheard of in the lawless countryside where a bandit lurked behind every bush and farmers set their dogs on strangers. Today many Americans equate the countryside with security and our cities with danger, but that is simply a shift in stylization. The primacy of safety in community still rules. **People don't communicate important personal information—nor reach for their wallets—unless safety and security are assumed.**

The world of on-line marketing recognized this dynamic early. Most corporate insiders and media commentators agreed that on-line retailing would not flourish until the public could have faith in the technology of security—encoding, passwords, firewalls, and the like. Amazon.com got around that issue by using cultural cues for stability, by attaching itself to an established trusted entity in American Express TV commercials. The issue became totally moot when known commercial entities such as Disney, QVC, and Craftsman tools went on-line. Consumers didn't see themselves as dealing with technology, which they will never entirely trust, but with a purveyor they do know and trust.

The rule of thumb in perception of value for security is: "When trust is high, precision can be low; when precision is high, trust is low." "High-precision" companies are those trying to protect information that produces their wealth. In this

instance, trust is low. Restricted access has high value to institutions such as Boeing and the US Air Force. When high-trust environments make access unduly difficult (hard-to-negotiate websites, limited credit-card use, too-complex package options), consumers get frustrated and take their business elsewhere.

High-trust companies such as Disney and Craftsman need not be perfect, just "good enough." We allow them the same leeway we grant to family members. As in families, we will let minor violations slide as long as we see the core trusted values as enduring and intact.

With a known brand, security is assumed. With an unknown company, trust must be earned. On the internet, far too many websites ask the consumer to rush immediately to an inappropriate level of intimacy by requesting personal information before any experience has taken place to build trust. This doesn't work in the analog world—ask anyone who has come on too strong on a first date—and it won't work in the virtual world. Too many potential customers opt out at the first screen because their trust is assumed well before it has been earned.

2. Location

- Communities share meaningful consistencies.

Major communities grow up along major travel arteries – rivers and highways. The history of civilization is filled with thriving communities that withered and died when a major artery developed elsewhere, one that bypassed the older route. **But the successful communities—some thousands of years old—share meaningful consistencies that serve as guidelines for building environments that pull—rather than push—people to make desired social and commercial choices.**

In successful cities, public space is broad and open, private areas tend to be narrow and inwardly focused (even in the US suburbs, parents send children to play in the *back* yard, not the front).

The market square is central to the social fabric of the city, so much so that the edifices of power, the church and the town hall, are built around it. Broad avenues and open spaces are common to thousand-year-old cities. They cue safety and reassurance because you can see potential problems coming from a long way off. We tend to interpret our environment in segments of about three city blocks—as far as most people can see with detail definition. If you take a close look at walkable cityscapes, you'll notice that they break down thematically into three-block iconic clusters. This isn't planned; it just evolves as an overlay on human biology and perception.

Cultivated green space is another commonality because it signals control over of nature and prosperity by indicating the land is not needed to grow food but is surplus as luxury. In most Western cultures green space is to be shared by the public. In cultures where the family, rather than the community, is the primary support group, green space is private, located within courtyards behind high walls. In either case, green space signals safety, control, and prosperity.

Water is the most primal attractant of all. Whether for commerce or pleasure, people have always tended to cluster where the land meets the water. Fountains, like green space, cue prosperity and control—and are thereby living signs of a positive future.

While all this is well documented, **what is not universally understood is that people are also attracted to *indoor* environments that follow these same patterns**. In creating a successful community experience, broad high-visibility avenues, the market square (whether for the exchange of goods or ideas), green space, and water are all design imperatives, not decorative luxuries. People gravitate towards indoor environments that reflect, as closely as possible, their cultural vision of the idealized outdoor world. Houseplants, sunlight, skylights, decking, fireplaces, indoor fountains, floral patterns, and fiber carpeting are all signs of this tendency.

Consistency of Theme

- Theme must be reflected in every aspect of your design.

All major communities showcase a central theme. Paris is The City of Light. New York is The Big Apple. Rome is The Eternal City. The theme is reflected in the architecture, with new building using materials, color, and shape to reference and play off the main theme. For example, all new building in Jerusalem (theme "Jerusalem the Golden"), no matter how contemporary the design, must be faced with the pinkish sandstone of the ancient landmarks. In this way, the community stays current, but continues to reflect the historic visual template that originally drew residents to that location. Just as values are broad tendencies to prefer one state of affairs over another, themes should cue broad sets of integrated and ongoing attitudes and behavior. The Big Easy, the City that Never Sleeps, The Happiest Place on Earth—all reflect this unity of design.
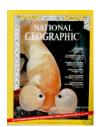
The core theme must be reflected as a constant in all aspects of the venue, from bricks-and-mortar to websites. This can be accomplished by holding to a consistent color palette. One media example is Disney animation. Over the past half century, the stylization has changed many times, but the trademark palette remains instantly recognizable as Disney. The cover of National Geographic magazine has evolved through countless stylistic updates across more than a century—but always with an eye towards maintaining the core themed design elements. A 1930s edition is instantly recognizable as National Geographic, as is a current issue. The broader the theme; the more opportunity for people to integrate their own stories. As in the rules of formal logic, the more inclusive the description, the more likely correct. Consistency of theme ensures that the visitor can instantly recognize your offering as exclusively your own.

4. Community, Commerce, and Content

- ## Content follows commerce.

While there is a long-standing intellectual tension between academia and commerce, community formation has to come down firmly on the side of commerce. The ur-models of commerce were developed over forty thousand years ago when modern man first walked the earth. (Mankind is much older than that, but we use 35-40 thousand years as our baseline because we can document consistent patterns of behavior from that point through artifacts.) Moral implications aside, "the world's oldest profession" is the most basic form of commerce — "I have something you want. You have something I want. So let's trade." Everything since that is mere refinement of the process. Nor is globalization a new trend. It began when humans first moved out onto the African savannah and kept moving north to populate the globe. These patterns aren't going to change because of a new technology. **Human beings do not adapt to fit technology; instead, we always have adapted technology to fit the pre-existing human pattern.**

Content has always followed commerce. Art historians credit Leonardo DaVinci with shaping the Italian Renaissance by redefining the way people looked at art. Before Leonardo, artists depicted the life of Christ or the saints with art as a medium to communicate moral lessons. Leonardo painted living subjects—and his 1503 image of the Mona Lisa came to define a whole new way in which art was about to be used.

But did Leonardo really shape the Renaissance? Leonardo was not just an artist; he was also technician and inventor. He appeared on the scene at a point when wealth was shifting from the church to the state and commerce. He painted—and developed inventions—for the patrons paying the bills. They didn't want pictures of the saints; they wanted portraits of themselves and their wives. Leonardo did not shape the Renaissance; commerce shaped the Renaissance. Art (content) followed the money.

The same pattern holds today. Go to any art museum and visit the Contemporary Art wing. Just a decade ago these places were dominated by large paintings — ten to

thirty-foot canvases — either abstract designs or ordinary objects blown up to extraordinary dimensions. Why? Because Commerce is still defining Art. Corporations were the major buyers. They wanted large paintings to decorate their vaulted office lobbies with subject material that wouldn't offend the thousands who pass through them — no nudes, battles, death, religious icons, or other touchy subject matter. But today the dynamic is shifting yet again as the major art schools have come to increasingly play the role of an academy in setting style. The look of contemporary art wings is evolving, with more academic and theorist works and installations. Like it or not, in content, as in commerce, the golden rule applies: he who has the gold makes the rules.

5. Activity

- People require spaces to reflect and integrate their experience in light of the perceived group experience.

In the experience economy, the value of interactivity is well-touted, although its execution is often deficient, reduced to touch-screen monitors and lift-the-flap-for-answer panels to questions the visitor didn't ask in the first place. True interactivity involves providing a reward for effort. One wouldn't normally think of the Disneyland Castle as interactive, but the attraction pulls the visitor up Main Street where the reward is not just the close-up view of the fanciful façade but the spinning carousel just inside the gates. The castle beckons, the visitor responds, and the carousel rewards. The castle pulls—not pushes—the crowd deeper into the park. As Walt Disney once told Imagineer John Hench, "If we want people to walk all that way, we have to pay them for it somehow." Interaction means more than giving visitors a button to push. Interaction is a transaction (I do this for you so that you give me something I want). **As in all transactions, in interaction the reward must always exceed the effort.**

Even less well understood than interaction is the equal importance of surrounding activity. Social primates spend significant amounts of their time scanning their environment. This is why market squares, megastores, and malls not only contain stores, but also coffee shops, cafes, and benches where people can sit and observe the

activity around them. These "tide pools" allow people to opt out of the chaos for time to reflect and integrate their experiences and calm the senses before reentering the flow. Without these resting places, people simply overload on information and leave the venue.

This is the reason "museum fatigue" is a well-known phenomenon. The North American museum visit averages less than one hour. The average Disney park visit is eight hours. Museums have only recently discovered that on-site coffee shops, restaurants, and "town-square" environments—for rest breaks as well as people-watching—significantly extend both visitation length and return rates. This should be no surprise: human beings have been drawn to watching each other since the dawn of mankind.

Interactivity requires focus, and maintaining that focus burns energy, hence "museum fatigue." Tide pools where people can watch others being active have a relaxing effect on the human brain. They allow us to rest, reflect, interpret and integrate their experience based not only on their own mental state, but within the reflected values of the group dynamic. A solitary golfer hitting a hole-in-one does not feel the exhilaration of the same act performed in front of a group. Your audience is itself part of the overall experience. Interactivity provides an individual experience: group activity validates the experience.

6. The Central Icon

- All successful communities use a central symbol.

Paris has the Eiffel Tower. New York has the Empire State Building. Disneyland has Sleeping Beauty's castle; both Las Vegas and Washington, DC are built on symbols. All successful communities feature a central symbol that carries the values the user finds attractive. These are not necessarily the same values the producer finds in their own

product.   The anchor symbol serves as both a carrier of values and a pragmatic landmark for maneuvering through the environment.

Humans have always had a fascination and awe of the monumental. Every culture has its sacred mountain. Symbols have evolved as society evolved, from simple totems bearing clan markings, through the castle (signifying earthly power), the church and cathedral (trumping earthly power), to the corporate towers that dominate most American cities and now world capitals.   Most, but not all: the skyline of Salt Lake City is still ruled by the Mormon Tabernacle, cueing everyone to a different set of values holding sway there.

The central icon also serves as a marker for wayfinding. Disneyland is remarkably free of directional signage. Instead, icons pull the crowds in the desired direction. No matter where you are within the park map, you can always see the central castle and position yourself with reference to it. The feeling of getting "lost" is a mental state not necessarily exclusive to physical space. You can get the same feeling in reading a poorly written narrative. The feeling of disconnection from the environment is disturbing at a primal level, and the surest way to drive your audience away.

The Seven Signals of Lost
. There are seven signals that cue us that we have lost our way, either in physical or mental space.

1. **Time** - Things take longer than you think they should: goals are not reached when you expected to reach them.
2. **Expectation** - Things aren't where you expected them to be: things happen when you don't expect them to happen.
3. **Recognition** - Nothing looks familiar; yet everything looks familiar.
4. **Misinformation** - Information does not match observable data.
5. **Comprehension** - You can't read the signs; the signs you can read don't make sense.
6. **Assumption** - You thought someone else knew the way; they thought you did.
7. **Awareness** – the most disturbing level. You don't know how you got where you are, so you don't know which way to go or how to return.

Before building any experience environment, you should write the desired experience as a visual narrative or journey script. What does the visitor see first? The rules of visual narrative are well established. What is your establishing shot to position the

viewer in space and time? What is your long shot that establishes where they must go next? What is your closeup that focuses their attention? The human brain cannot make sense of random input – it can only comprehend data by making a story out of it. Writing the experience first as a visual narrative both allows you to edit out any inconsistency as well as organize an intuitive progression of events—*before* you begin the costly design process.

The central icon, welcoming and reassuring, is a time-tested mechanism for mental place-keeping—not only in physical space, but in mental space as well, since people intuitively adopt behaviors appropriate to their context.

7. Tangibility

- People use touchstones to recall meaningful experiences.

We live the experience, then the remembered experience. The trouble with making mental notes is that the ink fades. From time immemorial, people have needed touchstones—relics, souvenirs, trophies, photographs—to cue memories. A significant experience demands a tangible reminder. At the gift shop in Muir Woods, time and time again, we watched people make repeated circuits of the gift shop searching for some tangible item to reflect their experience—and come up short. **They are actively trying to buy**, but the experience is not cued by the cedar laminated plaques or packets of seeds for sale. The lure of the woods is found in the age-old awe evoked by the monumental redwoods, but not invoked by slabs of wood or gardening. **People don't just want souvenirs, they need them.**

Communities are outcomes of a natural human drive towards affiliation. Members of communities with shared values have a need to declare their affiliation (closely tied to their sense of identity), as well as identify themselves to other members of the community. **We are tangible beings, and need tangible objects to reflect our sense of identity.** The logo tee-shirt is one way we signal our values to the group—in the 1960s it was slogans on buttons—and how we recognize other members.

The museum shop is more than an income generator, it's a social necessity.

Limits:

- Broadly defined values = broad range of visitors.

This subjective community has limits. At any one time it holds no more than 150 relationships, from the most intimate to the most distant. This appears to be all the brain can handle, which is why 150 has been the size of the traditional village for millennia. It's also the area of your average neighborhood – four blocks from where the corners meet. That means your venue must fill one of those very limited slots, preferably in the high-trust inner circles. **Marshall McLuhan was wrong; we do not live in a global village. Instead, we live on a globe of *villages*.** These subjective communities overlap, so that your brother is someone else's friend and another's colleague. This accounts for our current fractious political scene, since few issues affect a majority of subjective communities. National consensus is achieved only when issues *directly* affect a majority of overlapping community circles. WWII was our last truly community effort since it directly affected every subjective community circle.

This also explains why there was no National WWII Memorial until 2004. When the war ended, people intuitively built memorials where they would resonate the most – in their local town squares. Only after time, when the town social centers shifted to the malls and the Baby Boom children of WWII veterans had grown up and moved away from their hometowns, did the compelling need for a National Memorial arise.
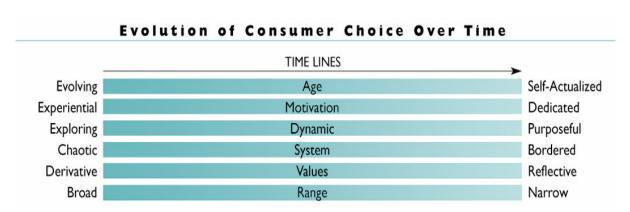
It can be hard to resist the temptation to add as many different features to your venue as possible in order to appeal to as many interest groups as possible. This is called the "BIG-Swiss-Army-Knife Syndrome." But it's worth remembering that most people don't use the Swiss army knife with thirty blades, because it is simply too cumbersome. What's more, those 150 relationships are not equal. **Core relationships are all built around the high-trust inner circle – around values shared by the vast majority of the community.** Those values are definable because people tend to gravitate to neighborhoods where their values are reflected, both in architectural style

and lifestyle of the residents. The more disparate features are added, the better the odds of violating the core value of your site.

Value Exchange

- Perception of value evolves in predictable patterns.

Communities have always been formed around the market square. In order to form a successful community, something of value must be exchanged. To do this, it is important to understand the relationship of the user culture to money. Americans use money primarily to move our individual identity around and, ideally, upwards (as opposed to Japan, where money is primarily moved around for the benefit of the group). We buy, and buy into, products, services, and concepts that either reflect or enhance our ideal sense of self. As we age, we shift from buying products with derivative value ("I'm cool because I'm wearing this jacket") to reflective value ("This jacket is cool because I'm wearing it"), but the exchange of value is predicated on the validation of the buyer's self-perception, not from the presumed features or functional benefits of the product itself.

Evolution of Consumer Choice Over Time

TIME LINES →

Evolving	Age	Self-Actualized
Experiential	Motivation	Dedicated
Exploring	Dynamic	Purposeful
Chaotic	System	Bordered
Derivative	Values	Reflective
Broad	Range	Narrow

Teenagers watch <u>television</u>
Teenagers shop at the <u>mall</u>
Teenagers go to amusement parks (thrill-based)
Teenagers buy <u>fashion</u> (what others are wearing)

Adults watch select <u>programs</u> on television
Adults shop at a specific <u>store</u> at the mall
Adults got to theme parks (story-based)
Adults buy <u>style</u> (personal to them)

Wayfinding

- Design of space must follow the rules of human perception.

Gender is the only biological factor that directly influences how we perceive the world around us. Men and women perceive the stimuli from their sense organs with brains that are configured differently, influenced by different chemicals, and transmit information to different arrangements of receptors.

Gender differences often lie not in culture but in different patterns of aptitudes. There is no evidence that one gender is smarter, better, or superior to the other— only that they rely on a different set of mental tools and talents in identifiable ways.

Psychologist Thomas Bever of the University of Rochester tested the way men and women move through physical space by using one of the classic tools of behavioral science, the rat maze, enlarged to human scale in a university basement. Bever's human subjects repeatedly negotiated the maze wearing blinders that limited their vision to a small portion of the walls and floor. The results provided some telling insights into how men and women use their distinctive mental "toolbars" to navigate from one point to the next.

Women tended to navigate by recognition of specific cues—a spot of peeling paint, a carpet stain, or a crack in the baseboard. As women moved through the maze, they constructed a mental map dotted with these specific landmarks. When these markers were covered over or removed, their progress slowed dramatically. Men, however, constructed their mental maps quite differently by using a form of dead reckoning or kinesic memory, relying on the correlation of remembered vectors — rough estimates of direction, speed, and time — to find their way. This helps explain the tendency (so beloved of female standup comics) of men to refuse to ask for directions. In general, they simply don't *feel* lost at the same point in the process that women do.

In physical space, this also helps explain why men feel uncomfortable shopping in major department stores. These places aren't designed for men. Because women control the domestic economy of the United States, major retailers are constantly fine-tuning their retail environments around the way women move through physical space. Men are on their own.

Beyond biologically-determined innate tendencies, culture affects how we interpret and "wayfind" through physical space. Americans tend to move through stores, malls, and experience environments [by moving] along the right side of aisles, navigating through the space in a counter-clockwise direction. It was long assumed that, since most people are right-handed, they preferred to have the merchandise under their dominant hand. However, in countries such as Japan and England, where people drive on the left side of the road, people move through physical space hugging the left side of aisles in a clockwise pattern. In this case, culture trumps biology. Why does it matter? It matters because studies have shown that when merchandising space is set up in a design that forces people to negotiate the space in the "wrong" direction (such as putting the main entrance on the left side of the store), people intuitively respond by spending less time in the store – which translates to fewer purchases.

On a global scale, reports from Hong Kong Disneyland indicate that some Chinese are having difficulty figuring out how to use the park. In mainland China they drive on the right, while in Hong Kong they drive on the left. Simple signage will direct people to move on one side or the other but to those who are culturally attuned to another system; this can "feel" wrong, resulting in an early exit from an uncomfortable situation. People do adapt to new systems rapidly if they involve conscious processes such as driving. Immigrants and tourists learn to comfortably drive on the "wrong" side of the road in as little as a few days. But the unconscious processes (such as a pedestrian glancing the "wrong" way for oncoming vehicles before stepping into traffic, or walking up the "wrong" side of a stairway into descending foot traffic) takes days—and even years—for some of the cultural effects to take root. Guests at Hong Kong Disneyland have only a few hours to adapt.

On the virtual level, despite the misleading terminology of the web "page" and the medium of text, even cyberspace is interpreted by the brain as three-dimensional, not

two. The same mental toolbars come into play in finding our way through virtual space as in physical space; indeed, we have no other tools to work with. Whether in physical space or in mental spaces such as television, film, or computer monitor, males and females will "decode" this space order to find their way through it using gender-keyed patterns of aptitudes. This is important because the relational nature of the way women move through space means that they tend to feel "lost" at a much earlier stage than men, even if they are tracking the right path.

Wayfinding matters because commerce as the exchange of value is the core of any community. A community site that doesn't follow the relational model of organized space – one with a high frequency of "landmarks" and an obvious way of checking position in relation to the rest of the venue –is unlikely to last. **Design of space, whether physical or virtual, must conform to the rules of human perception or fail.**

Conclusion

Community is a powerful attractant. We have been recognizing communities by their signs and symbols for millennia. We know exactly what a desirable community should look like. Pattern recognition takes one-twentieth of a second. **Unless your community venue fits the image on the user's mental map, you will never get the opportunity to demonstrate your value.** Your audience will have moved on, around, and beyond in search of their mental ideal.

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